

The Epistle of James
Responding to Grace
Discussion Guide

by George Robertson
with Mary Beth McGreevy

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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Almost all good Bible studies have some combination of study questions and commentary. Often the authors will comment on the passage to be read and then ask questions based on the passage and their comments. But ours is different.

This Bible study is designed so that the student's first steps into a passage of Scripture are taken by themselves with the help of the Holy Spirit. That is why the first thing you will find is not commentary but questions that are designed to help the students to read, search, discover, think about, and apply the great truths of the Scriptures for themselves before they are influenced by notes, lecture, or commentary from others.

After immersing themselves in the passage, pondering it, and answering what questions they can, we then suggest that the students participate in a group discussion and/or lecture. Then, after that, in preparation for the next meeting the notes for the following lesson should be read to reinforce, enhance, and clarify learning. After the notes are read, the students will have studied the passage at least three or four times (by themselves, in a group, hearing a lecture, and reading the notes with the passage). Then, following the notes, the questions in that lesson begin with one or two review questions to identify the "take-aways" from the study on that passage. Those are followed by the questions on the new passage of Scripture to be studied for the next class period or small group discussion.

George Robertson and I developed our studies while teaching the men's and women's Bible studies, respectively, at The Covenant Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, Missouri. We had both morning (women's) and evening (men's and women's) classes. Our format was fairly simple. The morning schedule looked like this:

9:30–10:05 a.m.	Small group discussion of lesson questions led by trained group leader
10:05–10:20 a.m.	Small group sharing of prayer requests and praying together
10:20–10:30 a.m.	Travel time to assembly of all groups together
10:30–11:00 a.m.	Lecture over the passage just discussed

The evening schedule was basically the same but began at 6:30 p.m.

When participants registered for the study, they were given the Introductory Questions to answer in preparation for the first class. (If you are receiving the study in a one-book, bound form, then simply give instructions to complete the Introductory Questions before the first class session.) Those questions were brought to class and discussed in the first small group discussion session before the first lecture. Then, after class, the students read Lesson One and answered the questions in Lesson One in preparation for the discussion in the second class session. That is the pattern on which the materials were designed.

We have heard of other groups that have utilized our studies using a similar schedule but with many variations. I have been using one of our studies with a small group of women with a very relaxed format, leading them through their answers of the questions and then giving them a teaching wrap-up

to explain, summarize and apply the passage at the end of our time together. We follow that with a time of prayer for each other.

The material may also be used for individual study. We do recommend, however, that you grapple with the Bible passage and the study questions and try to answer as many as you can before you go to commentaries, other study helps, or the next lesson's notes. We tend to learn best what we dig out for ourselves. If you miss the mark on a question, count that as an opportunity for learning; we tend to learn best from our mistakes!

We pray that this study will help you know God in Jesus Christ through the study of his Word.

Mary Beth McGreevy
St. Louis, Missouri

Introductory Questions

James

1. Please give your name, and how you happened to come to this study.

Everyone in the group is to answer this question.

2. Please tell the group what three activities take up most of your time at this point in your life.

This get-acquainted question also should be answered by everyone.

3. Read through the entire book of James. What questions come to your mind as you read? Jot them down as you skim the chapters.

Get ideas from several different people.

4. What are James' main topics or concerns in his epistle? Jot these down as you skim the chapters, also.

Get ideas from several different people.

5. Who is James? How does he identify himself in James 1:1?

A servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

6. What else do you learn about this James in Acts 12:17; 15:1–21; and 21:17–19?

Acts 12:17—a leader of the church in Jerusalem. Acts 15:13—the leader of the Council at Jerusalem, an elder of the church. Acts 21:17–19—Paul, Luke and their entourage reported to James and the elders of the church at Jerusalem. 1 Corinthians 15:7—Jesus appeared to James after the resurrection. Galatians 1:19—Paul saw James, the Lord's brother, in Jerusalem.

7. From James 1:1; 2:1; and 5:7, to whom is the letter addressed?

James 1:1—to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations. James 2:1—"my brothers," believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. James 5:7—"brothers," i.e., believers.

8. What are your expectations of this study?

Personal question; ask for volunteers.

9. How will you order your schedule to commit the time necessary for your personal study so that you may receive the greatest benefit from it?

Again, a personal question, but try to get several ideas and promote a commitment to doing the study together.

James—Lesson 1

Read the lesson notes and James 1:1–18.

1. What did you find interesting in the notes?

Answers may vary.

2. What are you expecting from God in your study of James?

Answers may vary.

3. Read James 1:2–3 with 1 Peter 1:6–7 and Romans 5:3–4. What is the progression of thought here?

There is a progression of thought here from trials to testing of faith to endurance. In 1 Peter 1:6–7 various trials prove faith which will receive praise and glory at the revelation of Christ. Paul's list is in Romans 5:3–4, in which suffering produces endurance which produces character which produces hope which will not be disappointed.

4. Why should we be joyful when we encounter trials?

In one sense, the reality of our faith is proven in trials when we continue to cling to Christ and are enabled to lift our eyes above the situation to rest in his eternal purposes. In another sense Peter teaches that our experience of trials further confirms that our lives are united to Christ—if he suffered, we will suffer.

5. How has God used trials in your life to grow you in perseverance and maturity?

Answers may vary.

6. James 1:4–8. How do we prevent perseverance from finishing its work?

Answers may vary. For example, perhaps we can think of many of our friends who have suffered much, but who, instead of growing in their love for Christ and other, have grown bitter and hard.

7. From these verses, what can we do to allow perseverance to continue its work?

James tells us to ask God for wisdom with the assurance that he is one who gives generously and without “hesitation,” that is, without the same hesitation that we have in asking.

8. What does it mean that we “must believe and not doubt” when we pray?

This strong admonition that we must believe and not doubt when we pray must cause us to shape our requests carefully. We must pray for what God wants, after the manner of the Savior’s prayer: “If it be your will.”

9. James 1:9–11. How do these verses relate to James 1:2–8?

The brothers mentioned are facing the trials of humble circumstances and the trials that come with riches.

10. How does a “brother in humble circumstances” have a high position?

James is telling these Christians that they must remember that though they may be poor and helpless in this world, they have a high position in Christ. They may be getting run over in this world, but this world is not all there is. God tells them to focus on what is real: they have a high position in Christ and will reign with him someday. James 1:12–15. What is the difference between a trial and a temptation?

11. James 1:12–15. What is the difference between a trial and a temptation?

Our enemies tempt us to do evil by sinning. God tests us to prove our faith. James urges us to remember that we are being tested, but that test is not to see if we qualify for salvation. James uses Job as an illustration in 5:11. Job was tested not to qualify but to prove to God’s cosmic Accuser the reality of his faith. Among other reasons, we are tested in the same ways and suffer the same difficulties as the rest of the world in order that God might prove to all in heaven and earth that his people will praise him regardless.

12. What blessings are promised to the one who perseveres under trial?

The crown of life is promised to those who stand the test.

13. What is the root of sin? What is its fruit?

Root: our own evil desires drag us away and entice us. Fruit: sin and death.

14. James 1:16–18. What proof of God’s faithfulness can be found in these verses?

James says that every good gift that we receive comes from God. But he specifically identifies God as the “Father of the heavenly lights,” that is, the God who has created the planets. Furthermore, he says that this one does not “change like shifting shadows,” like the sun that casts brighter or lesser light on the earth relative to where it is in the sky. In other words, he is the creator and sustainer of the planets, not their equal. And, too, he converted us that we might be the crowning work of his creation.

James—Lesson 2

Read the lesson notes and James 1:19–27.

1. What was encouraging to you in the notes on 1:2–18?

Answers may vary.

2. James 1:19–21. How would you apply these verses to the context of corporate worship?

The quick listening prescribed here could be in the context of worship, so that the child of God should listen to biblical teaching before expressing his own views. It could also be metaphorical in the sense that we must hasten to hear God speak to us in his Word and instruct us, rather than presuming to know all we need to know and rushing off to our own conclusions.

3. How could anger hinder you from receiving God’s Word?

None of us enjoys having his sin confronted biblically, not by a preacher, or a friend, or by merely reading the Word. But when we respond with anger, we defend ourselves and do not receive God’s gift to us, namely, to repent of harmful and unhelpful things.

4. What is the relationship to sin in the one in whom the Word is implanted?

Those sins that plagued us before we were saved will generally continue to do so afterwards. The difference is that after we are converted, the Word is “planted” in us. This seems to be a reference to the new covenant promised in Jeremiah 31:33. Therefore, with this new nature and new relationship to God’s law planted in us, we have the new ability to say no to sin and to continually, humbly accept God’s Word.

5. How is this different from the relationship to sin in the one in whom the Word is not implanted?

Before salvation, sin is entirely ascendant over him—but in the one in whom the Word is planted it meets with continual checks and does not have dominion over him.

6. James 1:22–25. How would you apply these verses to the context of corporate worship?

These verses indicate that James is envisioning responses to the public ministry of the Word in corporate worship. Therefore, he is urging us not to be careless in our listening to the Word in public worship.

7. How is looking into the Word of God similar to looking into a mirror?

To give a careless glance to the Word is like someone who glances in a mirror and forgets whether or not he was presentable. We must use mirrors to solve our appearance problems, not for vain glances. Mirrors reveal our flaws. We must listen to the Word that we might be changed, not carelessly.

8. How are we self-deceived by merely listening to God's Word?

We wrongly think that merely hearing the Word makes us a "better person." So we are careless in our observation, and miss the message that God wants to give us in order to free us.

9. How does the Law give freedom?

When we look at the Word we are looking at the way we were created to be. God tells us to put on certain things and take off other things relative to how they reform us to the image he originally created us to bear. Therefore, when you listen to the public ministry of the Word you are not hearing mere suggestions or good ideas but what God intends for you to be.

10. James 1:26–27. How would you apply these verses to the context of corporate worship?

Corporate worship that produces lives changed by the Word will result in a congregation that speaks and acts in a more godly fashion, James' "true religion."

11. If all the words you spoke yesterday were recorded and published in the local newspaper this morning, would those who read it consider you "religious"?

Personal. Answers may vary.

12. What does it mean to "keep a tight rein" on your tongue?

Answers may vary. But when we have no control over our tongues we prove our religion worthless.

13. What is pure and faultless religion, according to James? Why do you think he says this?

James 1:27—"to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." True religion is to be like the One we follow in action and character.

14. How are we to keep ourselves from "being polluted by the world"?

Paul said, "I want you to be wise about what is good and innocent about what is evil" (Romans 16:19). We may strive to be wise in what is good in order to keep pure for our Savior.

James—Lesson 3

Read the lesson notes and James 2:1–13.

1. What challenged you in the notes on James 1:19–27?

Answers may vary.

2. Read James 2:1–13 with Leviticus 19:15; Psalm 82:2–4; Malachi 2:9; Job 34:19; and Acts 10:34–35. What is favoritism, and why is it wrong?

Favoritism is the act of favoring a certain one or group more than others; having favorites; partiality. James argues that if God chose to bestow his favor on us and make us his people when we had done everything to disqualify ourselves, then there is no one that we can look down upon.

3. James 2:1–4. How do these verses describe favoritism? What does it look like and how does it behave?

In verse 2 we find a “gold-ringed man” who would have been an equestrian of second rank in Roman order on the road to civil service. James condemns giving that man the best seat and relegating the poor man to sit on the floor. So we, too, not only are tempted to give our prime attention to the wealthy, but also to those who have political or social clout.

4. In what sense does favoritism reveal a judgmental attitude (v. 4)?

The “judges” mentioned in verse 4 are in the sense of Leviticus 19:15, 18—those who are discriminators not in the legal sense, but in the privacy of one’s own heart. We have judged some people of more worth than others.

5. James 2:5–7. How do God’s choices and values differ from the natural discrimination of men?

Men tend to honor and choose the company of those who are wealthy, powerful or prestigious. But God has established a new community in which social distinctions are irrelevant. No one has more worth or status or importance than another, because all have had to be saved by grace.

6. Read also Acts 5:41 and 9:1–5. Those who abuse Christians are really abusing whom?

James 2:7 and these additional verses emphasize that abuse of Christians is abuse of Christ himself.

7. James 2:8–11. How do these verses fit into James' argument against favoritism?

We have received mercy from God who is the Judge. If he will not judge us in the way we deserve but rather shows us mercy, then we owe merciful attention to all people. Jesus said that the sum of the law is to love God and your neighbor.

8. How does breaking one law make one guilty of breaking all of God's law?

Any sin against any one of the commandments is, in essence, a sin against love for God and man (Matthew 22:38). Therefore, it does not matter which commandment one breaks—he or she has sinned against the person of God. Furthermore, the Ten Commandments not only contain prohibitions but also requirements. You are not a law keeper simply because you have never killed anyone. You are a lawbreaker if you have tendered hate rather than love in your heart, etc.

9. Where else is this “royal law” found in Scripture? (Your marginal references will help.)

Leviticus 19:18,34; Matthew 5:43-45; 22:34-40; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; John 13:34; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14.

10. James 2:12–13. How are those who are going to be judged by the law to speak and act?

We are to speak and act as those who have been set free from the law that condemns to the law that guides a free life (James 2:12). That is, we are to act like the Christians we are!

11. What is the motivating factor?

It is grateful love to God. Verse 13 says that those whose hearts are transformed by God's mercy also show mercy to others. Those who have not, do not (Matthew 5:7; 6:12; 18:23–35). As God's mercy triumphs over your judgment, your mercy flowing from that mercy triumphs over your own judgment, too. How can you speak and act in accordance with these verses in practical ways in your own church?

12. How can you speak and act in accordance with these verses in practical ways in your own church?

Answers may vary.

James—Lesson 4

Read the lesson notes and James 2:14–26.

1. What was interesting or challenging to you in the lesson notes?

Answers may vary.

2. How will the study of James 2:1–13 change the way you think, speak, and act toward others?

Personal. Answers may vary.

3. James 2:14–17. What is the main thing at issue in these verses?

The nature of saving faith. Is a faith that produces no works a true and saving faith?

4. How can any faith be considered “dead”? What kind of “faith” would that be?

A “faith” is “dead” if it is mere intellectual assent or religious words. A person cannot claim to be a caring Christian and at the same time, like James’ example, actually do nothing but tell the person who is in need to go away and everything will be all right. James 2:18–19. What kind of faith is demonstrated by the person in v. 18?

5. James 2:18–19. What kind of faith is demonstrated by the person in v. 18?

Saving faith repents of sin, turns from it, and entrusts one’s life to Jesus Christ alone as Lord and Savior. This is reflected in the life of the believer “by what I do.”

6. What kind of faith (or belief) is described in v. 19?

Intellectual assent is the faith that gives assent to the facts. The devil and his minions know the facts about the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ—that he is the Second member of the Trinity, that he is the Lord of the universe and Savior of the Church, that the keys of death and hell are given to him. But they are not saved. They shudder at these facts.

7. What is the difference between the faith described in v. 19 and saving faith?

Saving faith goes beyond knowing the facts and giving intellectual assent to the facts of the gospel. It believes in the atoning work of Jesus Christ and trusts in Him alone as Lord and Savior—a total commitment of life.

8. James 2:20–26. Read also Genesis 15. How was Abraham justified, or “saved”?

Genesis 15:6; James 2:23—Abraham believed God, and God credited His righteousness to Abraham through faith. This faith was demonstrated in Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Read also Joshua 2:8–11 and 6:15–25. How was Rahab justified, or “saved”?

9. How, then, does James come to his conclusion in 2:24? Follow his line of reasoning in your answer.

Faith alone—a “faith” that changes nothing in the life of the one who claims to have faith—justifies no one. Abraham had real faith. This faith offered Isaac on the altar, proving its reality. His action did not justify him, but showed that he was justified.

10. Read also Joshua 2:8–11 and 6:15–25. How was Rahab justified, or “saved”?

She was saved by faith. She confessed her belief in the God of the Israelites in Joshua 2:8-11.

11. What evidence can you find of Rahab’s faith?

That faith was proven when she put her allegiance with the Israelite spies and ushered them out another way after hiding them from the king of Jericho’s men. Further proof of the reality of her faith is seen in her living among the Israelites all the rest of her days (Joshua 6:25). Her works proved that God had worked that faith into her. What evidence can you find of your faith?

12. What evidence can you find of your faith?

Personal. Answers may vary.

13. Summarize the principle or teaching of James 2:14–26 in one sentence.

Answers may vary, but the idea is: Salvation is by faith, not works—but saving faith is a faith that works.

James—Lesson 5

Read the lesson notes and James 3:1–12.

1. What in the lesson notes was new or challenging to you?

Answers may vary.

2. How did your study of James 2:14–26 change the way you view your own sin?

Personal. Answers may vary.

3. James 3:1. With this verse in view, should we aspire to be teachers of the Bible? Why or why not?

Yes, if God calls us to that privilege. But James warns that those who teach will be held accountable for their words. God is zealous for the proper instruction of his people; therefore, he is intensely interested in what they are receiving from their teachers. One who is responsible to craft words that bring life or judgment has heightened responsibility to bridle his or her tongue.

4. James 3:2–8. How does the tongue often control the whole body?

If you are screaming at a ball game, the rest of your body gets active. If you are screaming at a driver, your blood pressure rises accordingly. If you want to apologize to someone, you have to walk up to him or her or dial the phone. If you tell a lie, you usually have to do something physically to reinforce and cover it. In other words, the tongue determines much of what the body does. There is an integral connection.

5. What illustrations does James use to make his point, and what do they emphasize?

These three images illustrate his point that this little member of our body wields much more power than its size would imply. In fact, he says, our tongues can actually control us. As the bit in a horse's mouth or a rudder on a ship dictates direction, and as a little spark can set aflame an entire forest, so the tongue can do the same.

6. From these verses and others you can find throughout the Bible, what is the root cause of evil on the tongue?

What is James actually doing but exposing the heart? The tongue does not have a mind of its own. It is only a physical appendage. What determines the words that spring from it if not the heart? Jesus said that the tongue merely articulates what is in the heart (Matthew 12:34; Mark 7:21-23). See also Psalm 5:9; 140:3; 10:7; Romans 3:13,14.

7. What does James say you can do to tame your tongue?

James says that not only will the tongue steer us to hell; we cannot change directions because we ourselves cannot control the tongue.

8. James 3:9–12. What is the particular problem of the tongue, and why is it wrong?

Verse 9 makes clear what the particular problem is: cursing men. First, we must understand that in the Bible it is impossible for a human being acting alone to curse another human being. A curse is a judgment that only God can give immediately or through a prophet. Therefore, to curse outside of God's direction is to attempt to take the place of God. What does it reveal about the heart?

9. What does it reveal about the heart?

A tongue that praises God yet curses men does not praise God at all—it is impossible. To curse men is to curse God in whose image they are made. James is saying that if mocking and criticizing other people characterize the regular pattern of your speech, then you are demonstrating that your heart has not been changed—you are not a Christian.

10. How does this problem manifest itself in the church?

Answers may vary.

11. How does this problem manifest itself in your life, and what can be done to control it?

Personal. Answers may vary.

12. How does James 3:1–12 illustrate the previous lesson in 2:14–26?

James' obvious strategy is that, as he is extending his argument about the nature of faith that produces good works—"faith without works is dead"—he is driving us to faith. And who is the object of our faith but Jesus Christ? And who is the One that applies his redemption to us but the Holy Spirit? So what should be our prayer?—Except that even as Christians we should be driven back to Christ again for more of his grace and specifically in prayer to the Holy Spirit to heal our tongues to break that pattern, that we might properly respond to the grace of Christ and illustrate to the world the blessing that comes from Christ's mouth through his people.

James—Lesson 6

Read the lesson notes and James 3:13–18.

1. What was convicting to you in the notes?

Personal. Answers may vary.

2. What was encouraging to you in the notes?

Personal. Answers may vary.

3. Using a dictionary or any other resource, define “wisdom.” How does that differ from “intelligence”?

Wisdom: 1. Knowledge and good judgment based on experience; being wise. 2. Wise conduct; wise words. 3. Scholarly knowledge. 4. Godly wisdom: looking at life from God’s perspective. Intelligence: 1. The ability to learn and know; quickness of understanding; intellect; mind. 2. Knowledge, news, or information.

4. James 3:14–16. What are the characteristics of false wisdom?

James says that envy and selfish ambition constitute false wisdom. He says it is “earthly,” that is, it is characteristic of this world’s values and goals. Then he says that it is “unspiritual.” Literally, he says that it is “soulish.”

5. What is the ultimate source of false wisdom?

James explains that pseudo-wisdom’s ultimate source is the devil himself. It is from hell. If you are creating discord among the people of God through envy and selfish ambition, applying your intelligence to being critical, you are being inspired by the devil.

6. James 3:13, 17, 18. What are the characteristics of true wisdom and how does it behave?

It is pure, then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. It works sowing peace to raise a harvest of righteousness.

7. Read also Proverbs 3:18 and 11:30. What is the “harvest of righteousness” in James 3:18—is it wisdom itself or only one part of wisdom?

In Proverbs 11:30, the fruit of righteousness is identified as a tree of life. However, in Proverbs 3:18, wisdom itself is also called a tree of life. Putting it together, we are to understand that

wisdom and righteousness are the same and are a tree of life. True wisdom is an holistically righteous Christian life lived in response to grace rather than simply making good decisions.

8. From an earlier lesson in James, how does one obtain wisdom? Give verses.

James 1:5-6—If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him . . .but let him ask in faith.

9. Read 1 Kings 3:4–15. How would you honestly answer God’s question of Solomon in v. 5 if it were put to you?

Answers may vary.

10. How does this episode in Solomon’s life illustrate Matthew 6:33?

Solomon sought first God’s kingdom and his wisdom and righteousness, and everything else—riches, houses, etc.—were given to him as well.

11. Scan Proverbs 1–10. What helpful teaching about wisdom do you find in these chapters?

Answers may vary. Some examples: 2:6—The Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; 2:12—Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse; 3:13—Blessed is the man who finds wisdom; 3:14—for she is more profitable than silver; 3:15—nothing you desire can compare with her; 3:16—long life is in her hand; 3:17—her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace; etc.

12. Where will you seek to apply God’s wisdom in your life this week?

Personal. Answers may vary.

James—Lesson 7

Read all of the lesson notes and James 4:1–12.

1. What from the notes did you apply to your own life?

Personal. Answers may vary.

2. After reading the notes, for what specific characteristics of wisdom will you ask God this week?

Personal. Answers may vary.

3. James 4:1–3 with Romans 7:20–25. From where does the overpowering pursuit of your own pleasures come?

From within you. You are the problem. Paul explains our condition even more clearly in Romans 7:20-25, where it says that there is a war within us between the desire of indwelling sin and the desire of the redeemed spirit.

4. From these verses in James, what are three results of pursuing selfish desires?

Broken relationships: James says that it is the source of fights and quarrels. Evil deeds: When it becomes obvious that there is only one object of desire and several want it, evil plots can result. Every crime ever committed has come from selfish desire. Hindered prayer: Finally, such overmastering desires will stop prayer. God will never answer prayers for selfish desires; to do so would encourage sin.

5. James 4:4–6 with Ezekiel 16:8–19. How would you define “friendship with the world”?

Answers may vary. It is hatred toward God (4:4); being God’s enemy (4:4); and being proud of it (4:6). From Ezekiel 16, the pursuit of selfish desires is spiritual adultery.

6. Why is it so terrible?

Again from Ezekiel 16, when we sin against God, we sin against love. We betray him as an adulterous wife betrays her husband. We receive his good gifts and offer them to “idols.” We break God’s heart.

7. Read also John 14:17 with Exodus 20:5; 34:15–16; Isaiah 54:5; and Jeremiah 3:20. What is the beautiful thing about the intense envy mentioned in James 4:5?

God is jealous for the love of his people as a husband for his bride. Not only does God the Father love you, and the Son of God love you, but that Person of the Godhead that actually indwells you—God the Holy Spirit—loves you feverishly with a love that is jealous of all others.

8. From 4:6, how then can we appropriately love God?

By grace! God gives grace to those who recognize that they need it—he gives it to the humble.

9. James 4:7–10. How do verses 7 and 8 answer the problem presented in v. 1?

As you submit your desires to God and resist the devil, you will not only come nearer to God, but the devil will flee. As you become more single-minded toward God, desires will change, and fights and quarrels will cease.

10. How do verses 9 and 10 answer the problem presented in verse 1?

Once we have turned our backs on the devil and are looking squarely at the face of the triune God who loves us so intensely, we must feel the full weight of our transgression against God. The thought that we would allow some selfish desire to draw us away from our gracious loving God must break us. We must grieve, mourn, and wail over that sin until we recognize our proper position in submission to him.

11. James 4:11–12 with Leviticus 19:16–18. Why does James equate slandering a brother with judging the law?

This is the same law to which he has already referred in 2:8. When we break a law and refuse to repent of it, we are saying in effect, “This should not be a law.” We are sitting in judgment over it, acting like we know better.

12. What is at the root of this sin?

Such action says something about our view of God. When we remove ourselves from under one of God’s laws, we act like we are God. We are placing ourselves in the place of God who is able to save and destroy. And he will share his throne with no one.

13. How does James 4:1–12 encourage you?

Answers may vary.

James—Lesson 8

Read all lesson notes and James 4:13–17.

1. What in the notes was interesting or encouraging to you?

Answers may vary.

2. Of what, if anything, did God convict you as you read the notes? What will you ask from him in response?

Personal. Answers may vary.

3. James 4:13, 14. What is wrong with the quoted statement in v. 13? Isn't a good idea to set goals and make plans?

James says such thinking is, first of all, irrational. It is seldom true that life turns out the way that we envision it. Although it is good to set goals and make plans, it is presumptuous to assume that we can determine exactly what will happen in a year's time.

4. A. What is James saying about our lives by using the analogy that we are “a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes”?

You and I cannot control what happens even to our own bodies—that which would seem the easiest to control. We are temporal. Our health is always a fragile commodity. And if we cannot control that which would logically seem the easiest—and that to which we are closest—how can we be so confident that our plans will work out exactly as we say they will?

- B. Should this discourage us?

No. As believers in Christ, our lives, although fleeting, have eternal significance. This should encourage us to redeem every present minute as good stewards of the time we are given from God's sovereign hand.

5. What is the main principle that James is trying to teach in these two verses?

Answers may vary. Some possibilities: Plans should be made in reference to the will of God, not materialistic profitability; if we live as if this world is all there is, we will soon find ourselves at the end of our lives with nothing of eternal value for the next; it is presumption to say we are going to do anything without reference to God's will; etc.

6. How does this contradict the popular thinking of our day?

Answers may vary. It flies in the face of such statements as: What the mind can conceive, you can achieve; I am master of my fate and captain of my soul; there's always tomorrow; etc.

7. James 4:16–17 with 1 John 2:15–16. To which of the “things in the world” is James referring in these verses?

1 John 2:16—“All that is of the world . . . the pride of life” (KJV); “the boasting of what he has and does” (NIV). John says that one of the characteristics of being of the world is this pride or boasting that you can handle life yourself.

8. Why is this so evil?

To presume that you are the “captain of your fate” and “master of your soul” is, in effect, to side with the world that represents all of God’s enemies in rebellion against him. It is to say that you are God—that you are equal to him.

9. Read also Matthew 6:25–34. How is this passage in James related to worry?

Worry flows from this presupposition: “I must control the outcome; therefore, if I cannot envision the outcome or do not know how to control it, then I must worry about it until I figure it out and do it.” James says that is the same as knowing that one ought to trust, but refusing to trust—and that, very simply, is sin.

10. What difference, if any, is there between a goal and a desire?

A goal is something that you can do something about, but a desire is something that you would like but cannot achieve by your own effort. You cannot make it a goal to be more tall or short, for example. You could make it a goal not to slump over if you are tall, or to dress to increase the appearance of your height if you are short, but you cannot “add a single cubit” to your height (Matthew 6:27).

11. James 4:15. What is James’ antidote to the sin of presumption?

He does not tell us glibly, “Quit presuming to be sovereign and start trusting God.” He first gives us a couple of intermediate steps. The first is to humble ourselves by repenting of our sin. If we are Christians, we will recognize that we are sinning and must repent. We will be horrified when we realize that we are acting like the world. Second, instead of presuming that we know what will happen, we are to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.”

12. How does this instruction further the theme of James—that true faith is faith that works?

James is really urging us to love of the Savior—to give the Savior his proper place in our lives as Lord. He gives us this exercise: Trust the Lord with your minds and express it with your lips until your hearts follow suit with overwhelming love and trust in him.

James—Lesson 9

Read all the lesson notes and James 5:1–12.

1. What was new or interesting to you in the notes?

Answers may vary.

2. A. In what areas of your life are you guilty of the sin of presumption?

Personal. Answers may vary.

- B. What do you need to do and to say to your heart so that you may implement James' antidote and follow in a new direction?

Personal. Answers may vary.

3. James 5:1–3. What three facts about their use of riches does James expose to the wealthy oppressors of God's people?

First, the wicked see that their wealth has passed away. Nothing remains. Then James says that the rusting of their wealth will “testify against them” in the Day of Judgment. Finally, James says that wealth can destroy the soul. It can “eat your flesh like fire.”

4. What warning do these have for us?

Answers may vary. But this is an exhortation to us that we must not pursue wealth—which does not last—above all else. Neither must we allow wealth to destroy our generosity and become hoarders. And we must not allow wealth to destroy our souls.

5. James 5:4–6. Read also Deuteronomy 24:14–15; Leviticus 19:13; and Malachi 3:5. What is the root sin of the oppression found in James 5:4?

Stealing—throughout the Old Testament God warns against robbing workers of their wages. In Leviticus 19:13, he says that the wages of your worker are not yours; they do not belong to you, but to the worker who has earned them. In Malachi 3:5, he says that you are a thief when you do not pay someone for his work.

6. What is the deceitfulness of riches (Matthew 13:22) described in James 5:5?

What one thinks will give satisfaction—luxury and self-indulgence—actually chokes out real spiritual life and fruitfulness, which do give true satisfaction.

7. What are some contemporary examples of the oppression described in James 5:6?

In various parts of the world today, Christians are persecuted even to the point of death. Even in the USA, Christianity is not tolerated in many circles and Christians are ostracized because of their identification with the Savior.

8. James 5:7, 8. What is James' reason for enduring faithfully under oppression, and how could it encourage Christians in the midst of suffering?

Because the Lord's coming is near. When Jesus comes the second time, there will be no doubt that he is the King of Kings. His power, judgment, and splendor displayed while he sets all things right will be obvious to all. Righteousness will be vindicated and evil judged. The timing should comfort them as well. The New Testament regularly encourages us that suffering has a terminus in the return of Christ.

9. James 5:9, 12 with Matthew 12:36–37. What do these verses have to do with being patient in suffering?

The first temptation in difficult times is to find some fault with your neighbor. You are jealous that his life is pleasant while yours is difficult; you are angry that he does not do more for you; or you find some reason to blame him and grumble against him. Then James warns against the greatest temptation in the midst of suffering—lashing out at God. You will be tempted to speak arrogantly about God and his ways.

10. How does v. 12 relate to Job 40:1–13 and Job's perseverance mentioned in v. 11?

Perhaps James is thinking of Job's response when he says, "Let your yes be yes and your no be no." Job said in response to God's queries, "I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth" (Job 40:4). In other words, when you don't understand why God is allowing certain afflictions in your life, be one of few words.

11. James 5:10–11. Give some examples with Scripture references of Old Testament prophets who persevered in the face of suffering.

Answers may vary. Some examples might be Daniel (6), Elijah (1 Kings 19), Jeremiah (38), etc.

12. What is James' positive reason for patience in the midst of oppression?

It must be the longsuffering patience, compassion and mercy of God dealing with sinful people that must move us to patience while facing the everyday injustices and sufferings of this life.

13. How does this encourage you today?

Personal. Answers may vary.

James—Lesson 10

Read the lesson notes and James 5:13–20.

1. What did you find encouraging in the notes? What was challenging?

Answers may vary.

2. James 5:13–15. What are the three situations addressed in vv. 13–14, and what action should be taken in response to them?

1. In trouble, one should pray. 2. In happiness, one should sing songs of praise. 3. In sickness, one should call the elders of the church to pray over and anoint him or her with oil in the name of the Lord.

3. The word for “raise him up” in 5:15 is the Greek, *sozo*, used also in James 1:21; 2:14; 4:12; and 5:20, often translated “to save” in the spiritual sense. In what sense it is used in these other verses?

Each time it refers to spiritual or eschatological (ultimate) salvation.

4. How can James 5:15 be explained with this in mind? Compare and relate to Matthew 9:1–8.

It is only reasonable that it would have that same meaning here. With this understanding, then, the clause “the Lord will raise him up,” is a reference to the resurrection. In Matthew 9:1–8, Jesus said to the paralytic on the mat, “Your sins are forgiven.” Then Jesus, answering the doubtful thoughts of the crowd, healed the man. He himself explained why—“So that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” He asked them which was easier—to forgive sins, or to heal physically. Clearly the answer was to heal physically; the real miracle was to forgive the man’s soul and heal him for eternity.

5. If someone is not healed after praying for healing, does this mean that his or her faith is deficient? What is the danger of this kind of thinking?

Although God urges us to pray for physical healing, he never promises it like he does these great spiritual blessings. Our faith does not determine the healing, but God’s grace. Thinking that it depends upon the sick person’s faith will dangerously lead us into judgment of sick and hurting people instead of helping them.

6. James 5:16–20. What is the more important healing for which we should pray in 5:16?

James tells us not to focus on physical healing, although we should pray for it, but rather the healing from sin in eternal salvation and the hope of the resurrection.

7. How effective is the prayer of a righteous man? Find as many effects as you can in James 5:13–16.

Eternal life, forgiveness of sins, and the body raised at the resurrection (vv. 15–16).

8. Read 1 Kings 18:16–19:18. How was Elijah “a man just like us”? Give verses with our answer

Elijah’s faith was not always strong; he became so despondent after the showdown on Mt. Carmel with the prophets of Baal that he wished he could die (1 Kings 18:4) after he had run for his life from Jezebel (1 Kings 18:3).

9. How did God work through Elijah’s prayers powerfully and effectively? Give verses from Kings and James with your answer.

1 Kings 18:38—On Mt. Carmel, the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the water-saturated sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil as well as the water in the trench. James 5:12—God answered his prayer for drought to turn Israel from its Baal worship; then brought rain again after three and a half years in answer to another of Elijah’s prayers.

10. For what would James have us pray powerfully in 5:19–20?

It is an exhortation for us to be in fervent prayer for sinners, even professing Christians too in this context, to be turned from their slavery and propensity to sin.

11. What kinds of requests occupy most of your prayer life? For what do you think God would have you pray this week?

Personal. Answers may vary.

12. How has your thinking changed as a result of studying James? How has God changed your life through studying this book?

Personal. Answers may vary.