

The Book of James

SERIES OVERVIEW:

One of the most frequent, and often fair, criticisms of religious people is that they don't walk the talk. Essentially, the world watches as those that claim to believe in God live a life that is wildly inconsistent with their belief system. They see a gap between what people say they believe and how they truly behave. The implications of such an inconsistent application are that the world calls those people frauds and dismisses God because people that claim to follow Him seem to be so bad at it.

Over the next few weeks, we're going to do a deep dive into the book of James. We'll take it verse by verse and then ask some questions like, "What does this teach us about Jesus? And how should it change the way we live?"

Remember: The questions provided are designed to spark conversation...don't feel you have to get through all of them...pick the ones that will best fit your group.

WEEK 1 – JAMES 1

Read James chapter 1

- When it comes to religious people, the world sees a gap between what a person says he or she believes and how he or she truly behaves. How does what you believe affect how you behave? What does it mean to "walk the talk"?
- James begins his letter with a command to "count it all joy" when you face trials. Why does this seem unnatural and counterintuitive?
- Comfortable circumstances versus continued progress—one of these is the guiding principle of your life. Which one? Has it changed since you gave your life to Christ? Since joining this Life Group?
- Trials deepen our dependence on God's wisdom. Why is it so difficult to ask for God's wisdom without doubting? Have you ever approached God's wisdom as a backup plan? What were the results?
- Wisdom always comes with scars. What does this mean to you? How could this scare people away from the process of wisdom and cause them to look for shortcuts?
- It's possible to be knowledgeable about God's Word but never nourished by it. What is the difference? How can you tell when you've been nourished by the Word rather than just acquiring knowledge about it?

Next Steps: What is one thing that you needed to hear from today? How will you respond?

WEEK 2 – JAMES 2

Read James chapter 2

- What are some ways that we assign value to the people around us? How does our culture influence that process? How does the gospel influence it?
- In James 2:5-9, what does James mean when he says God has chosen the poor to be rich in faith and inherit the Kingdom of God? Who is he referring to? What are the dangers of forgetting how poor you really are by comparing yourself to others?
- The minute we begin sending people signals that they aren't welcome, valued, and loved is the minute our church begins to die, and probably should. What can you do to make sure everyone feels welcome, valued, and loved at Riverside, in your home, at work, school, and in your community?
- What are the consequences of claiming you have faith in God but not showing it by your actions?
- Have you become an obstacle to anyone else seeing and receiving what God has given you through Jesus because of dead and useless faith?

Next Steps: What is one thing that you needed to hear from today? How will you respond?

WEEK 3 – JAMES CHAPTER 3

Read James chapter 3

- What is the most encouraging thing someone has said to you lately? What effect did those words have on you? When have you witnessed the destructive power of words? What effect did those words have?
- Read James 3:8. James says we can control many things, but no one can tame the tongue. Once words leave our mouths, they are uncontrollable and uncontainable. Why is it so difficult to control our tongues? If we can't do it, how can our tongues be controlled? How would acknowledging that all people are created in the image of God change the way you spoke to them?
- Which of the three metaphors that James used to describe the tongue speaks to you the most and why? A horse's bit, a ship's rudder, or a tiny spark in a forest?
- "You can't control your tongue if you've lost control of your heart." Read Matthew 12:33-37. What correlation does this passage draw between the heart and the tongue? How are your words one of the greatest metrics for your relationship with Jesus?

Next Steps: What is one thing that you needed to hear from today? How will you respond?

WEEK 4 – JAMES CHAPTER 4

Read James chapter 4

- Envy often reveals what we believe to be of ultimate value in life. What do you get really excited about, and why do you get excited about it? Is your envy closely related to what you are most passionate about?
- James compared selfishness and envy to adultery, leading us to ask the question, “Who or what will you ultimately be faithful to?” Have you ever viewed sin as putting God in second place? How should we deal with our sin in light of this? How should the idea of a jealous God—a God who pursues you and wants to be first in your life—transform your relationship to God and to the world?
- James 4:6 says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” When you recognize what God has saved you from, the result is humility. When was the last time when you thought deeply about what God has saved you from? What are some practices you have in place to reflect on Christ that keep you humble?
- Read James 4:11-12. Other people don’t care what you believe if they can’t see what you believe. How would our interactions with other people look different if we viewed them as people to be loved instead of people to be judged? Is there a specific person in your life whom you need to treat this way?
- James 4:14 compares our lives to a mist—here one-second and gone the next. Does that give you fear or hope? How does assuming that we have a tomorrow change how we live today?
- Read James 4:17. There are two different kinds of sin: sin of commission and sin of omission. What’s the difference? Which type are you more familiar with and more aware of in your life?
- The assumption of tomorrow eliminates urgency—someday is a code word for never. What are you putting off? What is your “someday”? What do you need to do or who do you need to talk to today?

Next Steps: What is one thing that you needed to hear from today? How will you respond?

WEEK 5 – JAMES 5

Read James chapter 5

- James directs his attention to the rich in chapter five. Do you consider yourself to be rich? Now consider these statistics: if you make \$14k per year, you are in the top 10% of the wealthiest people in the world. If you make \$25k per year, you are in the top 2% of the richest people in the world. Does that change your perspective?
- Money is not a bad thing, but it can be dangerous. Does your money, or your lack of money, dominate your life? Share how the love of money and possessions has over-promised and undelivered.
- Generosity is one of the most sensitive and difficult areas of life in which we lack urgency. Why do you think that is? Why is it easier to be generous in other areas of life than it is with your money?
- James' instruction for Christians suffering in an imperfect world is, "be patient." This sounds simple and easy to do, but why is it so difficult to practice? Do you consider yourself a patient person? Has impatience ever improved your situation or circumstances?
- James uses an illustration of a farmer patiently waiting on the rain to grow his crops to remind us that we have limited control. How do you remain patient when there are things that are out of your control? Why is it important to continue to do the things we do have control over while we are waiting on God?
- After being patient, James' second instruction is to pray. Is prayer your first response when you come against suffering? Why or why not?

- Read James 5:17-18. Do you feel like your prayers are as powerful as Elijah's? Jake said that Elijah's prayer lined up with God's plan, and that our prayers are about our plans. Is this true and relevant for your life? What are some barriers that you run into in your prayer life?

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