



# James Core Group Study

The purpose of this study is to discuss and encourage one another to live out the core realities of a mature Christian life. Studying James will help us understand how to be believers who possess a consistent and undivided commitment to God.

Few books of the Bible have been more maligned than the Book of James. Controversy has waged over its authorship, its date, its recipients, its canonicity, and its unity. It is well known that Martin Luther had problems with this book. He called it a “right strawy epistle.” But it is only “strawy” to the degree it is “sticky.” There are enough needles in this haystack to prick the conscience of every dull, defeated, and degenerated Christian in the world. Here is a “right stirring epistle” designed to exhort and encourage, to challenge and convict, to rebuke and revive, to describe practical holiness and drive believers toward the goal of a faith that works. James is severely ethical and refreshingly practical.

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## Overview

### *Author*

It seems clear therefore that the author is James, the half brother of Jesus, who became the recognized leader in the Jerusalem church. This conclusion is supported by the authoritative tone of the letter and by the marked similarities in Greek between this epistle and the speech by James recorded in Acts 15. Though James was reared in the same home with the Lord Jesus, he apparently did not become a believer until after Christ's resurrection. John wrote, “For even His own brothers did not believe in Him” (John 7:5). James' encounter with the risen Lord may have brought him to saving faith. Christ “appeared to James, then to all the apostles” (1 Cor. 15:7). Paul later listed James, Peter, and John as “those reputed to be pillars” of the church (Gal. 2:9). The strongest evidence for the authorship of the Epistle of James clearly favors the half brother of Christ. Furthermore, Origen, Eusebius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Athanasius, Augustine, and many other early writers support this view.

### *Date Written*

Flavius Josephus, first-century historian, records that James was martyred in A.D. 62, so the epistle must have been written prior to that date. Since no mention is made of the Jerusalem Council (A.D. 49) in which James took such an active role, it is likely that the letter was written between A.D. 45 and 48.



James is probably the earliest of the writings of the New Testament and therefore can hardly be seen as a polemic against Paul's letter to the Romans, which was written later. Romans, however, is not a refutation of James. It is apparent from Paul's relationship with James (Acts 15:13; 21:18) and his recognition of James (Gal. 1:19; 2:9, 12) that Paul held James in high respect. Together Paul and James give the full dimension of faith. Paul wrote about inner saving faith from God's perspective. James wrote about outward serving faith from man's perspective. The true seed of saving faith is verified by the tangible fruit of serving faith. James' point is that biblical faith works.

### *Recipients*

Clearly addressed to "the 12 tribes scattered among the nations" (James 1:1), this letter has a marked Jewish flavor. The book has the substance and authority of the Prophets and the style and beauty of the Psalms. He refers to "firstfruits" (1:18; Lev. 23:10), the synagogue or "meeting" (James 2:2), "our ancestor Abraham" (2:21), Gehenna or "hell" (3:6), "the Lord Almighty" (5:4; cf. Gen. 17:1), and to the early and latter or "fall and spring rains" (James 5:7; cf. Deut. 11:14). Though some suggest that the "12 tribes" may be taken metaphorically as the Gentile church scattered throughout the Roman Empire, it is far more logical to take the statement in its normal sense. The letter is definitely to a Jewish constituency. Though the letter demonstrates careful Greek diction, it is nonetheless filled with extensive Hebrew symbolism.

### *Objective*

The purpose of this study is to discuss and encourage one another to live out the core realities of a mature Christian life. Studying James will help us understand how to be believers who possess a consistent and undivided commitment to God.





# Week One: James 1A

## Introduction

Share with your Core Group what you learned from the overview of James. What is the context? Who wrote it? Who received the letter?

## Opening Questions

1. How do you normally react to trials that come into your life?
2. Has your reaction to trials changed since being in college or since becoming closer to God?

**Read James 1:1-8.**

## Text Questions

1. Read verse 2. What do you notice about James' point of view concerning trials? (Hint: Notice how he says "whenever" you face trials, not "if" you face trials.)
2. What does James say our attitude should be about trials? (Hint: Verse 2.)
3. How does James define "trials?" (Hint: Look at verses 2-12. Where are trials sent from?)
4. How does James address "temptations?" (Hint: Look at verses 13-17.)
5. Where do temptations lead? (Hint: Talk about temptation leading to sin.)
6. What is the outcome of trials according to verses 3-4? (Hint: Maturation.)
7. How does James connect trials with the idea of wisdom? (Hint: Needing God's wisdom to persevere in trials of any kind.)
8. What do we learn about God's character in verse 5?

## Interpretation Questions

1. Why do you think God allows trials to come into our lives?
2. What is the difference between trials and temptations?
3. What does it look like to consider trials pure joy? How does that impact our experience of trials?
4. Why would the enemy want to plant doubt in our minds about God's character? Which characteristics of God does James highlight to give us confidence in His goodness?
5. How do you think the early church used James' encouragement to face trials differently? How can you face trials differently in your life?

## Application

Is there a trial going on in your life right now where you need God's wisdom? Share briefly with the person sitting next to you, and commit to praying for each other this week.

When you face temptation this week, how will you respond in light of this chapter? Memorize James 1:17 together as a Core Group this week to remember in times of temptation.





## Week Two: James 1B

### Opening Questions

1. Has there been a time you wish you would have followed someone's advice but did not? Share about that time.
2. Share about a time you spoke without thinking and it resulted in an awkward moment.

**Read James 1:18-27.**

### Text Questions

1. According to verse 18, how were we created? Why were we created?
2. What does firstfruits mean? (Hint: Think in terms of a harvest, the first sheaf of grain.)
3. What does firstfruits mean in terms of James' audience? (Hint: The first group of believers of the early Church who were a sign of the full harvest to come, the Christians who would come from the early Church.)
4. Summarize the rest of the chapter. What is the main point? (Hint: Think through the practical instructions of how we can be firstfruits of God.)

### Interpretation Exercise

Draw two columns. Label one "Do" and one "Don't Do." Re-read James 1:19-27, having half of the group write down what James says to do, and half what James says not to do. Have the groups share with each other and finish filling out the chart.

Do	Don't Do
Be quick to listen.	Be rid of moral filth and evil.
Be slow to speak.	Don't merely listen to the Word.
Be slow to become angry.	Don't be polluted by the world.
Humbly accept the Word.	
Do what the Word says.	
Keep a tight rein on the tongue.	
Take care of those in need.	

1. How do you see that we should be first fruits? Why do you think humility is important to this?
2. Read Psalm 25:9 together. How does pride impact us? (Hint: It makes us unresponsive to the Spirit's salvific and sanctifying works)



3. Why is it not enough to receive the Word? (Hint: Talk about what happens when we hear but do not obey. Will the Word change us if we never respond to it?)
4. What happens when we apply the Word to our lives? (Hint: As we obey, we find freedom. We know and experience the truth, and it sets us free.)
5. What do you think verses 26-27 say about religion? (Hint: God is not satisfied with rituals, but He is interested in a life of godliness. Talk about the symbol of the tongue, and how it can show futile religion with only words versus a faith with deeds.)
6. What do you think God is looking for in an honest Christian? (Hint: Think about things like compassion and purity.)
7. How do you think you can best show what God has done in your life? How can you show you are being transformed?

### **Application**

From the chart above, is there a trait you feel strong in? Is there a trait that you want to focus on this week to grow in? What could it look like to grow in all the traits of the firstfruits? How can we partner together as a Core Group to see these traits grow in our community?

Memorize James 2:19-20 together this week.





## Week Three: James 2

### Opening Question

1. How did last week's study impact your week? Share stories about what you experienced.

**Read James 2:14-26.**

### Text Questions

1. On your first reading, what seems to be James' main point?
2. In verses 14-19, which two examples does James give us of empty faith? (Hint: Notice how James talks about the topics of prayer and of demons.)
3. Why do you think James gave this first example? What about the second?
4. How is the demon's belief like human faith that produces no good deeds?
5. What four types of people are described in James 2? What might their lives look like? (Hint: Faith without works, works without faith, faith and works out of faith, and no faith or works.)
6. Looking at verses 21-23, what were some "signs of life" in Abraham that gave witness to the fact that he had genuine faith? (Hint: Look at Genesis 22:1-12 for more details. Faith and actions worked together in Abraham when he offered Isaac to God.)
7. What are "signs of life" in Rahab that showed us her faith was genuine? (Hint: Summarize Rahab's story. Rahab was not perfect, and did lie, but her heart was to help the Israelites and serve God. She laid it all on the line to choose God, not waiting to be perfect to act.)

### Interpretation Questions

1. What is wrong with the demons' belief? (Hint: Belief needs to go beyond head knowledge to giving over oneself to the Lordship of Jesus. Faith affects every area of our lives and our beings.)
2. What does it look like for someone to do exactly what James is describing? (Hint: Think about specific examples of people you have seen, or even in your own life.)
3. Read Ephesians 2:8-9 together. How do you reconcile this verse with James? (Hint: Think through the paradox. We are saved by grace, and our signs of salvation are spiritual growth and sharing the Word with others.)
4. What is one area where you have seen God changing and transforming your life over the past few months?
5. Has God asked you to give up something that is precious to you? Tell us about it and how that impacted your faith walk.
6. Thinking about Abraham and Rahab, why is faith that is not demonstrated with deeds dead? Summarize the relationship between faith and works.



## **Application**

How can your faith and deeds work together this week? Is there anything God is asking of you to accomplish or trust Him with this week?

Close in prayer by praying for your faith to be full of deeds this week. Pray that each person in your Core Group would be protected against believing that works are salvific, but that the works will bless, encourage, and point to the transformative, life-giving work of Jesus in our lives.

Memorize James 2:21 and 2:26 together this week.





## Week Four: James 3

### Opening Questions

1. How did processing last week go? Reiterate the closing question and ask about progress with the application.

**Read James 3:1-12.**

### Text Questions

1. Why is it such a big responsibility to be a teacher, especially of Scripture?
2. Look at verse 2. "Perfect" is the same word in Greek as James 1:4, meaning "mature" and "complete." Knowing this, how would you summarize this verse?
3. In verses 3-6 what three images are we given for the tongue? What do these images have in common? What do you think makes them similar to the tongue?
4. According to verse 9, why is it especially horrible to curse or verbally abuse a human being? (Hint: Think about Genesis 1 and what it means that all humans are created in the image of God.)
5. In verse 11, what would happen if both fresh and salt water flowed from the same spring? How is this like what happens to our witness if both praises and curses come from our mouths? How do you see this common struggle against hypocrisy in your own heart, life, and words?

### Interpretation Questions

1. What was the impact of words to the early Church? Describe a time when the words of another person had a lasting impact on you, either positively or negatively.
2. Has the Holy Spirit ever convicted you of speaking badly to or about others? How about when we speak to or about ourselves?

**Read James 3:13-18.**

### Text Questions

1. Summarize verses 13-18.
2. How would you describe or define bitter envy and selfish ambition?
3. What do you think verse 18 means?

### Interpretation Questions

1. Have you seen bitter envy and selfish ambition in the life of someone around you or in your own personal experience? Tell us about your observations and how bitter envy or selfish ambition impacted them and you.





## **Application**

How can you use your words differently this week? What are ways to use words to encourage, build up, and bless others?

Is there one quality that sticks out to you that you would like to grow in more? In closing, let's ask God to grow these attributes in us. Talk about how growth in that area could occur specifically this week.





## Week Five: James 4

### Opening Questions

1. Who in your life do you quarrel with the most? Why do you think that is?

**Read James 4:1-17.**

### Text Questions

1. What stands out to you most from these verses and why?
2. According to verse 1, what causes quarrels? What are the desires that battle within you?
3. Looking at verses 2-3, have you experienced these things in your own life? Tell us about a time you wanted something but had the wrong motivation. Tell us about a time you did not ask God for something and therefore did not get it.
4. According to verse 4, what are some of the symptoms of friendship with the world? Why is friendship with the world equivalent to hatred towards God?
5. Looking at verses 6-10, what are actions that we take, and what are actions that God takes?
6. How do these actions relate to pride and humility?
7. How would you define submission?
8. Summarize verses 1-10.
9. Verse 11 says that to slander or judge a brother is to criticize and judge God's law. Why do you think James takes such an intense point of view on this topic? How is constructive correction different from slander?
10. Describe what is going on in verses 13-17. What was James' audience experiencing? (Hint: They were probably living out of selfish ambition and for their own pleasure, having the wrong priorities, putting desires before God, avoiding doing good, and boasting and bragging.)

### Interpretation Questions

1. Scripture tells us to be in the world but not of the world. (See John 17:13-19, 1 John 2:15-17, 2 Corinthians 10:3.) How does this play out in your own life? What areas have you wrestled with in your decision making?
2. How are you balancing being in the world but not of it? What could that have looked like for the early Church, and what does it look like in your life?
3. What questions do you ask when making a decision? Look at the Wise Decision Making resource at [xaatuva.com/resourcelibrary](http://xaatuva.com/resourcelibrary) to talk about wise decision making principles.
4. What questions should you ask yourself before you talk about someone? (Hint: Talk about motivation. Am I trying to boost myself up, or am I speaking words of life to or about someone? Is what I'm saying undermining someone's authority in my life? Would it help the person I'm talking to? Would I say the same thing in front of the person I'm talking about?)
5. Think about making a decision without consulting God. When we do that, what are we saying about God? (Hint: Think about things like Lordship, God's wisdom versus human wisdom, and what it means to have nothing before God.)



6. Is God saying that planning for the future is wrong? (Hint: No, but He is asking us to seek His wisdom and be centered on His desires for us as our motivation. God cares about our heart attitudes as we plan!)

### **Application**

What is one thing you have learned tonight that you want to apply to your life this week? What could that look like? How do you need God to help you grow in this area? How can you start implementing this in your life now?

Pray together over what the Spirit is speaking to you, and commit to praying for each other this week.





## Week Six: James 5

### Opening Question

1. Think about a time where you experienced mercy. What happened? Now think about a time where you experienced judgment. What happened? How did both experiences feel?

**Read James 5:1-20.**

### Text Questions

1. According to verses 1-6, what have some rich people done to get in big trouble? List the attitudes and actions you can find.
2. Does James seem to be condemning all rich people?
3. How could a rich person manage their wealth well? (Hint: Think about generosity.)
4. Thinking through verses 7-12, do you think about the Lord's coming? Do you think it is important to think about?
5. Why does grumbling at others lead to judgment?
6. With verses 13-20, what does James counsel us to do when we are in trouble, happy, or sick? Why do you think this is wise counsel?
7. What is the point of James' illustration about Elijah?
8. Whose responsibility is it to do something if we see a fellow Christian wandering from the truth? (Hint: Ours.)
9. Which one truth seems most significant to you from James 5?

### Interpretation Questions

1. How did generous living look for James' audience? How could generous living look for us? (Hint: Think not only about giving time and gifts, but of giving financially. Think through the local church, missions, and benevolence.)
2. Regarding the Lord's coming, what could it look like to look forward to this? How should Christians behave during the waiting time before the Lord's return?
3. What does it mean to stand firm and how can we do this?
4. Where in your life do you need God's help to patiently persevere?
5. How do you do at keeping your word, or letting your yes be yes and no be no?
6. When you see a fellow Christian stray from God, are you prone to watch in disappointment and keep your distance, or do you seek ways in which God would have you help bring this person back?
7. What are some practical steps a person can take when she sees someone wandering from the truth?



## **Application**

How can you practice giving now? How about this week? Spend some time making a plan for generous giving. What needs to change in your budget in order to give for the church, missions, and benevolence? Even if you do not have a consistent income, spend some time dreaming about how God could use what you do have.

Is there anyone God is asking you to reach out to this week? Perhaps someone comes to mind who is far from God or who is straying from God who you could talk to. Make a plan to reach out to this person.

Lastly, take some time as a group to reflect on the James Core Group Study. What have you most appreciated about James? What has God taught you over the past six weeks?

