



**FLOURISH  
BIBLE STUDY**

# **JAMES**

LEADER'S GUIDE



**LYDIA BROWNBACK**



## **INTRODUCTION: GETTING INTO JAMES**

At this first meeting, you'll want to cover the setting of the letter—who wrote it and to whom, when it was written, and the primary themes, which primarily have to do with living out our faith in our day-to-day lives and relationships. A primary takeaway from this study is the nature of real, saving faith, the kind that shapes not only our thoughts and emotions but also our words and our deeds, so at this first meeting, you might want to ask each participant to share her understanding of faith—what it is, how we acquire it, and what it looks like practically. Later on, or at the end of the study, you can reflect together on how studying James has changed or enriched everyone's perspective on the meaning of biblical faith.

## **WEEK 1: BETTER THAN WARM AND FUZZY**

JAMES 1:1-18

There are two primary topics this week. The first is the link between hardships and spiritual maturity. In your conversation, be sure to emphasize how joy factors in. The second primary topic is distinguishing between tests of faith and temptations to sin. In addition to the Let's Talk questions at the end of the week, you'll likely want to cover several of the questions in section 2, giving participants the chance to talk about doubt, perhaps sharing a personal experience, and then circling back to how James uses the term. Cover at least a portion of section 4, being sure to leave time to review the last question in that section.

## **WEEK 2: MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL**

JAMES 1:19-27

A main takeaway this week is the vitality of God's Word—how it reveals our hearts, exposes our motives, and shapes our lives as the Spirit works in our hearts and minds through the Word. James has a good bit to say about anger this week, and you might want to frame this as a “test case” for illustrating how we approach and apply the word of God in and to our lives. The Let's Talk section fleshes this out as well. Save time to cover the first question in section 3, making sure participants understand the distinction James makes between true and false religion.



### **WEEK 3: PLAYING FAVORITES**

JAMES 2:1-13

Try to draw out participants to share circumstances in which they are tempted to show favoritism, to give special attention to certain people at the expense of others. See if they can identify what underlies the temptation. Section 2 brings out the link James makes between money and power. James has sharp words for those who use their wealth to control others, and when you cover this section, it might be good to mention the fact that simply possessing wealth is not a sin. You want this portion of the lesson to end up at this key point: God views people from a radically different perspective. Talk about what draws his heart toward someone. Spend the rest of the time talking about how verses 8–13 drive us straight to the gospel. This passage shows us our need of both Christ’s active obedience (on our behalf, he perfectly obeyed every commandment during his earthly life) and his passive obedience (his death on the cross to pay for our failures). The good news of the gospel is that God reckons Christ’s completed work to us by grace through faith.

### **WEEK 4: BEWARE OF FAKE FAITH**

JAMES 2:14-26

The nature of true faith is front and center this week, where James makes clear that genuine faith is proved by how it plays out in one’s life. Your discussion this week is likely to be the most doctrinally focused of the entire study. You’ll want to spend a good bit of time on section 1, about how Paul’s words in Ephesians 2:8–10 help clarify (rather than contradict) what James means when he says that faith without works is dead (v. 14). Be sure that each participant grasps how these passages, when taken together, show that good works are the result of salvation by faith, not the cause of it. Clarifying the nature of faith-based “good works” is important this week too, so it’d be good to touch on the portion of section 3 that covers James’s examples of Abraham and Rahab.



## **WEEK 5: SALT POND OR FRESH WATER?**

JAMES 3:1-12

Most likely you won't have time to review every question in this week's lesson, especially those questions that draw largely from other portions of Scripture. You might want to just summarize all those references with a few overarching takeaways. How do the passages reveal the way words lead others to flourish or diminish? What patterns of speech showcase the goodness of God? And finally, how do our words expose our hearts? Once you've set out and discussed the biblical perspective of the tongue, you can devote the rest of the meeting to the Let's Talk questions.

## **WEEK 6: WISDOM OF THE WORLD OR WISDOM OF GOD**

JAMES 3:13-18

Wisdom is the theme this week, as James contrasts two kinds, the world's and the Lord's. In addition to talking through the lesson, you might want to broaden the discussion to include how the Old Testament defines wisdom in Proverbs 9:10: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." Perhaps come prepared with a few related wisdom passages to talk through, such as Psalm 25:12-14 and a few additional proverbs (8:13; 10:27; 14:26-27; 15:13; 16:6).

## **WEEK 7: ALL OR NOTHING**

JAMES 4:1-12

What we love shapes our desires, which in turn shape our relationships—that's a vital theme this week. You'll want to focus on the link James makes between our passions and our pursuits, drawing out the group to articulate how they've seen this link play out in their own lives. Some might question how to understand verse 5: "Do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, 'He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us?'" The best interpretation is that God's jealousy is in view here, and that the "spirit" here refers to our inward being, not to the Holy Spirit. Humility is a prerequisite for God's Word to do its work, so be sure to plan sufficient time to work through section 3.



**WEEK 8: ARROGANCE, SELF-DECEPTION,  
AND THE HOLINESS OF GOD**

JAMES 4:13-17

The necessity of humility underlies the passage this week, but if you focused a good bit on it last week, you can center your discussion on another theme in this week's passage: living our lives and making our plans in conscious submission to God's authority. You might want to include some conversation about how to pursue God's guidance when making plans. Rather than looking for specific and detailed guidance for our decisions, we are to step out in faith, acting on what we know of God's will from his Word and trusting that God is at work in our situation to bring about the plans he intends. Making our plans according to his revealed Word is part of what it means to live in conscious dependence on the Lord. If you decide to spend time on this topic, you might want to review at least some of the verses in the "Plan-Making in Proverbs" chart in section 1.

**WEEK 9: WOES AND WONDERS**

JAMES 5:1-12

Although James's warning to the wealthy in this chapter is directed to unbelievers, he includes this material in a letter to those who *do* know Christ. Some of his readers were suffering under the oppressive power of those wealthy sinners, while others were likely tempted to envy them because they wanted to experience their own ease, pleasure, and power. Both the oppression and the temptation are just as much an issue in our day, and you can reference that when you get to the first Let's Talk question. Also, be sure that your group understands the distinction between how believers and unbelievers will experience Judgment Day. Those united to Christ by faith will never experience the wrath of God.



## **WEEK 10: PRAYING WITH POWER**

JAMES 5:13-20

Prayer is the focus of this final lesson. It's important that everyone understands James's "prayer of faith"—sickness and health are not determined by one's degree of faith. Sometimes there is, however, a link between sickness and sin. Even so, we don't have to try to figure out some sin we might have committed whenever we get sick. If there's a link, it's usually pretty obvious. That being said, it's always wise to pray for wisdom and discernment about the suffering in our lives. If something we're doing is contributing to the suffering, we can trust God to make it clear. Be sure to save sufficient time for the third and final Let's Talk question.