

A SMALL GROUP STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JAMES

James:

a 360° Faith

Hi.

Hi.

Host Materials

This is a six-part study about living like we follow God—and not just talking about it—because a life of action is a natural result of a growing relationship with God.

A good study for new followers of Jesus or those of us who need some motivation and perspective. Light reading, lots of group discussion and individual challenges to “live it out.”

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- **One printed-off “Host Materials” guide** for group time. Facilitates discussion.
- **One host.** Someone who prints this guide and brings it to every group meeting. Also the person who coordinates the whens and wheres for the meetings and gets things rolling.
- **A Bible for everyone.** To be brought to every group meeting. Free ones are available at Crossroads’ Info Center (or take a smart phone to your meetings and use biblegateway.com).
- **A notebook** or something for note-gathering during this study.

HOW LONG IT TAKES:

This study is divided into six parts. You can do it in six weeks, eight, twelve—whatever suits your group. We recommend keeping the momentum going by doing the study at least twice a month. **Each part should take about an hour**, plus some time to just hang out.

WHAT EVERYONE NEEDS TO DO BEFORE THE FIRST GROUP MEETING:

- **Read the book of James.** It’s really short, so no skimming. For the rest of this study, there’s no homework or need to read ahead. (But if you want to check out what your group will be talking about and what questions you’ll be asked, feel free to read the next pages.)
 - **Start a notebook.** As you’re reading James, write down anything that strikes you or brings up a question. And when your group starts meeting, have those pages around to take notes or write down anything you want to remember.
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WHAT THE HOST NEEDS TO DO BEFORE THE FIRST GROUP MEETING:

- **Read the book of James** like the rest of the group.
- **Send an email** to communicate the when and where for your small group meetings.
- **Make sure everyone in your group has a Bible** or online access to one—and knows that they need to read the book of James before the first meeting. Some people from your group might not have looked at this page of instructions, so spread the word.
- **Print this guide** and take it to your meetings. It will facilitate the discussions.
- **Look over Part One** in this guide before the group meets, just to familiarize yourself with the format and get a sense of what will be asked.

Part One

HOST,

If your group doesn't know each other well, start by asking people to say their name, how they spend their time during the weekdays and what they're hoping to get out of this study. If you know each other well, skip the name-game and just go around and say why you're interested in studying the book of James.

THEN READ ALOUD:

It's a common complaint that being a Christ-follower is just about strict rules and weekend religion, and that those who claim to be Christians never actually *do* anything.

This is where James comes into the picture, and why we're studying his book.

James was one of the early leaders of the Church, and he knew it could be easy to get lost in all the *talking* about following Jesus and lose sight of the *doing*. James also understood that every command from God isn't just God's attempt to squash our freedom. Each command is a hint that shows us how to find a powerful relationship with God. And following His commands actually brings us freedom.

For this study, we'll be talking about different sections of the book of James and how they apply to our lives. Every time we meet, we'll also get a personal, action-oriented challenge. We'll get those challenges at the end of each meeting.

For now, someone open a Bible and read James 2:14-26.

AFTER THE SCRIPTURE IS READ, CONTINUE READING:

To some of us, those words might sound kind of harsh. It could make us think that we have to earn or work for God's approval and love. But the truth is that His approval and love is already ours. And when we fully receive His love and grace, our lives naturally begin to reflect those things. Our hearts match our actions.

To get some perspective on this possibility, take a minute to go around the group and answer this question:

1 : **Share one thing you love or feel passionate about. Then describe how that passion shows up in what you actually do. For instance, if you love music, maybe you go to Southgate House for concerts or you're always creating playlists for friends. Or if you're passionate about sports, maybe you coach a team or play Fantasy Football. So go around the circle and say one thing you love, and how that shows up in what you do.**

AFTER DISCUSSING, CONTINUE READING:

The point with that conversation is probably obvious. When we love or enjoy something, we love and enjoy action that's related to it. It's a natural response, not a burden or something we have to force. James is saying it's the same with how we follow Jesus. When we're in a relationship with Him, our lives visibly show it. We're the same on the outside as we are on the inside. So our faith becomes very real and very practical.

Host, go through these next discussion questions one by one, giving everyone an opportunity to speak if they want.

- 2:** Everyone share briefly about a time when something you did made you feel a sense of joy, and you're pretty sure it made God joyful, too.
- 3:** For this round, everyone talk about a time when you felt like God might have prompted you to do something, but you chose not to do it. What held you back?

PASS THIS TO SOMEONE ELSE TO READ ALOUD:

Here are a few things to consider: God doesn't *need* you to do things in order to accomplish his work. The Bible clearly tells us that His work *will* be completed. And you can never make God love you more than he does right now—even if you become Mother Theresa overnight. So don't start making a to-do list of ways you can be more saintly, hoping to get closer to God. He's crazy about you already. Instead, recognize that your day-to-day life can become a natural reflection of God's love and grace. You're not doing this on your own—it's through His power.

- 4:** For the last conversation, everyone take a minute to share one way you've experienced something good from God. Then describe how that affects your life, in big or small ways.

WHEN EVERYONE HAS SHARED, READ ALOUD:

Here is everyone's challenge for this week, so get out your notebooks and write it down. We all just shared something good we've experienced from God. With that at the front of your mind, consider a way that you can show God to someone else. It could be an act of financial generosity. A phone call to a friend who you know just needs to have someone listen. Or an extra helping of grace to the person who drives you crazy. Write down any ideas you have right now, then be open to God showing you how to act this week.

END OF PART ONE

Part Two

HOST, READ ALOUD:

Welcome back to Part Two of our James study.

1. Let's take the first few minutes to share how our challenges went this past week as we took an action to share God's love with someone else. Anyone can go first.

WHEN EVERYONE IS FINISHED TALKING, CONTINUE READING:

We're probably all familiar with the rallying cry from the *Three Musketeers*: "All for one, and one for all!" Not only does it have a good ring to it, but who doesn't like the idea of a small band of people rallying together to triumph over impossible odds?

Yet, that simple phrase also hits at a deeper principle that James teaches. **Someone grab a Bible and read chapter 2:1-13.**

WHEN FINISHED READING, CONTINUE:

At face value, what we just read could sound like a vague item to add to a list of religious do's and don'ts. But James isn't laying down a religious hoop for people to jump through. He's talking about where we find our security and value.

If our sense of self-worth is found largely in our possessions or social standing, then we will always struggle with the temptation to show favoritism—to treat people differently based on what they can or can't do for us. Yet, when we find our security and value in the promises of God, we are freed to live a radically generous and confident life. Because of God's influence on us, we can live an "all for one, one for all" mentality. No person is insignificant or beneath us. No person stresses us out because we're so worried about getting their approval. We are able to see people as God does, and love them accordingly. No more and no less.

HOST, PASS THIS TO SOMEONE AND ASK THEM TO GO THROUGH THE NEXT QUESTIONS OUT LOUD:

2. Based on what we read in James, everyone take a minute to describe three things: First, when you've felt like the host of the party who showed preferential treatment. Second, when you've felt like the rich guy who got undue favor. Third, when you've felt like the poor person who was judged.
3. Who do you see being favored, today? Anyone can answer.
4. Now that we've talked about favoritism we see in our daily lives, let's brainstorm the roots of favoritism. When we favor someone or a group of people, what is it that we desire or feel that we lack? Then, what would be a way to counteract that favoritism?

AFTER EVERYONE IS FINISHED WITH THE ABOVE QUESTIONS, READ ALOUD:

Jesus says we are to love others as we love ourselves. This is easier said than done, which is why it will be the challenge this week. Right now, take a minute to think of someone or a type of person in your life who you treat as a person beneath you or not worth your time. If no one comes to mind, ask God to reveal that person to you.

AFTER EVERYONE SEEMS LIKE THEY'RE FINISHED THINKING ABOUT THIS, READ ALOUD:

Here's this week's challenge, which you probably knew was coming: Take an action this week that shows God's love to the person you just identified. You might not get thanked or even acknowledged for your action, but gratitude isn't the reason for doing this. The point is knowing that your worth and the worth of that other person is rooted in God.

END OF PART TWO

Part Three

HOST, READ ALOUD:

Hi everyone. Welcome to Part Three. Let's start things off by talking about how everyone's challenge went last week.

1. You don't have to name names, but take a minute and briefly share what action you took to show someone God's love and what happened as a result. If you didn't get around to it, just say what held you back.

WHEN EVERYONE IS FINISHED, CONTINUE READING:

Today, we'll be talking about how we use words. A quick fact is that the average woman says about 20,000 words a day. The average man says 7,000. Regardless of gender, and whether we're introverted or the life of the party, we all do a lot of talking. Which means there's plenty opportunity to either build people up or tear them down with our words.

Someone read James 3:1-12 out loud.

AFTER THE SCRIPTURE IS READ, CONTINUE READING:

This idea of words having a huge effect on others probably isn't breaking news. But often, even though we know the power of words, we forget the power of our own words in our daily lives. We're much more aware of how people are speaking to us or about us, especially when it's negative. But James says our words are even capable of changing the course of a whole life. Changing the course of a person's life? That's a lot of power.

HOST, GO THROUGH THESE NEXT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ONE-BY-ONE:

- 2: Everyone give an example of when you have a hard time controlling your tongue, whether that means your words come out with anger, jealousy, judgment or even passive-aggression.
- 3: Now, everyone describe a time when someone else's words had a really positive effect on you. This isn't limited to compliments. It could be some insight you've been given about yourself, a moment of encouragement, or just words you'll never forget.
- 4: Someone look back at James 3:9-12 and reread those verses out loud. (Pause for reading.) James is telling us that our words not only direct our life, but our words demonstrate where our life already is. Take a minute to talk about what that means. Anyone can throw out ideas or examples.

WHEN THE GROUP IS FINISHED TALKING, PASS THIS TO SOMEONE ELSE TO READ:

This week, we'll do the challenge during group time. In the spirit of James' action-oriented teachings, let's go around the group right now and encourage each other. This is a time to build into each other, call out people's good character, and just strengthen the people around you. Feel free to first spend a minute in silence, as you think about what to share. It doesn't have to be anything earth-shattering. Just a genuine word or two of encouragement.

AFTER EVERYONE HAS BEEN ENCOURAGED, CONTINUE READING:

That's all for this meeting. But take it as an extra challenge this week to control your tongue and to build others up with authentic encouragement. Use your notebook to record anything interesting that happens.

END OF PART THREE

Part Four

HOST, READ ALOUD:

Have you ever been at a party, or maybe a family gathering, and gotten stuck in a conversation with *that* person? The person who fights to stay in the center of attention or is always going for the classic one-upper? Chances are, it felt like that person sucked the life out of that moment.

Pride has a way of doing that. **Someone open a Bible and read James 4 out loud.** (Yes, the whole thing.)

AFTER THE SCRIPTURE IS READ, CONTINUE READING:

So there's a reason why those people suck the life out of us. By its very nature, pride separates us from people. It's difficult to really connect with someone when that person is constantly trying to make sure that they have more than others, that they're in a higher position, and so on. Pride automatically disconnects us from other people.

1. **Everyone take a minute and consider how you've seen pride interfere with a relationship, even if it wasn't yours. Then if anyone is comfortable, share it with the rest of the group.**

HOST, CONTINUE READING:

Pride doesn't just separate us from other people, it also separates us from God. It's impossible to give God the place of highest value in our lives when we're unwilling to put anything above our own self-interest. It simply won't work.

It is only when we humble ourselves, and are willing to think beyond ourselves, that we're truly able to have the kind of connection with God and others that we were designed for.

2. **This next question is for everyone to answer, so get out your notebooks. Make a list of talents or gifts that you feel God has blessed you with. It could be a knack for interior design, a gift for making friends easily, a talent for being organized. Make your list. And remember, being humble doesn't mean being ashamed of these gifts and talents.**

WHEN EVERYONE IS FINISHED WITH THEIR LIST, CONTINUE READING:

3. **Now look at your list again. With each talent, consider if it ever becomes a source of pride for you. In other words, maybe you use that talent as a way to draw extra attention to yourself, cover up an insecurity, or you use it to judge others who don't have the same gift. If anything on your list has that tendency, just put a mark by it. When you're finished, and if anyone feels like sharing an example, go for it. You might find some surprising results.**

WHEN EVERYONE IS FINISHED, CONTINUE READING:

When we're connected with God, and when we trust that our worth comes from him and not the things we do well or don't do well, we can find the balance of self-confidence and humility. We don't hide our gifts and talents, but neither do we flaunt them or use them to cover up insecurities.

The challenge this week should hopefully be fun. Choose one of your talents or gifts from your list and use that gift as a way to bless someone. But here's the catch: you have to do it without drawing attention or credit to yourself. See you next time.

END OF PART FOUR

Part Five

HOST, READ ALOUD:

Welcome back, everyone.

- 1: To start us off, everyone share two things about the challenge you did last week to bless someone with one of your talents or gifts. First, say one thing that made it easy. Then say one thing that made it difficult.

AFTER EVERYONE SHARES, KEEP READING:

Today we'll be talking about the things we own or want to own, and what we sacrifice for them.

It's funny how the things that mean so much to us at one point in our life can turn out to mean so little later on. Think back to your childhood for a minute. When you think about what you treasured back then, what comes to mind? Baseball cards? Barbies? A certain bike or skateboard? All of us had things that were valuable to us—things that we treasured.

But where are those things now? Probably forgotten in an attic or basement, if they're even around at all. Are you upset about the loss? Probably not. And even things we treasured last year, or last month, might have lost importance to us.

Someone read James 5:1-6 out loud.

AFTER THE SCRIPTURE IS READ, CONTINUE READING:

In these verses, James isn't rebuking his community for being wealthy. He rebukes them for misusing their resources and being overly-dependent on possessions. Possessions themselves aren't bad. We should enjoy what God has given us. But when we're

consumed by our possessions, we push God out of our lives. And because our possessions will eventually bore us or lose their importance, we're putting our trust in something that ultimately leaves us unfulfilled.

HOST, GO THROUGH THESE QUESTIONS ONE-BY-ONE:

- 2: Have you ever felt consumed by something you own? What was it, and how did you know you were consumed by it?
- 3: This might take a minute to think about before answering out loud, but consider what you've sacrificed in your life in order to accumulate possessions. Try to be as specific as possible.
- 4: Most of us have intentions of being generous. When was a time when you followed through and gave something away that still had value to you? How were you feeling afterwards?

AFTER EVERYONE HAS FINISHED SHARING, READ THE FOLLOWING:

The whole issue of possessions is not really about "stuff" at all. It is about where we find our satisfaction and security—about how tightly we cling to that stuff. Remember, James' main theme is living as a follower of Jesus and not just giving lip-service to it. So if we believe God is our provider, that he loves us, and that he will take care of us, our life will naturally reflect generosity. We won't get obsessed with what we own or want to own because we know what's more important.

This week, ask God to show you some ways that you can be generous with what he's given you. Then, in at least one way, act on what He shows you. That's your challenge. Write it down.

END OF PART FIVE

Part Six

HOST, READ ALOUD:

Hi everyone, welcome to our last meeting on James.

- 1: Take the first few minutes to talk about your generosity attempt from the last challenge.

WHEN PEOPLE ARE FINISHED TALKING, CONTINUE READING:

Today, we'll talk about what happens when we're in hard situations and how we our lives change when we're suffering.

"No pain, no gain," is a common saying. So is, "That which doesn't kill me only makes me stronger."

We're generally OK with suffering as a principle. We know life can't be painless, and we have some sense that we'll grow or mature as a result of it. Yet it seems like suffering sneaks up on us every time. Often, it just becomes crisis management. We do what we have to do to make it through the hard situation, to just get it over with. Maybe we shut down. Maybe we get really selfish. Maybe we lash out at people around us. Maybe we turn away from God. Because we're suffering, we give ourselves permission to change, often for the worse.

The point is that when we suffer, we have a choice about how we'll live each day.

Someone read James 1:1-12 out loud.

HOST, PASS THIS TO SOMEONE ELSE TO READ:

When we're in the midst of difficulty, it's hard to see beyond our immediate circumstances. We get laser-focused on the problems at hand, and they consume all our thought and energy. Yet James encourages his readers to go through their trials with a new mindset.

- 2: Everyone consider a time in your past when you suffered through something. You don't need to share it with the group unless you want to, so think freely. When everyone has something in mind, we'll continue with a couple questions.

(Pause for a minute or two.)

- 3: The first question is this: During the time while you were suffering, think about any ways that you shut down, or acted in a way you're not proud of, or turned away from God or other people. Can you describe the effect of your response? Anyone who wants to share their experience, feel free.

AFTER PEOPLE HAVE SHARED (OR NOT SHARED), CONTINUE READING:

- 4: Now, everyone consider if anything positive or healing came out of your suffering. This doesn't mean the good outweighed the bad, but it means considering where maybe you grew in your understanding of God, or found new relationships, or saw an unexpected benefit. Then if anyone wants to, please share your experience as an encouragement to others.

AFTER PEOPLE HAVE SHARED, CONTINUE READING:

As adults, we know that all of us will suffer. We will continue to face hard situations in our lives. What James is teaching us is that we have a choice about how to handle our suffering. We can either turn away from God and other people, or we can continue to reflect God's love and grace in the midst of our suffering.

Take the last few minutes to discuss the idea of making a choice in how you suffer. Share any ideas about how suffering could grow your relationship with God and be a time when you could continue reflecting God's character.

AFTER PEOPLE HAVE SHARED, CONTINUE READING:

That's the end of our James study about how to live in a way where our beliefs and desire for God matches how we act every day—whether that's in regards to the words we speak, the generosity we show, the favoritism we avoid, the humility we have or the suffering we live through. James is a great book with tons of wisdom, so continue to use it as something to go back to and get a refresher. And before you leave, now is probably a good time to decide what's next for your small group.

END OF PART SIX