

# Riverside Group Study- The Book of James

## Week 1: Introduction to James

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### OPENING ICEBREAKER *(5-10 minutes)*

*What's something you've heard about the book of James before, or what's one thing you're hoping to get out of this study?*

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### ABOUT THE BOOK OF JAMES *(10-15 minutes)*

**Who wrote it?** James, the half-brother of Jesus, wrote this letter. He likely didn't believe Jesus was the Messiah during Jesus' earthly ministry, but after the resurrection, James became a leader in the early church in Jerusalem. He was known for his devotion to prayer and his passion for practical, lived-out faith.

**Who was it written to?** James wrote to "the twelve tribes scattered among the nations" – Jewish Christians who had been forced to leave Jerusalem because of persecution. They were living as minorities in cultures that didn't share their faith, facing trials, poverty, and pressure to compromise.

**Why did he write it?** James wrote to encourage believers who were struggling and to challenge them to live out their faith authentically. He wanted them to know that real faith isn't just about what you believe. It's about how you live. The book is intensely practical, addressing topics like handling trials, controlling your words, caring for the poor, and resisting worldliness.

### What are the major themes?

- **Faith and works go together** – Real faith produces real change
- **Trials refine us** – God uses hard things to mature us
- **Words matter** – What we say reveals what's in our hearts
- **Favoritism is sin** – God cares deeply about how we treat others, especially the vulnerable
- **Wisdom from God** – We need God's perspective to navigate life
- **Humble dependence on God** – Pride and self-reliance are dangerous

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS *(30-35 minutes)*

1. James is often called the "Proverbs of the New Testament" because it's so practical. Why do you think the early Christians needed a letter like this? What pressures were they facing that made practical faith so important?
2. James was Jesus' half-brother and likely didn't believe in Him until after the resurrection. What do you think it would have been like to grow up with Jesus as your brother and not realize who He was? How might that have shaped the way James writes about authentic faith?
3. This letter was written to Christians scattered by persecution – people who lost their homes, jobs, and community because of their faith. How might that context change the way we read James's instruction to "consider it pure joy" when facing trials?
4. James emphasizes that faith without works is dead. Why do you think it's so easy to separate what we believe from how we live? What does it look like when those two things come together?
5. Looking at the themes we just discussed, which one do you think will be most challenging for you personally over the next 13 weeks? Which one are you most looking forward to digging into?
6. James wrote to believers who were pressured to compromise their faith to fit in. Where do you feel the most pressure to compromise – at work, with friends, on social media, in your spending?

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## TAKING IT HOME *(3-5 minutes)*

**This week's question:** What does it mean for my faith to be "real" and not just something I say I believe?

Over the next 13 weeks, we're going to wrestle with what it means to live out authentic faith in the real world – with our money, our words, our relationships, and our struggles. James doesn't pull punches, and he won't let us settle for surface-level Christianity. This is going to challenge us. But if we let it, this study will help us become people whose faith actually changes the way we live.

### **Prayer for the Week:**

*Father, thank You for giving us Your Word to guide us. As we begin this study, open our hearts to hear what You want to say to us through James. Help us to be honest about*

*where our faith is real and where it's just words. Give us the courage to let You change us – not just our beliefs, but our actual lives. We want to be people who don't just hear Your Word but do what it says. Prepare our hearts for the next 13 weeks. In Jesus' name, amen.*

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## **DIVE DEEPER**

*This section is for anyone who wants to explore additional background on the book of James on their own time.*

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

James likely wrote this letter between AD 45-50, making it possibly the earliest New Testament book written. The persecution he references probably refers to the scattering that happened after Stephen's martyrdom (Acts 7-8), when Saul (Paul) was hunting down Christians.

James became a pillar of the Jerusalem church (Galatians 2:9) and presided over the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. According to early church historians, he was martyred in AD 62 by being thrown from the temple and stoned.

## **LITERARY STYLE**

James writes in a style similar to Old Testament wisdom literature (like Proverbs), using:

- Vivid imagery (waves tossed by the sea, a bit in a horse's mouth, a small spark starting a forest fire)
- Direct commands (over 50 imperatives in 108 verses)
- Rhetorical questions
- Practical observations about everyday life

## **JAMES AND JESUS**

James echoes Jesus' teaching throughout his letter, particularly the Sermon on the Mount. Some examples:

- Trials and perseverance (James 1:2-4 // Matthew 5:10-12)
- Asking God for good gifts (James 1:5 // Matthew 7:7-11)
- Hearing and doing (James 1:22 // Matthew 7:24-27)
- Don't judge (James 4:11-12 // Matthew 7:1-5)
- Rich and poor (James 2:5 // Matthew 5:3)

## KEY VERSE

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." – James 1:22

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## Week 2: James 1:1–8

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### OPENING ICEBREAKER (5-10 minutes)

*What's one thing you're really good at now that was difficult or frustrating when you first started learning it? (Could be a skill, hobby, sport, part of your job, etc.)*

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### READ TOGETHER (2-3 minutes)

*James 1:1–8*

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### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (40-45 minutes)

1. James tells us to "consider it pure joy" when we face trials. Be honest: what's your gut reaction when hard things happen?
2. Think about a difficult season you went through in the past. Looking back now, can you see anything good that came out of it – something built in you that wasn't there before?
3. James says we need trials to build endurance and maturity. Why do you think we can't just grow spiritually during the easy seasons?
4. When life gets hard, what are you most tempted to run to for comfort or escape instead of turning to God? (Be specific: binge-watching shows, shopping, isolation, overworking, etc.)
5. What do you think spiritual maturity actually looks like in real life? Can you think of someone who seems spiritually mature? What is it about them?
6. James warns that a "double-minded" person, someone trying to trust God while also hedging their bets, is unstable and shouldn't expect to receive anything from Him. Where in your life right now are you most tempted to keep one foot in with God and one foot out?

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## **TAKING IT HOME** (3-5 minutes)

**This week's question:** What's one way I can trust God more fully with what I'm facing right now?

God isn't wasting your struggles. When trials come, He's using them to build endurance and maturity in you – to make you complete, lacking nothing. This week, ask Him for wisdom to see what He's building, and for single-minded faith to trust Him all the way through it.

### **Prayer for the Week:**

*Father, I confess that trials make me want to run instead of remain under Your hand. Give me the endurance to stay faithful when life is hard. Help me see that You're not wasting my struggles – You're using them to build something in me. When I lack wisdom, teach me to ask You with a whole heart, trusting You completely instead of hedging my bets. Unite my divided heart. Make me single-minded in my devotion to You, stable and steady because my hope is in You alone. Work in me until I am mature and complete, lacking nothing. In Jesus' name, amen.*

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## **DIVE DEEPER**

*This section is for anyone who wants to explore the original language and connecting Scriptures on their own time.*

### **GREEK SPOTLIGHTS**

#### **Verse 3: "Produces"**

The word translated "produces" comes from the Greek word *katērgazomai*, built from *kata* ("down/according to") and *ergazomai* ("to work or accomplish"), so it means "to work something all the way to its end point." It pictures testing as steady work that keeps going until endurance is clear, solid, and fully formed in a person. Put simply: when your faith is tested over time, that testing doesn't just start endurance; it actively builds real endurance in you.

#### **Verse 3: "Endurance"**

The word translated "endurance" comes from the Greek word *hypomonē*. It is built from *hypo*, meaning "under," and *menō*, meaning "to remain or stay," so together it literally means "to remain under." It pictures someone staying put under a heavy load instead of

running away from it. Put simply: endurance is God-enabled strength to stay faithful and steady under pressure, not giving up when life is hard.

#### **Verse 4: "Perfect"**

The word translated "perfect" is the Greek word *teleios*. It does not mean "flawless" as in never making a mistake, but "brought to its intended goal," "mature," or "fully developed," like something that has reached the purpose it was designed for. Put simply: "perfect" here means spiritually mature and grown-up in character, not sinless perfection.

#### **Verse 4: "Complete"**

The word translated "complete" in James 1:4 is the Greek word *holoklēros*, which pictures something whole in all its parts, with nothing missing or left out – like a body with every limb present or a set with every piece in place. Put simply: "complete" describes a believer whose character is well-rounded in Christ, not strong in just one area but growing in every part of obedience, with nothing essential left missing.

#### **Verse 8: "Double-minded"**

The word translated "double-minded" comes from the Greek word *dipsychos*, built from *dis* ("two") and *psychē* ("soul/mind"), so it literally means "two-souled." It pictures a person trying to live with two different souls or loyalties at the same time – pulled between trusting God and trusting something else, never fully committed to either. Put simply: being double-minded means having a divided heart that wavers back and forth, making you unstable because you're trying to trust God while also holding back or hedging your bets.

#### **Verse 8: "Unstable"**

The word translated "unstable" comes from the Greek word *akatastatos*, built from *a-* ("not/without") and *katastatos* ("settled/established"), so it literally means "unable to be set in place." It pictures something that can't stay firm or steady – like a boat tossed on waves, always shifting and never finding solid ground. Put simply: being unstable means you're unreliable and unpredictable in all your ways because the double-mindedness inside makes you constantly waver, never settled in what you believe or how you'll act.

### **CROSS REFERENCES**

#### **1 Peter 1:6-7**

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

### **Romans 5:3-5**

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

### **1 Peter 5:6-11**

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

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## **Week 3: James 1:9–18**

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### **OPENING ICEBREAKER** (5-10 minutes)

*If you could have any material possession in the world, what would it be and why?*

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### **READ TOGETHER** (2-3 minutes)

*James 1:9–18*

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### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS** (40-45 minutes)

1. **James says the poor should take pride in their high position and the rich should take pride in their humiliation. What do you think he means by that? How does that flip our “normal” way of thinking?**
2. **Verse 12 says "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial" and promises a crown of life to those who love God. When you're in the middle**

of something hard, does the promise of future reward actually help you keep going? Why or why not?

3. James makes it clear that God doesn't tempt us – we're tempted by our own desires. Why do you think we're so quick to blame circumstances, other people, or even God when we're drawn toward sin?
  4. Verse 15 describes a progression: desire leads to sin, and sin leads to death. Can you think of an example of how a small desire snowballed into something bigger and more destructive?
  5. James says "every good and perfect gift is from above." When good things happen in your life, do you naturally think "this is from God," or do you tend to credit yourself, luck, or circumstances?
  6. Verse 18 says we are "a kind of firstfruits" of God's creation. What do you think it means to be the "firstfruits" to God, and how could remembering that change the way you see yourself this week?
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### **TAKING IT HOME** (3-5 minutes)

**This week's question:** What's one desire in my life that I need to surrender to God before it leads me somewhere I don't want to go?

God doesn't tempt you, but He does allow trials to refine you and prove your faith. This week, pay attention to where your desires are pulling you. Remember that every good gift comes from Him, and He chose to give you new life. When temptation comes, run to Him – not away from Him.

### **Prayer for the Week:**

*Father, help me see the difference between the trials You allow to grow me and the temptations that come from my own desires. Give me the wisdom to recognize when I'm being pulled toward something that will lead to death instead of life. Remind me that every good thing I have comes from You – not from my own effort or luck. Thank You for choosing to give me new birth through Your word. Help me persevere under trial, keeping my eyes on the crown of life You've promised to those who love You. In Jesus' name, amen.*

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### **DIVE DEEPER**

*This section is for anyone who wants to explore the original language and connecting Scriptures on their own time.*

## GREEK SPOTLIGHTS

### Verse 12: "Blessed"

The word translated "blessed" comes from the Greek word *makarios*, which means deeply happy, fortunate, or flourishing in a way that comes from God – not from circumstances. It's the same word Jesus uses in the Beatitudes ("Blessed are the poor in spirit..."). Put simply: "blessed" describes a state of true well-being and joy that exists regardless of external conditions, because it's rooted in God's favor and presence.

### Verse 12: "Crown"

The word translated "crown" is the Greek word *stephanos*, which refers to a victor's wreath – the kind given to winners of athletic competitions, not the royal crown (*diadema*) worn by kings. It pictures a reward for finishing the race well, for persevering to the end. Put simply: the "crown of life" is the victor's prize that God promises to those who endure trials and remain faithful to Him.

### Verse 13: "Tempted"

The word translated "tempted" comes from the Greek word *peirazō*, which can mean both "to test" (in a good way) and "to tempt" (in a bad way). The context determines which meaning applies. God tests our faith to strengthen us, but He never tempts us to sin. Put simply: the same Greek word covers both testing and tempting, but God only does the former – He allows trials to prove and strengthen your faith, never to lure you into sin.

### Verse 14: "Desire"

The word translated "desire" (or "evil desire") is the Greek word *epithymia*, built from *epi* ("upon/toward") and *thymos* ("passion/strong feeling"), so it means a strong craving or longing directed at something. The word itself is neutral – it can be used for good desires or sinful ones. Put simply: desire becomes dangerous when it's directed at the wrong things or pursued in the wrong way, and James warns that unchecked sinful desire conceives sin, which leads to death.

### Verse 17: "Good and perfect gift"

The phrase "good and perfect gift" uses two Greek words: *agathos* ("good, beneficial, useful") and *teleios* ("complete, mature, brought to its intended purpose"). Together they describe gifts that are both genuinely beneficial and completely whole – nothing defective, nothing missing. Put simply: every gift from God is not just good but perfect – complete and lacking nothing, because He gives with generous perfection.

## CROSS REFERENCES

**Matthew 6:19-21**

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

**1 Corinthians 10:13**

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

**Romans 6:23**

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Philippians 4:8**

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.

**Hebrews 12:1-2**

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

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**Week 4: James 1:19–27**

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**OPENING ICEBREAKER** *(5-10 minutes)*

*Are you more of a talker or a listener? What's one thing that makes it hard for you to really listen to someone?*

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**READ TOGETHER** *(2-3 minutes)*

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS** (40-45 minutes)

1. James tells us to be "quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." Which of those three is hardest for you, and why?
  2. James says human anger doesn't produce God's righteousness. What does anger tend to produce instead – in relationships, in ourselves, in situations?
  3. James talks about the word being "planted" in you. What do you think has to happen for something planted to actually grow and produce fruit? What kills it before it can take root?
  4. Verse 22 is one of the most famous lines in James: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." Why is it so easy to hear God's word week after week but not actually let it change how we live? What keeps us stuck in the "listening" stage?
  5. James warns against hearing God's word and then forgetting it. What are some practical things that help you actually remember and apply what you've heard? What makes the difference between it sticking and it slipping away?
  6. Verse 27 says that "religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." How does this definition of "pure religion" compare to what our culture – or even church culture – tends to emphasize?
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**TAKING IT HOME** (3-5 minutes)

**This week's question:** What's one thing God has been speaking to me about that I've been hearing but not doing?

Real faith doesn't stop at hearing – it moves to action. This week, don't just listen to God's word. Don't just think about it or agree with it. Do what it says. Pick one thing you know God has been speaking to you about, and take one tangible step of obedience.

**Prayer for the Week:**

*Father, help me to be quick to listen – to You and to others. Slow my tongue and my anger. Plant Your word deeply in my heart and help me humbly receive it, not just as*

*information, but as something that should change the way I live. Show me where I've been deceiving myself by hearing Your word but not doing it. Give me eyes to see the people You've placed in my path who need care – the overlooked, the vulnerable, the hurting. Keep me from being polluted by the values and priorities of this world. Make my faith real. In Jesus' name, amen.*

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## **DIVE DEEPER**

*This section is for anyone who wants to explore the original language and connecting Scriptures on their own time.*

## **GREEK SPOTLIGHTS**

### **Verse 19: "Quick to listen"**

The word translated "quick" is the Greek word *tachus*, meaning swift, speedy, or prompt. It's the same root that gives us words like "tachometer" (measures speed). Put simply: being "quick to listen" means being eager, ready, and fast to hear – making listening your first and fastest response, not an afterthought.

### **Verse 21: "Humbly accept"**

The word translated "humbly" is the Greek word *prautēs*, often rendered as "meekness" or "gentleness." It doesn't mean weakness but rather strength under control – a teachable spirit that's willing to be corrected. Put simply: to "humbly accept" God's word means to receive it with a soft, teachable heart instead of a defensive or argumentative one.

### **Verse 27: "Religion"**

The word translated "religion" is the Greek word *thrēskeia*, referring to external religious practices and rituals – the outward expression of faith. Put simply: James is saying that true religious practice isn't just about ceremonies and spiritual-sounding activities; it's about caring for vulnerable people and living differently from the world.

## **CROSS REFERENCES**

### **Matthew 7:24-27**

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came

down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.

**Proverbs 18:13**

To answer before listening – that is folly and shame.

**Ephesians 4:26-27**

"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

**Isaiah 1:17**

Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.

**1 John 3:18**

Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

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**Week 5: James 2:1–13**

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**OPENING ICEBREAKER** (5-10 minutes)

*Have you ever felt "out of place" or underdressed in a situation – maybe at a wedding, a work event, or somewhere you were meeting new people? What was that experience like?*

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**READ TOGETHER** (2-3 minutes)

*James 2:1–13*

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**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS** (40-45 minutes)

1. **James paints a vivid picture: a rich person and a poor person walk into church, and the rich person gets the best seat while the poor person is told**

to stand in the back. Why do you think this scenario still happens today, even if it looks different than James describes?

2. Verse 5 says God has chosen the poor to be rich in faith. When you have less and can't rely on yourself, what changes about your relationship with God? Why might poverty position someone to trust God more deeply?
3. We live in a culture that says "more money = more blessing." How does James flip that assumption on its head, and why is that so hard for us to accept?
4. We form impressions of people quickly – sometimes in seconds. What factors do you think shape those first impressions, and how much do things like appearance, status, or presentation play into that?
5. The "royal law" is to love your neighbor as yourself. James says when you show favoritism, you've broken that law just as much as someone who commits murder or adultery. Why is favoritism such a serious offense to God? What does it reveal about our hearts?
6. James says "mercy triumphs over judgment." What do you think that means practically? When you're tempted to judge someone, what would it look like to choose mercy instead?

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### **TAKING IT HOME** (3-5 minutes)

**This week's question:** Who have I been overlooking, judging, or treating with less honor than they deserve?

Favoritism isn't just about wealth. It's about any time we assign value to people based on what they can do for us, how they look, or what they have. This week, ask God to open your eyes to the people you've been overlooking. Then take one tangible step to show them honor, care, or attention.

### **Prayer for the Week:**

*Father, forgive me for the ways I've shown favoritism – for valuing people based on what they can offer me instead of seeing them the way You do. Help me to love my neighbor as myself, without partiality or judgment. Open my eyes to the people I've been overlooking or dismissing. Teach me to show mercy the way You've shown mercy to me. Thank You for choosing me when I had nothing to offer. Help me treat others with that same radical grace. In Jesus' name, amen.*

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## DIVE DEEPER

*This section is for anyone who wants to explore the original language and connecting Scriptures on their own time.*

### GREEK SPOTLIGHTS

#### Verse 1: "Favoritism"

The word translated "favoritism" is the Greek word *prosōpolēmpsia*, built from *prosōpon* ("face") and *lambanō* ("to take or receive"), so it literally means "receiving face" – judging or treating people based on their outward appearance or status. Put simply: favoritism means giving preferential treatment based on external factors like wealth, appearance, or social standing, rather than seeing people as God sees them.

#### Verse 5: "Rich in faith"

The phrase "rich in faith" uses the Greek word *plousios* ("wealthy, abundant") to describe faith. James isn't saying the poor always have more faith, but that God often chooses those who have nothing materially to be abundantly wealthy in what matters most – faith and inheritance in His kingdom. Put simply: the poor are often "rich" in the things that truly matter because they have to depend on God in ways the self-sufficient don't.

#### Verse 8: "Royal law"

The phrase "royal law" uses the Greek word *basilikos*, meaning "belonging to a king" or "kingly." The command to "love your neighbor as yourself" is called royal because it comes from the King, it governs His kingdom, and it's the supreme law that summarizes all others. Put simply: loving your neighbor is the "king" of all commands—it reigns over how we're supposed to treat others and fulfills God's intent for the law.

#### Verse 12: "Law that gives freedom"

The phrase "law that gives freedom" uses *nomos* ("law") and *eleutheria* ("freedom, liberty"). James calls God's law a law of freedom, not of bondage, because it reveals truth that sets us free from sin and self-deception. Put simply: God's commands aren't meant to restrict or burden us; they free us to live as we were designed, in love toward God and others.

#### Verse 13: "Mercy triumphs"

The word translated "triumphs" is the Greek word *katakauchaōmai*, which means to boast over, to exult over, or to overcome with confidence. It pictures mercy standing victorious over judgment. Put simply: when judgment and mercy meet, mercy wins. It doesn't ignore justice, but it surpasses it, offering grace where condemnation was deserved.

## CROSS REFERENCES

### **Matthew 22:37-40**

Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

### **1 Samuel 16:7**

But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

### **Matthew 25:40**

The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

### **Romans 2:11**

For God does not show favoritism.

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## **Week 6: James 2:14–26**

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### **OPENING ICEBREAKER** *(5-10 minutes)*

*What's something you're good at in theory but struggle with in practice? (Could be cooking, exercise, budgeting, staying organized, etc.)*

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### **READ TOGETHER** *(2-3 minutes)*

*James 2:14–26*

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### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS** *(40-45 minutes)*

1. James opens with a blunt question: "What good is it if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds?" How would you answer that in your own words?
  2. James gives the example of telling someone "go in peace, be warm and fed" without actually helping them. There's often a gap between caring about someone's need and actually meeting it. What makes that gap so hard to cross?
  3. Verse 19 says even demons believe in God and shudder. What's the difference between believing facts about God and having faith in God? How can you tell the difference in your own life?
  4. Abraham and Rahab both took real risks because of their faith – costly, dangerous choices. What does it look like for faith to actually cost you something in today's world? What kinds of risks might God call us to take?
  5. Verse 24 says "a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone." This can sound like it contradicts Paul's teaching that we're saved by faith, not works (Ephesians 2:8-10). How do you make sense of that? What's James actually saying here?
  6. James ends by saying "faith without deeds is dead." If someone followed you around for a week and watched how you actually live, what would they conclude about your faith?
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### **TAKING IT HOME** (3-5 minutes)

**This week's question:** What's one concrete action I need to take this week to prove my faith is alive?

Faith isn't just something you feel or think. It's something you do. This week, look for one opportunity to put your faith into action. Don't just say you believe God cares about the hurting – actually help someone who's hurting. Don't just say you trust God with your finances – actually give generously. Let your faith move from your head to your hands.

### **Prayer for the Week:**

*Father, convict me of dead faith. Show me where I've been all talk and no action, where I've claimed to believe You but haven't let that belief change how I live. Give me eyes to see the needs around me and the courage to actually do something about them. Help me understand that You saved me by grace through faith, but that real faith always produces real change. Make my faith alive, active, costly, and undeniable. In Jesus' name, amen.*

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## DIVE DEEPER

*This section is for anyone who wants to explore the original language and connecting Scriptures on their own time.*

## GREEK SPOTLIGHTS

### **Verse 14: "Deeds" (or "works")**

The word translated "deeds" or "works" is the Greek word *ergon*, meaning action, activity, or accomplishment – something actually done, not just thought about or intended. Put simply: "deeds" are the tangible, observable actions that flow from genuine faith; they're the proof that faith is real and alive.

### **Verse 17: "Dead"**

The word translated "dead" is the Greek word *nekros*, meaning lifeless, without breath, inactive. James uses this strong word to describe faith that produces no action. It's not weak or sleeping, it's actually dead. Put simply: faith without works isn't just ineffective or incomplete; it's spiritually lifeless, like a corpse that can't do anything.

### **Verse 22: "Made complete"**

The word translated "made complete" is the Greek word *teleioō*, which means to bring to an end, to accomplish, to fulfill, or to perfect. It's related to *teleios* ("perfect/mature") from chapter 1. Put simply: works don't add to or earn faith, but they "complete" it by bringing it to its intended goal, making it fully realized and mature, not just theoretical.

### **Verse 23: "Credited"**

The word translated "credited" is the Greek word *logizomai*, an accounting term meaning to reckon, count, or impute something to someone's account. Paul uses this same word in Romans to describe how God credits righteousness to us by faith. Put simply: Abraham's faith was "credited" to him as righteousness. God counted him as righteous not because he earned it, but because he believed and his belief produced obedient action.

### **Verse 26: "Useless"**

The word translated "useless" (some versions say "barren") is the Greek word *argos*, built from *a-* ("without") and *ergon* ("work"), so it literally means "workless" or "idle." It describes something that produces nothing. Put simply: faith without deeds is "useless" – not just weak, but completely unproductive, incapable of accomplishing anything spiritual.

## CROSS REFERENCES

### **Ephesians 2:8-10**

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

### **1 John 3:17-18**

If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

### **Hebrews 11:8, 17**

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going... By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son.

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## **Week 7: James 3:1–12**

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### **OPENING ICEBREAKER** (5-10 minutes)

*Think of a compliment or encouragement someone gave you years ago that you still remember. Why did those particular words stick?*

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### **READ TOGETHER** (2-3 minutes)

*James 3:1–12*

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### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS** (40-45 minutes)

1. **James opens with a warning: "Not many of you should become teachers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." Why do you think teachers and leaders are held to a higher standard when it comes to their words?**

2. James uses three powerful images: a bit in a horse's mouth, a ship's rudder, and a tiny spark starting a forest fire. What's the point he's making with all three? Why is the tongue so small but so powerful?
  3. James says the tongue sets "the whole course of one's life on fire." That's dramatic language. Why do you think words have that kind of lasting power?
  4. We praise God with the same mouth we use to gossip, complain, or criticize others. James says "this should not be." Why do you think it's so hard to see the connection between how we talk about God and how we talk about people who are made in His image?
  5. Verse 8 is sobering: "No human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison." If we can't control our tongues on our own, what hope do we have? How does God help us with something we can't fix ourselves?
  6. James asks if a spring can produce both fresh water and salt water, or if a fig tree can bear olives. The answer is obviously no. So what does it say about our hearts when our mouths produce both blessing and cursing? What needs to change at the source?
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### **TAKING IT HOME** (3-5 minutes)

**This week's question:** What do my words this week reveal about the condition of my heart?

Your tongue reveals what's inside you. This week, pay attention to what comes out of your mouth – not just the big, obvious things, but the small comments, the sarcasm, the complaints, the gossip. Ask God to show you what your words say about your heart, and invite Him to change you from the inside out.

### **Prayer for the Week:**

*Father, I confess that I can't control my tongue on my own. Too many times I've said things I regret – things that hurt others, things that contradict the praise I offer You. Forgive me for the ways my words have corrupted my relationships and set fires I can't put out. Change my heart so that what flows out of my mouth is life, not death. Set a guard over my lips. Help me speak words that build up, encourage, and honor You. Tame my tongue in ways I can't do myself. In Jesus' name, amen.*

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## DIVE DEEPER

*This section is for anyone who wants to explore the original language and connecting Scriptures on their own time.*

## GREEK SPOTLIGHTS

### Verse 2: "Stumble"

The word translated "stumble" is the Greek word *ptaiō*, meaning to trip, fall, or make a mistake. It pictures someone losing their footing and falling. Put simply: we all "stumble" or mess up in many ways, but James says if you can control your tongue, you can control your whole body. Your words are the hardest thing to get right.

### Verse 6: "Corrupts"

The word translated "corrupts" is the Greek word *spiloō*, meaning to stain, defile, or pollute. It's the same root used for a spot or blemish on clothing. Put simply: the tongue "corrupts" the whole body by staining or defiling it. What you say pollutes not just your words but your whole person and your relationships.

### Verse 8: "Restless"

The word translated "restless" is the Greek word *akatastatos* (the same word used in James 1:8 for "unstable"). It means unable to be settled, constantly shifting, never at rest. Put simply: the tongue is "restless." It's never quiet, never still, always moving toward the next words, and without God's help, it's always ready to do damage.

### Verse 9: "Curse"

The word translated "curse" is the Greek word *kataraoimai*, built from *kata* ("down") and *ara* ("a prayer or wish"), so it means to call down evil upon someone, to invoke harm against them. Put simply: to "curse" someone is to speak destructive, harmful words over them, wishing evil on people who were made in God's image.

### Verse 11: "Fresh water and salt water"

James uses *glykys* ("sweet, fresh") and *pikros* ("bitter, salty"). A spring can't produce both fresh, drinkable water and bitter, undrinkable salt water – one source produces one kind of output. Put simply: what comes out reveals what's inside; if your mouth produces both blessing and cursing, something is wrong at the source (your heart).

## CROSS REFERENCES

### Matthew 12:34-37

You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell

you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.

**Proverbs 18:21**

The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

**Ephesians 4:29**

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

**Psalms 19:14**

May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

**Proverbs 12:18**

The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

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**Week 8: James 3:13–18**

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**OPENING ICEBREAKER** (5-10 minutes)

*Think of some of the wisest people you know. What makes them wise in your eyes?*

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**READ TOGETHER** (2-3 minutes)

*James 3:13–18*

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**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS** (40-45 minutes)

1. **James says true wisdom is shown by "deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom." What's the connection between wisdom and humility? Why can't you have one without the other?**

2. James lists bitter envy and selfish ambition as marks of worldly wisdom. Why do you think those two things in particular are so toxic? What makes them different from healthy ambition or wanting good things?
  3. James contrasts two types of wisdom: earthly wisdom and godly wisdom. What are the clear markers you can look for to tell which kind of wisdom is driving a decision or action?
  4. Verse 17 lists seven qualities of wisdom from heaven: pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere. Which of these is hardest for you personally? Which one do you need God to grow in you most right now?
  5. James says wisdom from heaven is "submissive" (some translations say "willing to yield" or "open to reason"). Our culture prizes being right, winning arguments, and standing your ground. How does godly wisdom challenge that?
  6. "Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness." What's the difference between being a peacemaker and just being a peacekeeper who avoids conflict? What does it mean to actively sow peace?
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### **TAKING IT HOME** (3-5 minutes)

**This week's question:** Where in my life am I operating out of worldly wisdom (envy, selfish ambition) instead of godly wisdom (humility, peace, mercy)?

Wisdom isn't just knowledge. It's living rightly in relationship with God and others. This week, ask God for His wisdom to replace any envy, selfish ambition, or need to be right that's driving your decisions. Look for one relationship where you can sow peace instead of discord, and one place where you can yield instead of insisting on your own way.

### **Prayer for the Week:**

*Father, I confess that I've often pursued the world's version of wisdom – trying to get ahead, prove I'm right, and protect my own interests. Forgive me for the envy and selfish ambition that have created disorder in my relationships. Give me wisdom from heaven – the kind that's pure, peace-loving, and willing to yield. Help me care more about being loving than being right. Make me a peacemaker who sows righteousness instead of conflict. Show me where I need to humble myself, extend mercy, and choose peace over winning. In Jesus' name, amen.*

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## DIVE DEEPER

*This section is for anyone who wants to explore the original language and connecting Scriptures on their own time.*

### GREEK SPOTLIGHTS

#### **Verse 13: "Humility"**

The word translated "humility" (or "meekness") is the Greek word *prautēs*, meaning gentleness, mildness, or a humble spirit. It's not weakness but strength under control, power that chooses not to dominate. Put simply: true wisdom shows itself through humility – a gentle, teachable spirit that doesn't need to show off or prove itself.

#### **Verse 14: "Selfish ambition"**

The word translated "selfish ambition" is the Greek word *eritheia*, which originally referred to a day laborer working only for wages, but came to mean self-seeking rivalry or pursuing your own agenda at others' expense. Put simply: "selfish ambition" is caring more about advancing yourself than serving others or honoring God. It's the opposite of godly wisdom.

#### **Verse 16: "Disorder"**

The word translated "disorder" is the Greek word *akatastasia*, meaning instability, confusion, or chaos – a lack of order and peace. It's the opposite of God's nature, which brings order and peace. Put simply: where selfish ambition and envy rule, you get disorder. Relationships fall apart, communities fracture, and chaos takes over.

#### **Verse 17: "Submissive" (or "open to reason")**

The word translated "submissive" or "open to reason" is the Greek word *eupeithēs*, built from *eu* ("good/well") and *peithō* ("to persuade"), so it means easily persuaded, compliant, or willing to listen. Put simply: godly wisdom is "submissive" – not stubborn or defensive, but open to correction, willing to yield, and ready to listen when shown a better way.

#### **Verse 17: "Impartial"**

The word translated "impartial" (or "unwavering") is the Greek word *adiakritos*, built from *a-* ("without") and *diakrinō* ("to judge between or discriminate"), so it means without favoritism or prejudice. Put simply: godly wisdom is "impartial." It treats everyone fairly and doesn't play favorites or discriminate based on status, appearance, or personal benefit.

### CROSS REFERENCES

**Proverbs 3:13-18**

Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her; those who hold her fast will be blessed.

**1 Corinthians 3:19**

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness."

**Matthew 5:9**

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

**Philippians 2:3-4**

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

**Colossians 3:12-15**

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

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**Week 9: James 4:1–6**

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**OPENING ICEBREAKER** (5-10 minutes)

*If you could snap your fingers and instantly have one thing – a possession, an achievement, a relationship status, whatever – what would it be?*

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## **READ TOGETHER** (2-3 minutes)

*James 4:1–6*

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## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS** (40-45 minutes)

1. James says our conflicts come from desires battling within us. What are some common unmet desires that fuel arguments – in marriages, friendships, at work? Why do we fight about surface issues instead of naming what we really want?
  2. In verse 2 James uses extreme language – "you kill" – to describe what unfulfilled desires do to us. What's the connection he's making? How do small unmet wants escalate into really destructive behavior?
  3. James says "You do not have because you do not ask God." Why do you think we so often try to get what we want through manipulation, force, or our own effort instead of just asking God? What stops us from bringing our desires to Him first?
  4. Verse 3 says even when we do ask God, we don't receive because we're asking with wrong motives – to spend on our own pleasures. How can you tell the difference between a prayer that's self-centered and one that's God-honoring? What does it look like to ask God for things with the right motives?
  5. James uses strong language: "friendship with the world means enmity against God" and "anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God." What does it mean to be a "friend of the world"? What does that actually look like in your daily life – in how you spend money, what you pursue, what you value?
  6. This section ends with a promise: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." If pride says "I deserve this and I'll get it my way," what does humility say instead?
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## **TAKING IT HOME** (3-5 minutes)

**This week's question:** What do I want right now that's causing conflict in my heart or in my relationships?

Your desires aren't neutral. They drive your behavior, fuel your conflicts, and shape your relationship with God. This week, bring your wants to God honestly. Ask Him to show

you which desires are pulling you away from Him and which ones He wants to fulfill in His way and His timing. Choose humility over demanding your own way.

### **Prayer for the Week:**

*Father, I confess that so many of my conflicts, internal and external, come from wanting things I don't have and demanding my own way. Forgive me for the ways I've tried to get what I want through my own scheming instead of asking You. Forgive me for the times I've asked You with selfish motives, treating You like a vending machine instead of my loving Father. Show me where I've been a friend of the world instead of a friend of Yours. Humble me. Change my desires to align with Yours. Help me trust that You know what I need and that Your timing is perfect. In Jesus' name, amen.*

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### **DIVE DEEPER**

*This section is for anyone who wants to explore the original language and connecting Scriptures on their own time.*

### **GREEK SPOTLIGHTS**

#### **Verse 1: "Desires"**

The word translated "desires" (or "passions") is the Greek word *hēdonē*, from which we get the English word "hedonism." It refers to pleasure, gratification, or lust – the pursuit of what feels good. Put simply: the "desires" that cause fights and quarrels are the pleasures we crave and will do almost anything to get, even at others' expense.

#### **Verse 2: "Covet"**

The word translated "covet" is the Greek word *zēloō*, which can mean to eagerly desire, envy, or burn with jealousy. It's an intense, consuming want for what someone else has. Put simply: to "covet" means to look at what others have with envious longing, and that jealousy drives conflict, bitterness, and destructive behavior.

#### **Verse 3: "Wrong motives"**

The phrase "wrong motives" (or "ask amiss") uses the Greek word *kakōs*, meaning badly, wrongly, or with evil intent. It describes prayers that are self-serving rather than God-honoring. Put simply: having "wrong motives" in prayer means you're asking God to serve your agenda and fuel your selfish pleasures, not to align your heart with His will.

#### **Verse 4: "Friendship with the world"**

The word translated "friendship" is the Greek word *philia*, referring to affection, love, or

devotion. "World" here is *kosmos*, referring not to the planet but to the world system – values, priorities, and pursuits opposed to God. Put simply: "friendship with the world" means loving, pursuing, and devoting yourself to the world's values (money, power, status, pleasure) instead of God's kingdom.

### **Verse 6: "Humble"**

The word translated "humble" is the Greek word *tapeinos*, meaning lowly, modest, or without pretense. It describes someone who doesn't think too highly of themselves and is willing to submit to God. Put simply: the "humble" are those who recognize their need for God, surrender their own agenda, and trust His wisdom over their own desires.

## **CROSS REFERENCES**

### **Matthew 6:24**

No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

### **1 John 2:15-17**

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

### **Mark 8:36**

What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?

### **Philippians 4:6-7**

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

### **Proverbs 16:18**

Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

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## **Week 10: James 4:7–12**

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## **OPENING ICEBREAKER** (5-10 minutes)

*What's one task or chore you've been procrastinating on for way too long? Why do you keep putting it off?*

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## **READ TOGETHER** (2-3 minutes)

*James 4:7–12*

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## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS** (40-45 minutes)

1. **James gives a series of commands starting with "Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." What does it mean to actually submit to God? What does that look like in your daily life, not just as a concept but as a practice?**
  2. **James says resist the devil and he'll run away. That sounds encouraging, but why do so many of us feel defeated by the same temptations over and over? How does submitting to God first change our ability to resist?**
  3. **Verse 8 says "Come near to God and he will come near to you." What are some practical ways you draw near to God? And be honest – what keeps you from drawing near to Him when you need Him most?**
  4. **James commands, "Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded." That's pretty direct. Why do you think James doesn't soften his language here?**
  5. **Verses 9-10 call for mourning, grief, and humility instead of laughter and joy. This seems harsh – doesn't God want us to have joy? What is James actually saying here about recognizing the seriousness of sin?**
  6. **According to verses 11-12, when you judge or criticize someone, you're setting yourself up as judge over the law, not a follower of it. What does James mean by that? How does judging others attempt to put you in God's place?**
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## **TAKING IT HOME** (3-5 minutes)

**This week's question:** What's one area where I need to stop resisting God and submit to Him?

Resistance against the devil starts with submission to God. This week, identify one place where you've been doing things your own way instead of God's way. Confess it, grieve it if you need to, and then take one concrete step toward obedience. Draw near to God through prayer, Scripture, worship, silence. Trust that He will draw near to you.

### **Prayer for the Week:**

*Father, I submit myself to You. Forgive me for the ways I've resisted Your will and tried to live life on my own terms. Give me strength to resist the enemy's lies and temptations. I draw near to You. Cleanse my hands and purify my heart. Show me where I've been double-minded, trying to serve both You and my own desires. Humble me. Help me see my sin the way You see it, with the seriousness it deserves, so I can truly repent and change. Keep me from judging others when I should be examining my own heart. You alone are the Judge and Lawgiver. In Jesus' name, amen.*

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## **DIVE DEEPER**

*This section is for anyone who wants to explore the original language and connecting Scriptures on their own time.*

## **GREEK SPOTLIGHTS**

### **Verse 7: "Submit"**

The word translated "submit" is the Greek word *hypotagē*, built from *hypo* ("under") and *tassō* ("to arrange or order"), so it means to place yourself under authority, to arrange yourself beneath someone. It's a military term for ranking under a commander. Put simply: to "submit" to God means to willingly place yourself under His authority and align your life with His commands, not out of force but out of trust.

### **Verse 7: "Resist"**

The word translated "resist" is the Greek word *anthistēmi*, built from *anti* ("against") and *histēmi* ("to stand"), so it means to stand against, to oppose, or to withstand. Put simply: to "resist" the devil means to actively stand against his schemes and temptations, not passively hoping he'll leave you alone but taking a firm, opposing stance.

### **Verse 8: "Come near"**

The word translated "come near" (or "draw near") is the Greek word *engizō*, meaning to approach or draw close. It's often used in the Old Testament (in Greek translation) for approaching God in worship. Put simply: to "come near" to God means to actively approach Him – through prayer, worship, obedience – moving toward intimacy with Him rather than keeping your distance.

### **Verse 8: "Purify"**

The word translated "purify" is the Greek word *hagnizō*, meaning to cleanse, make pure, or consecrate. It's often used for ceremonial cleansing in the Old Testament. Put simply: to "purify your hearts" means to let God cleanse you from the inside out, removing the mixed motives and divided loyalties that keep you from wholehearted devotion.

### **Verse 11: "Slander" (or "speak against")**

The word translated "slander" or "speak against" is the Greek word *katalaleō*, built from *kata* ("against") and *laleō* ("to speak"), so it means to speak against someone, to criticize or defame them. Put simply: to "slander" your brother or sister means to speak negatively about them, tearing them down with your words. James says when you do that, you're setting yourself up as judge over both them and God's law.

## **CROSS REFERENCES**

### **Ephesians 6:10-13**

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

### **Psalms 51:10**

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

### **2 Chronicles 7:14**

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

### **Romans 14:4**

Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

### **Matthew 7:1-5**

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank

out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

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## **Week 11: James 4:13–17**

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### **OPENING ICEBREAKER** (5-10 minutes)

*Are you a planner or more of a "go with the flow" person? What's one area of your life where you like to have everything planned out?*

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### **READ TOGETHER** (2-3 minutes)

*James 4:13–17*

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### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS** (40-45 minutes)

1. **James criticizes people who confidently plan their future business ventures without acknowledging God. So what's the difference between wise planning and presumptuous planning? When does planning cross the line?**
2. **James says life is brief and uncertain – "a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." Does thinking about that make you want to hold your plans tighter or hold them more loosely?**
3. **"If the Lord wills" sounds like something Christians are supposed to say, but how often do we actually mean it? What's the difference between saying it out of habit and genuinely holding your plans with open hands before God?**
4. **If you're genuinely holding your plans with open hands before God, how do you respond when He closes a door you wanted to walk through? What does surrender look like in that moment?**

5. **Why do you think James ends this section by talking about the sin of knowing what to do but not doing it? What's the connection between planning with humility and actually obeying what God has already told you?**
  6. **What's harder to deal with: sins of commission (things you do wrong) or sins of omission (things you don't do that you should)?**
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### **TAKING IT HOME** (3-5 minutes)

**This week's question:** What's one thing I know I should do that I've been avoiding, and what's my first step toward obedience?

You don't control tomorrow. Your life is brief, and your plans are uncertain. But you do control today, and you do know what God has already told you to do. This week, stop waiting for the perfect time or the perfect circumstances. Take one step of obedience in something you've been putting off. Trust God with the outcome and acknowledge His will in your plans.

### **Prayer for the Week:**

*Father, forgive me for living as if I'm in control – for making plans without considering Your will, and for boasting about what I'll accomplish as if my life is guaranteed. Thank You for the reminder that my life is brief and my plans are uncertain. Help me hold my plans loosely and hold You tightly. Show me where I've been putting off obedience – where I know what You want me to do but I've been waiting, hesitating, or ignoring Your voice. Give me the courage to act today on what You've already told me. If it is Your will, I will live and do what You've called me to do. In Jesus' name, amen.*

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### **DIVE DEEPER**

*This section is for anyone who wants to explore the original language and connecting Scriptures on their own time.*

### **GREEK SPOTLIGHTS**

#### **Verse 13: "Boast"**

The word translated "boast" (in verse 16 context) is the Greek word *kauchaomai*, meaning to glory in, take pride in, or brag about something. It can be positive (boasting in the Lord) or negative (boasting in yourself). Put simply: to "boast" about your plans

means to speak confidently about what you'll accomplish, as if you're in control and the outcome is guaranteed.

**Verse 14: "Mist" (or "vapor")**

The word translated "mist" or "vapor" is the Greek word *atmis*, which refers to smoke, steam, or mist – something visible but temporary and impossible to hold onto. Put simply: life is like "mist." It appears briefly and then disappears; you can see it but you can't control it or make it last.

**Verse 15: "Will" (as in "the Lord's will")**

The word translated "will" is the Greek word *thelō*, meaning to wish, desire, or determine. It refers to God's sovereign choice and plan. Put simply: "the Lord's will" is His sovereign purpose and plan – what He chooses and desires to happen, which may or may not align with our own plans.

**Verse 16: "Arrogant"**

The word translated "arrogant" (or "proud boasting") is the Greek word *alazoneia*, meaning pretentious pride, bragging, or false confidence in yourself. It describes someone who acts as if they're more powerful or secure than they actually are. Put simply: "arrogant" boasting is living with false confidence in your own power and plans, forgetting how fragile and dependent you really are.

**Verse 17: "Sin"**

The word translated "sin" is the Greek word *hamartia*, which literally means "to miss the mark" – like an archer missing the target. It refers to falling short of God's standard. Put simply: "sin" isn't just doing wrong things; it's also failing to do the right things you know you should do – it's a sin of omission, not just commission.

**CROSS REFERENCES**

**Proverbs 27:1**

Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring.

**Proverbs 16:9**

In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps.

**Proverbs 19:21**

Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.

**Luke 12:16-21**

And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and

there I will store my surplus grain. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God."

**Matthew 6:34**

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

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**Week 12: James 5:1–12**

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**OPENING ICEBREAKER** (5-10 minutes)

*What's the longest you've ever had to wait for something you really wanted? How did the waiting affect you?*

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**READ TOGETHER** (2-3 minutes)

*James 5:1–12*

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**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS** (40-45 minutes)

1. **James opens with a harsh warning to the rich: "Weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you." This isn't just about having money. It's about how the rich in this passage got their wealth and what they did with it. What specifically does James condemn them for? How does that challenge the way we think about wealth and success?**
2. **Verse 4 says the wages that were withheld from workers are crying out to God, and He hears them. What does it tell you about God's character that He cares this deeply about workers being paid fairly? How should that**

shape the way we respond when we see someone – or ourselves – being treated unfairly?

3. Starting in verse 7, James shifts from warning the rich to encouraging believers to "be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near." Why is patience so hard when you're suffering or being treated unfairly? What helps you keep waiting and trusting when you don't see justice or relief?
4. James uses the example of a farmer who waits for rain and harvest. The farmer can't control the weather or speed up the process. He just has to wait and trust. What's something in your life right now where you're in the "waiting" season? How does the farmer's example speak to your situation?
5. Verse 10 points to the prophets as examples of patience in suffering. The prophets were often rejected, ignored, and persecuted for speaking God's truth. When you're suffering for doing the right thing – for your faith, your integrity, your obedience – how do you keep going? What makes it worth it?
6. James ends by saying "do not swear – not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple 'Yes' or 'No.'" Why is it so powerful when someone's word is their bond – when their yes means yes and their no means no? What does it take to become that kind of person?

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### **TAKING IT HOME** (3-5 minutes)

**This week's question:** Where do I need to practice patience and trust God's timing instead of trying to force or control the outcome?

Patience isn't passive. It's active trust while you wait. This week, identify one area where you're growing impatient – with God's timing, with a relationship, with a situation that won't change fast enough. Instead of pushing, manipulating, or giving up, practice standing firm and trusting that God sees, God hears, and God is coming. Let your words be honest and simple, and let your life be a testimony of endurance.

### **Prayer for the Week:**

*Father, help me be patient when everything in me wants to rush ahead or give up. Teach me to wait like a farmer waits – doing my part, trusting Your timing, and believing You will bring the harvest. Thank You that You hear the cries of those who are hurting and oppressed. Help me see injustice the way You see it and respond with compassion and action. Strengthen me to stand firm when I'm suffering for doing what's right. Keep me from being double-tongued or making promises I won't keep. Let my yes be yes and*

*my no be no. I trust that You are coming, and that makes the waiting worth it. In Jesus' name, amen.*

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## **DIVE DEEPER**

*This section is for anyone who wants to explore the original language and connecting Scriptures on their own time.*

## **GREEK SPOTLIGHTS**

### **Verse 4: "Cries out"**

The word translated "cries out" is the Greek word *krazō*, meaning to cry out loudly, shout, or scream – often used for desperate or urgent cries for help. Put simply: the unpaid wages themselves are pictured as "crying out" to God in protest. The injustice is so severe that even the money screams for justice on behalf of the workers.

### **Verse 7: "Patient"**

The word translated "patient" is the Greek word *makrothymēō*, built from *makros* ("long") and *thymos* ("passion/temper"), so it literally means "long-tempered," the opposite of short-tempered. Put simply: to be "patient" means to be long-suffering, to endure difficult circumstances without losing your temper or giving up, trusting God's timing even when the wait is hard.

### **Verse 8: "Stand firm"**

The word translated "stand firm" is the Greek word *stērizō*, meaning to establish, strengthen, or make stable – to set something firmly in place so it won't be moved. Put simply: to "stand firm" means to be spiritually strengthened and rooted so you don't waver or fall away when trials come and the wait feels too long.

### **Verse 11: "Persevere" (or "endure")**

The word translated "persevere" or "endure" is the Greek word *hypomonē* (the same word from James 1:3-4), meaning to remain under pressure, to stay steadfast. Put simply: to "persevere" means to keep going under the weight without quitting – and James says we bless (consider fortunate) those who have this kind of endurance.

### **Verse 11: "Compassionate and merciful"**

The words translated "compassionate" (*polysplagchnos* – literally "full of compassion/tender mercy") and "merciful" (*oiktirmōn* – showing pity or mercy) describe God's character. Put simply: the Lord is "compassionate and merciful." He's not cold or distant when you suffer; He feels deeply for you and extends mercy, making your perseverance worth it because of who He is.

## **CROSS REFERENCES**

### **Proverbs 14:31**

Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.

### **Amos 5:11-12**

You levy a straw tax on the poor and impose a tax on their grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. There are those who oppress the innocent and take bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts.

### **Hebrews 10:35-37**

So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For, "In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay."

### **Romans 12:12**

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

### **2 Peter 3:8-9**

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

### **Matthew 5:33-37**

Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.' But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

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## **Week 13: James 5:13–20**

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## **OPENING ICEBREAKER** (5-10 minutes)

*When you're going through something hard, who's the first person you reach out to?  
Why that person?*

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## **READ TOGETHER** (2-3 minutes)

*James 5:13–20*

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## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS** (40-45 minutes)

1. **James gives practical instructions for different situations: if you're in trouble, pray; if you're happy, sing; if you're sick, call the elders. Why do you think prayer is the answer for all of these circumstances? What does that say about the kind of relationship God wants with us?**
  2. **Verse 15 promises that "the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well." This is a passage that raises a lot of questions because we've all prayed for healing that didn't come. How do you make sense of this promise when you've seen faithful prayers go "unanswered"? What does it mean to pray "in faith" when the outcome is uncertain?**
  3. **James says "confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." Why is confessing sins to other people so hard? What keeps us from being that honest and vulnerable with each other?**
  4. **Verse 16 says "the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective," and then uses Elijah as an example – someone who prayed and it stopped raining, then prayed again and it rained. But then James says Elijah was "a human being, even as we are." Why is that detail important?**
  5. **The book ends with instructions about bringing back someone who has wandered from the truth. Why do you think James closes his whole letter with this? What does it say about the kind of community God wants us to be – for each other, not just for ourselves?**
  6. **What does it look like to actually help someone turn back to God without being judgmental or self-righteous? How do you do that in a way that's loving and not condemning?**
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## **TAKING IT HOME** (3-5 minutes)

**This week's question:** Who in my life needs me to pray for them, confess to them, or reach out to them in their wandering?

James ends his letter the way he started it – calling us to live out our faith in real, tangible ways. Prayer isn't just private, it's communal. Confession isn't just vertical, it's horizontal. Faith isn't just personal, it involves caring for each other's souls. This week, don't isolate yourself. Reach out. Pray with someone. Confess to someone. And if you know someone who's drifting from God, pursue them with love.

### **Prayer for the Week:**

*Father, teach me to pray – not just when I'm desperate, but in every season. When I'm suffering, help me turn to You. When I'm joyful, help me worship You. When I'm sick, give me the humility to ask for help. Forgive me for hiding my sins instead of confessing them to trusted people who can pray for me. Remind me that I don't have to be a spiritual giant to pray powerfully. You hear me because of who You are, not because of who I am. Show me who's wandering from You, and give me the courage and wisdom to pursue them with love. Thank You for this community and for Your word that shapes us. In Jesus' name, amen.*

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## **DIVE DEEPER**

*This section is for anyone who wants to explore the original language and connecting Scriptures on their own time.*

### **GREEK SPOTLIGHTS**

#### **Verse 13: "In trouble"**

The word translated "in trouble" is the Greek word *kakopatheo*, built from *kakos* ("bad/evil") and *pascho* ("to suffer"), so it means to suffer hardship or undergo difficulty. Put simply: "in trouble" means experiencing any kind of suffering, hardship, or distress – and the first response should be prayer.

#### **Verse 15: "Prayer offered in faith"**

The phrase "prayer offered in faith" uses *euche* ("prayer, vow") and *pistis* ("faith, trust, confidence"). It describes prayer that trusts God's character and power, even when the outcome is uncertain. Put simply: praying "in faith" means bringing your requests to God with confidence in His goodness and power, trusting Him with the results even when you don't understand them.

**Verse 16: "Confess"**

The word translated "confess" is the Greek word *exomologeō*, built from *ex* ("out") and *homologeō* ("to agree/acknowledge"), so it means to openly acknowledge or admit something. Put simply: to "confess" your sins means to bring them out into the open with trusted believers, agreeing with God that they're wrong and receiving prayer and support toward healing.

**Verse 16: "Powerful and effective"**

The phrase "powerful and effective" uses *ischyo* ("to have strength/power") and *energeo* ("to be at work/active"), from which we get the word "energy." Put simply: prayer is both "powerful" (it has real strength and impact) and "effective" (it actively accomplishes things). It's not empty religious talk but a force that changes reality.

**Verse 19: "Wanders"**

The word translated "wanders" is the Greek word *planaō*, meaning to go astray, be led off course, or deceive. It's where we get the word "planet" (wandering star). Put simply: to "wander" from the truth means to drift off the path, to be led astray from God's word and His way, often gradually and without realizing how far you've gone.

**CROSS REFERENCES****1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

**Matthew 18:19-20**

Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.

**1 Kings 18:41-45**

And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain." So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees. "Go and look toward the sea," he told his servant. And he went up and looked. "There is nothing there," he said. Seven times Elijah said, "Go back." The seventh time the servant reported, "A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea." So Elijah said, "Go and tell Ahab, 'Hitch up your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.'" Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain started falling and Ahab rode off to Jezreel.

**Galatians 6:1-2**

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should

restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

**Jude 1:22-23**

Be merciful to those who doubt; save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear – hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

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**Week 14: Conclusion and Reflection**

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**OPENING REFLECTION** (10-15 minutes)

*Think back over the last 13 weeks. What's one moment, verse, or conversation from this study that has stuck with you the most?*

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**LOOKING BACK TOGETHER** (25-30 minutes)

Rather than discussing new content, use this time to reflect on what God has been teaching you through the book of James. Here are some questions to guide your conversation:

1. **When we started, we talked about how James is the "Proverbs of the New Testament" – practical, challenging, and real. Has that been your experience? What surprised you most about this book?**
2. **James doesn't let us separate faith from works, belief from behavior. Where has God challenged you the most in this study to stop just hearing His word and start doing it?**
3. **James addresses so many areas of life: trials, wealth and poverty, our words, favoritism, patience, prayer. Which topic hit you the hardest? Which one are you still wrestling with?**
4. **One of James's big themes is that real faith shows up in how we treat people – especially the vulnerable, the poor, the overlooked. How has this study changed the way you see or interact with people around you?**
5. **James talks a lot about wisdom – the difference between worldly wisdom (selfish ambition, envy) and godly wisdom (peace-loving, humble,**

merciful). Where do you see yourself growing in godly wisdom? Where do you still need God's help?

6. James emphasizes that faith isn't just personal. It's lived out in community. We confess to each other, pray for each other, restore each other, care for each other. How has this study shaped your view of what Christian community should look like?
  7. Looking ahead: what's one specific change you want to make in your life because of what you've learned in James? What's one area where you want to keep growing?
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### **CLOSING PRAYER TIME** (10-15 minutes)

Take time to pray for each other. You might:

- Thank God for what He's taught you through this study
  - Confess areas where you've been hearers but not doers
  - Ask God for strength to live out what you've learned
  - Pray for each other's specific struggles and growth areas
  - Commit to continuing to walk in faith that produces real change
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### **MOVING FORWARD**

*Consider how your group will continue to encourage one another in living out James's message. Will you keep meeting? Start a new study? Check in with each other about the commitments you've made? Don't let this study end here – James wouldn't want that. He'd want you to keep doing what God's word says.*

#### **Final Prayer:**

*Father, thank You for these 14 weeks together. Thank You for Your word that doesn't let us stay comfortable or complacent. Thank You for the book of James – for its honesty, its challenge, and its call to authentic faith. We confess that we've been quick to hear but slow to do. Forgive us. Change us. Help us to be people whose faith is alive – active, risky, and real. Make us quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger. Help us care for the vulnerable, control our tongues, resist favoritism, and pursue Your wisdom. Teach us to persevere under trial, to draw near to You, and to live with eternity in mind. Don't let us forget what we've learned. Keep working in us until we're mature and complete, lacking nothing. In Jesus' name, amen.*

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## KEY VERSES TO REMEMBER FROM JAMES

- James 1:22 – "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."
- James 1:27 – "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."
- James 2:17 – "Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."
- James 3:5-6 – "The tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark."
- James 4:7-8 – "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."
- James 4:17 – "If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them."
- James 5:16 – "The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective."