

A LOOK IN THE MIRROR

THE LETTER OF JAMES



rockypc SERIES COMPANION

*growing
disciples*
sacrifice. serve. speak

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MEET JAMES

The letter of James is one of the most popular New Testament books for Christians to study, probably because it contains practical wisdom for living as followers of Jesus today.

We love **explicit commands** for what we should and shouldn't do.

We love **short thoughts** that don't get bogged down in detail.

And we love **easy to remember, vivid metaphors and illustrations.**

All of these are present throughout this letter, which was written by the half-brother of Jesus.

James became a follower of Jesus after Jesus was crucified and raised again (1 Corinthians 15v7; cf John 7v5) and he was a leader in the early Christian church, even talking with the Apostle Paul about their different areas of ministry (Acts 12v17, 15v12-21, 21v18-19; cf. Galatians 1v19, 2v9, 12).

He probably put pen to paper (or quill to papyrus) **in the mid-late 40s**, before the Council of Jerusalem in AD48 and he was **predominantly writing to Jewish Christians in Palestine and Syria, who had to flee Jerusalem due to persecution from both the Jews and Romans** (cf. Acts 11v19). These Christians had left everything behind and were now being taken advantage of by wealthy landlords (e.g. James 2v7), so they were facing economic distress on top of fear for their lives.

James' concern was that, **due to their suffering, the temptation would be to compromise their faith to ease their troubles.** James knew the pressure would be for worldly practices to invade the church, so they would not honour the one to whom they belong. A key section of the letter that shows the problem is 4v4-10:

*"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.** Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble." **Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.**"*

The temptation to compromise our faith is one that afflicts every church and every believer almost immediately from the moment they turn to Jesus. For these Christians it was intensified because they were now removed from their homes in Jerusalem. Like the Christian who moves to a new town for work or university, unless they find a church that's different from the world around them, they can easily fall prey to temptation and worldliness.

The letter of James is a call to discipleship and practical Christian living. It was needed in the face of persecution almost two thousand years ago and it's still needed today.

How should we live as Christians in a world that is hostile to Christianity?

In the same vein as an Old Testament prophet, James tells us, amongst other things, to pray for wisdom and to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God.

This Series Companion is designed to be used as either a print version, or interactively on a device. Use whichever method is most helpful for you. Copies available at rockypc.org.au/series-companions



PURE JOY

JAMES 1v1-18

IN THE SPACE BELOW YOU CAN TAKE NOTES FROM THE BIBLE TALK. (IF YOU'RE USING THIS ON A DEVICE YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO CLICK AND START TYPING.)

Something I Never Knew:

Something I Was Reminded About:

A Question I Still Have:

Something I Was Challenged To Think Differently About / Do Differently:

Something I Can Share:

A Key Verse:

My prayer in response to God's word:

Who is the wisest person you know? What is it about them that makes you think that?

READ JAMES 1v1-2

1. What do we learn about the author of this letter? (see also Matthew 12v46-50; 13v53-56; 1 Corinthians 15v3-8; Acts 15v1-4, 12-13)

2. What do we learn about the recipients of the letter? (see also Acts 11v19-20)

READ JAMES 1v2-4

James talks about 'trials of many kinds'. In his letter he is going to mention at least a few, such as poverty and wealth (2v15-17), persecution (2v6-7) and sickness (5v14)

3. How should we view our trials?

4. How is God at work in our trials?

READ JAMES 1v5-8

5. Why do you think we need wisdom in our various trials?

6. What confidence can we have when we feel lacking in wisdom? (see also Matthew 7v7-12)

7. What should be our attitude in asking for wisdom?

8. What's so important about being whole-hearted and single-minded (see also Deuteronomy 6v4-5)

READ JAMES 1v9-11

James seems to switch topic here to talk about wealth and poverty. But it may be that this is a trial they are undergoing as they have sought to make a new life in the places they've scattered to.

9. What attitude can poor/humble believers bring to their situation? What about rich believers?

READ JAMES 1v12

10. Earlier, James was talking about the benefits now of persevering through trials. What future benefits are there?

READ JAMES 1v13-15

James moves from talking about external trials to more internal temptations.

11. Why is God not to blame for our temptations to sin?

READ JAMES 1v16-18

12. What do we learn about God's character? (see also Isaiah 40v25-26)

13. What do we learn about ourselves?

growing disciples

At **rockypc** we have 5 core values — we want to be growing disciples who are **DEEP IN THE WORD**, **SEEKING GOD**, on **MISSION**, as we **SERVE** in **COMMUNITY** together.

How has your view of God been challenged today? How do you want to respond to him?





What trials are you undergoing at the moment? What attitude can you bring to them, from what we've read today? Have you asked God for wisdom?

What maturity and godly character can you see God has grown in you through past trials?



What do you worry about in your temptations? That it's God's fault? That they're your fault? That you'll be dragged away into sin? Something else?

What do you think James would say to you in this?

PRAYER IDEAS

- Praise God, the Father of the heavenly lights, unchanging and always good. Praise him for his generosity and kindness. Praise him for giving us birth through the word of truth, the gospel of Jesus. Thank him that we are the firstfruits of a new creation.
- Pray that we would consider our trials as pure joy. That we would understand how God is growing our perseverance so that we might be mature, not lacking in any godly character. Ask for his wisdom to persevere and so that we might receive a crown of life.
- Pray that we would recognise how our desires threaten to drag us away from single-minded devotion to Jesus. Ask God's help to resist temptation and to trust his goodness.

LOOKING INTENTLY

JAMES 1v19-27



IN THE SPACE BELOW YOU CAN TAKE NOTES FROM THE BIBLE TALK. (IF YOU'RE USING THIS ON A DEVICE YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO CLICK AND START TYPING.)

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Something I Was Reminded About:

A Question I Still Have:

Something I Was Challenged To Think Differently About / Do Differently:

Something I Can Share:

A Key Verse:

My prayer in response to God's word:

How long do you spend in front of the mirror in the morning?

Last week, we saw James encourage these Jewish Christians to persevere despite trials and temptations because of who God is — the generous giver of wisdom, life and blessing and new birth through his word.

READ JAMES 1v19-23

1. What does God desire? (see also Matthew 5v6; 48)

2. How does James say we will and won't be able to produce it? (see also Proverbs 17v27-28)

READ JAMES 1v22-25

3. How does the mirror analogy explain God's word and an attitude towards it?

READ DEUTERONOMY 4v9-20

4. Forgetting is not a new problem. What danger did Israel face in forgetting?

5. What does James say we should do instead?

6. Which law do you think James is talking about in v25? (see also Jeremiah 31v31-34; Galatians 5v13-14)

READ JAMES 1v26-27

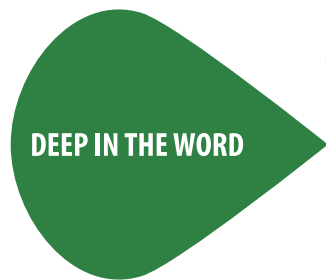
7. What are 3 ways live out pure and acceptable religion? (see also Micah 6v6-8)

James is going to fill out these three themes more thoroughly throughout the rest of the book.

8. How do they spring from God's character? (see also Exodus 34v5-7; Psalm 68v4-6; Leviticus 18v24-19v2)

growing disciples

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Are you prone to looking at God's word and forgetting? What needs to change in your attitudes and actions towards the word planted in you/ the perfect law that gives freedom?



Do you want to produce the righteousness God desires? What do you need to confess to him? What do you need to remember about his character?



How does James' definition of religion fit with what your friends say about it? What stood out to you today in how God's word calls us to treat one another?

PRAYER IDEAS

- Praise God the Father who is slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness. Praise him for caring for the vulnerable and for remaining holy and pure. Pray that we would desire to be like him. That we'd hunger to live out his righteousness.
- Thank God that his word is true and is like a plant that grows in us. It is perfect and brings freedom through Christ Jesus. Confess that we often fail to look intently into God's word. That we look at it and immediately forget what we're like, what God is like and how to obey him. Pray for his help to look intently and obey. Pray for humility to rid ourselves of moral filth and evil.
- Confess when we have spoken in anger and lacked self-control. Confess when we've failed to care for those who are vulnerable and have not been pure in thought, word and deed. Thank God for his forgiveness through Jesus and his help to love with compassion and patience, like he does.

LIVING FAITH

JAMES 2v1-26



IN THE SPACE BELOW YOU CAN TAKE NOTES FROM THE BIBLE TALK. (IF YOU'RE USING THIS ON A DEVICE YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO CLICK AND START TYPING.)

Something I Never Knew:

Something I Was Reminded About:

A Question I Still Have:

Something I Was Challenged To Think Differently About / Do Differently:

Something I Can Share:

A Key Verse:

My prayer in response to God's word:



Which is your favourite chocolate in a box of Cadbury's Favourites? Which one is always left until last in your household?

James ended the section we read last week by talking about what true religion is, he said in 1v27:

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress

James then brings up a concrete example of how his readers are failing in this area.

READ JAMES 2v1-4

1. How are these believers becoming evil judges? (see also Deuteronomy 10v17-19, Leviticus 19v15)

READ JAMES 2v5-7

2. James gives two further reasons not to discriminate against the poor and in favour of the rich. Firstly, how are they failing to value those whom God values? (v5-6b; see also Matthew 5v3)

3. Secondly, how well is preferencing the rich working out for them?

READ JAMES 2v8-13

4. Which law is James talking about here? (see also Matt 5v43-48; 22v34-40)

5. Are the sins of adultery and murder worse than favouritism? Why/why not?

6. What is the relationship between the law of freedom, mercy and judgment? (see also John 8v31-36; Matthew 18v21-35; 25v31-46)

James wants us to know what kind of faith provides security for us in the coming judgment. So he addresses the hypothetical opponent who considers themselves religious (1v26) and says 'I just need faith' (2v18)

READ JAMES 2v14-19

7. From v14-17, what is wrong with faith that's not accompanied by action?

8. How do demons' beliefs make James' point? (see also Deuteronomy 6v4)

READ JAMES 2v20-26

9. James provides evidence that faith is always accompanied by deeds, through two Old Testament figures. How did Abraham's actions in Genesis 22 work together with his faith from Genesis 15v6?

10. How is Rahab also an example of living faith? (see also Joshua 2)

READ JAMES 2v24 & ROMANS 3v28

11. Are Paul and James in conflict? How can we reconcile these two apostles' statements?

growing disciples

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Are you tempted to think some of your sins against others aren't that bad? How can you reorient your thinking in light of God's judgment and mercy?

Is your faith dead or useless? What needs to change in your head, heart, and hands?



Is favouritism an issue for you? Or is generosity-in-action a problem? What do you need to repent of? To whom do you need to say sorry?

How can you show love and mercy to those who are poorer than you?

How we **rockypc** grow as a COMMUNITY in this?



PRAYER IDEAS

- Praise God for his love shown to us in the glorious Lord Jesus Christ, who sets us free by his death and resurrection. Praise him that those who love him can inherit his kingdom, no matter how poor in the eyes of the world.
- Confess when you've failed to obey Jesus' commands to love others — when you've shown favouritism to those who are rich, or failed to show mercy, or done nothing about the physical needs of another. Ask God's help to honour those he honours, to overflow in mercy as he does and to have a living faith that works together with your actions.
- Pray that we'd be a COMMUNITY that cares for one another — both spiritually and practically.



TAMING THE TONGUE

JAMES 3v1-18

Something I Never Knew:

Something I Was Reminded About:

A Question I Still Have:

Something I Was Challenged To Think Differently About / Do Differently:

Something I Can Share:

A Key Verse:

My prayer in response to God's word:

Share a time your tongue has gotten you into trouble.

James has been focusing on true religion, where actions match faith (1v27; 2v17). Now he comes to one of the hardest ways to live out our faith.

READ JAMES 3v1-2

1. What is it about being a teacher that should make us think before rushing in to the job?

2. How many of us are perfect?

READ JAMES 3v3-5

3. What do horses, ships and bushfires teach us about our tongues? (see also Proverbs 18v20-21)

READ JAMES 3v6

4. How else is the tongue like a fire? (see also Proverbs 16v27; Matthew 12v33-37)

READ JAMES 3v7-8

5. How do our tongues resist our control? (See also Genesis 1v28; Proverbs 13v3)

READ JAMES 3v9-12

6. How do James' metaphors demonstrate our hypocrisy? (see also Matthew 7v15-20)

7. What do we need to remember about one another, when curses are on our lips? (see also Genesis 1v26-27)

James has needled us, making us feel uncomfortable as he points out the obvious problems with our tongues. So what can we do about this tiny, untameable, hypocritical body part?

READ JAMES 3v13-18

8. Where does earthly wisdom lead us? (see also Jeremiah 9v23-24)

9. How does wisdom from heaven contrast? (see also Matthew 5v5-9; 11v28-30)

10. How might this wisdom help our tongues? (see also James 1v5; 17)

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Is your tongue untameable, destructive or hypocritical? Don't just think about big incidents, but are there settled patterns/habits in your speech that display this?

How do we boast or lack humility in this area?

Have you spoken with God about this, seeking his wisdom?



What impact does your tongue have on others?

What do you need to remember about them? What do you need to remember about God's nature and desires?

How can we help one another in this area? How can we, as **rockypc**, value righteousness and peace?



PRAYER IDEAS

- Praise God for Jesus, our gentle, humble Saviour. Praise him for making us in his image, all valued in his sight.
- Ask forgiveness for the many ways that our tongues set fire to relationships, in restless evil. Confess our lack of self-control over what we say. Ask forgiveness that we are so hypocritical to praise God one minute, and then curse one another the next.
- Confess when we've failed to show the humility of wisdom, and have boasted in ourselves instead. When we've harboured bitter envy and selfish ambition in our hearts. Thank God for his compassion and mercy for sinners like us. Ask for his heavenly wisdom to work in our lives. Pray that we'd be pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Ask that we'd sow in peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.

PASSIONATE LOVE

JAMES 4v1-12



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Something I Was Reminded About:

A Question I Still Have:

Something I Was Challenged To Think Differently About / Do Differently:

Something I Can Share:

A Key Verse:

My prayer in response to God's word:

Is jealousy good or bad? When is it appropriate or not?

James finished Chapter 3 by pointing out the hypocrisy of our tongues that both praise God and curse one another (3v9). This springs from unspiritual wisdom that envies instead of loving peace (3v14,18).

READ JAMES 4v1-3

1. What is leading to fights and quarrels? (see also 1v5, 3v1, 3v13)

2. Do you think these Christians are literally killing one another in their envy? What are some other options for what James means?

READ JAMES 4v4-5

3. What choice do we have to make?

Verse 5 is tricky to translate, so your Bible might have some alternatives in the footnotes. James describes his readers as adulterous (v4) instead of beloved brothers and sisters (eg 1v16, 19, 2v5) and God's longings for us as jealous (v5).

READ EXODUS 34v10-14; JEREMIAH 3v20; HOSEA 1v2, 3v1-5

4. How does Israel's story help us understand God's passionate love, and desire for an exclusive relationship with his people?

READ JAMES 4v6-10

5. How does God want us to respond when we realise we've been unfaithful to him? (see also Psalm 24v3-4; Joel 2v2; Matthew 23v12)

6. What assurance can we have when we do come in humility? (see also Proverbs 3v34)

READ JAMES 4v11-12

James is using a sandwich pattern (or chiasm) to highlight the real problem with how these Christians are treating one another.

A — Fights and quarrels

B — Proud adultery towards God

A' — Slandering and judging

7. How does James describe the mistreatment of each other in this section? (see also Leviticus 19v16-18)

8. How does this demonstrate a wrong view of God and his law?

growing disciples

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Would God describe your relationship with him as adulterous? How are you befriending the world and becoming his enemy?



How will you approach God?

Do you trust that he will come near to you, giving more grace to lift you up? Has this been your experience of him in the past? How can you grow your confidence in God's grace?



What are you fighting about with others?

When does your frustrated envy and coveting lead you to pride, quarreling or slandering?

What do you need to remember in order to respond differently in these moments?

PRAYER IDEAS

- Praise God for his passionate love for us, that he jealously longs for us to be faithful to him. Confess the many ways that we are adulterous, loving the world instead of him. Ask his forgiveness for the coveting, envy and selfishness that lead us to quarrel with others or slander them to make ourselves feel better and for putting ourselves in God's place as judge over others and his law.
- Pray that we'd remember God is the one to turn to. That we'd submit ourselves to him in humility, washing our hands and purifying our hearts, that we might be single-mindedly devoted to him. Ask that we'd mourn our sin instead of being proud of it.
- Praise God that he promises to respond to us in abundant grace, favouring us and coming near to lift us up. Pray that we'd have confidence in his grace towards us.



COMPASSION & MERCY

JAMES 4v13-5v11

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Something I Was Reminded About:

A Question I Still Have:

Something I Was Challenged To Think Differently About / Do Differently:

Something I Can Share:

A Key Verse:

My prayer in response to God's word:

Are you a planner or do you prefer to wing it?

James has already spoken about the rich and the poor (1v9-11; 2v1-17) and about arrogance (3v13-16). But he picks up these themes again.

READ JAMES 4v13-17

1. James addresses Christians here. Does he see a problem with doing business? Or with planning? What is the real problem? (see also, Psalm 39v4-6)

2. What should our attitude be?

3. What warning is in v17 if we start showing an arrogant attitude? (see also James 1v23-25)

READ JAMES 5v1-6

James seems not to be talking to Christians anymore. He goes into full prophet mode!

4. How are the rich oppressing the poor? (see also Leviticus 19v13)

5. How will God respond to the cries of the oppressed? (see also Exodus 2v23-25; Deuteronomy 24v4-5; Luke 6v24-26; Micah 2v1-4)

6. How should the rich oppressors respond to James' warnings? (see also Isaiah 13v6-13)

READ JAMES 5v7-11

James now turns to the oppressed in this situation.

7. According to v9, what is the wrong way to deal with injustice?

8. Instead, what does James urge us to do? How should we be like farmers? (see also Psalm 37v1-13)

9. Who offers us examples of such patience? (see also Job 1v18-22)

READ JOB 42

10. What did the Lord finally bring about in Job's case? How is this an encouragement to us to persevere?

11. What motivates our patience? (v7, 8,-11; see also Exodus 34v6-7; Luke 6v20-23; 9v23-26)

growing disciples

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Whether you're a planner or a wing-it kind of person, how can you acknowledge God's sovereignty and will over your plans?



How should you view those who oppress others? Is James talking about you? What do you need to weep and wail over?



What does patience look like for you when you're faced with injustice? Do you need to repent of grumbling? Or of forgetting the Lord is coming to judge? Or of doubting his compassion and mercy to respond to our cries?



PRAYER IDEAS

- Praise God for his sovereign will, that he sets our course with wisdom and kindness. Pray that we'd trust him to do this. Confess when we've arrogantly kept him out of our plans, as though we are really in charge.
- Praise God that he cares about injustice and hears the cries of the oppressed. Thank him for his compassion and mercy. Ask that he'd bring justice to those who hoard wealth and defraud the innocent.
- Pray that in times when we suffer injustice, God would grow our patience. That we'd have confidence that Jesus will return to judge. Pray that instead of grumbling, we'd patiently persevere and receive the blessing he promises.

LET THEM PRAY

JAMES 5v12-20



IN THE SPACE BELOW YOU CAN TAKE NOTES FROM THE BIBLE TALK. (IF YOU'RE USING THIS ON A DEVICE YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO CLICK AND START TYPING.)

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Something I Was Reminded About:

A Question I Still Have:

Something I Was Challenged To Think Differently About / Do Differently:

Something I Can Share:

A Key Verse:

My prayer in response to God's word:

Tell us about a time you've seen God answer your prayers.

James has spent a lot of his letter helping us think about how we use our tongues. And that is how he finishes his letter.

READ JAMES 5v12

James says 'Above all' to tell us that he's in the concluding section of his letter, not because this is more important than what came beforehand.

1. What is wrong with swearing oaths?(see also Leviticus 19v12; Matthew 5v33-37)

READ JAMES 5v13-18

2. What circumstances should lead us to pray in v13-14?

An anointing with oil doesn't seem to be necessary for God to hear our prayers as many others are healed in the New Testament without it. (eg Matthew 8v1-17; Acts 9v17-19)

3. What does the oil signify? (see also Exodus 40v12-15; Mark 6v6-13)
4. What is promised to the sick person here? (see also Matthew 9v1-8)
5. What link do you think James is making between sickness and sin? How does this fit with what you know from the rest of the Bible?
6. Who/what makes prayer powerful and effective?
7. How is Elijah an example of this? (see also 1 Kings 17v1; 18v41-46)

READ JAMES 5v19-20

8. What responsibility and privilege do we have towards one another? (see also Psalm 32)

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When are you most likely to pray? When are you least likely?
How have you been encouraged to pray today?



How easy do you find it to confess your sins to others? What can we do as a **COMMUNITY** of Jesus' disciples to make this part of our relationships?



Is there someone who is part of **rockypc** that you are worried may be wandering from the truth? What can you do to bring them back to Jesus?



Do you keep your word? What will it look like for you to show your trustworthiness to others?

PRAYER IDEAS

- Praise God that he loves to forgive, heal and restore. Praise him that he is powerful to act. Thank him that he is always ready to listen to us and invites us to talk to him. Confess when we've been slow or stubborn or neglectful in prayer. Ask that God would forgive us and lead us to pray in every circumstance. Pray that our faith in him would grow.
- Pray that we would be a **COMMUNITY** that confesses sin to one another and prays together. Pray that our elders would lead us in this. Ask that we'd be humble listeners who point each other to Jesus' forgiveness. Pray for those of us who are wandering. Pray for wisdom and courage to approach one another and seek to turn that brother or sister back. Pray that God's power and forgiveness would be at work to cover over our sins as we repent.