

13 - WEEK BIBLE STUDY ON

# James



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# Session 1

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## TRIALS, STEADFASTNESS & WISDOM

1. Think about joy and suffering - are they related in any way?
  - o Generally speaking, are you more joyful when things are going well, or badly?

*Read James 1:1-8*

2. In **v1**, how does James describe himself?
  - o What could he have said and does the fact he doesn't strike you in anyway?
  - o Consider the following verses: **Matthew 13:55; Mark 3:20-21; John 7:3-5; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8; Acts 15:12-13**. What do these tell us about James' personal story?
    - How might this influence the way he thinks about himself?
3. How does he describe the people he's writing to?
  - o What is the implication of James calling Christian believers 'the 12 tribes' and 'the Dispersion'?
  - o What impact should the fact that as Christians we are scattered in the world, and not grouped in ghettos, have on our lives?
    - How might this influence the kind of topics James covers in the letter?
4. In **v2**, what does James say we should do when we meet trials?
  - o Does 'count it all joy' primarily refer to our *emotional* response to trials or the way we *think* about them?
  - o Why might the way we handle trials be closely linked to the way we think about them?

- How could James' words be misused by someone trying to help someone else going through trials?
- 5. James says, 'when you meet trials of various kinds'. What does that word 'when' imply?
  - He describes the trials as 'various.' What does that mean?
  - Give some examples of trials you've been through recently, or the form they might take in others' lives.
- 6. What reason does he give in **v3** for why we should count it all joy when we face trials?
  - How *do* trials test our faith and why does this result in steadfastness?
    - What is steadfastness?
      - Look at **Hebrews 12:1-2**. Who is our model of steadfastness/endurance [same word in Greek]? How did he endure? How does this link to what James is saying here?
    - Why is steadfastness important in the Christian life?
- 7. Look at **v4**. What impact does growing in steadfastness have on us?
- 8. In **v5**, James brings up the subject of wisdom. How would you define wisdom?
  - Why might trials and a need for wisdom be linked?
    - When you have/are going through a hard time, have you ever felt this lack of wisdom?
  - How does James say we should respond to this lack, and do you?
  - Look at **Proverbs 2:1-6**. How does this compare to what James writes here?
  - Why do we need to ask God for wisdom, rather than just produce it/grow in it ourselves?
  - How does James describe God's response to our prayers for wisdom? Why should that encourage us?
- 9. In **v6**, what does James say our attitude to praying for wisdom should be?

- What does it mean to doubt - and how does the idea of being double minded (v8) help us understand what James is getting at?
- Why is James' illustration of a wave a fitting one for the person who doubts/is double-minded when it comes to God's wisdom?
- Considering v8, how is the person who doubts different from the one who is steadfast?

## *Recap & Reflect*

How might what you have learnt about trials reshape the way you think about and handle the trials you currently face or might face in the weeks to come?

Where are you currently lacking in wisdom? Take time now to ask God to give you wisdom and trust that he will generously do so.

## Session 2

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### RICHES: A BIBLICAL MINDSET

1. Do people tend to view the rich or the poor as more 'blessed'? The famous or the unknown? The beautiful or the 'plain'? Why?
  - To what extent do you think this value system influences the modern western church?

*Read James 1:9-11*

2. In **v9-10**, James compares two types of persons and two positions. What are they and, given the comparisons made, what does each term mean?
  - Do you consider yourself rich or poor?
    - Why might we have a distorted view of our wealth?
    - Why can riches have a corrupting influence on our characters?
    - In what ways does our culture (in particular the media and advertising) encourage us to define ourselves by our wealth?
3. James has been talking of trials (**v1-8**) and will pick the subject up again in **v12**. This suggests his comments on the rich and the poor are connected to how we view and handle suffering.
  - How might the rich view their wealth during suffering? How might it affect the way they respond (or not) to others' suffering? How might the poor's lack of wealth affect the way they respond to suffering?
4. In **v9** James talks about boasting. What sorts of things do people normally boast in?

- Why is boasting generally seen as socially unacceptable? Do you see any evidence of a changing attitude to boasting, of it becoming more acceptable?
  - How does the gospel undermine boasting? (See **Romans 3:27-28**).
  - Given what James says in **v9-10**, what does he mean by 'boast' and how is this connected to the gospel?
  - 'The gospel humbles the rich and lifts up the poor.' Discuss.
5. In **v10** what reason does James give for the rich boasting in humiliation?
- How can we keep our mortality before our eyes?
6. In **v11** James compares the rich to the beauty of flowers. What does that comparison teach us?
- Why do we need to remember that success or fame are fleeting?
  - What does it mean for the rich to 'fade away' in the midst of their pursuits? For example, how might someone 'fade away' while still living? How might they 'fade away' during and after death?
7. Read **Luke 16:10-15** and **19-31**
- How does what James teaches mirror what Jesus said?
  - How does the rich man of Jesus' parable display the kind of sins James may be alluding to?
8. Read **Proverbs 30:7-9**:
- How might the temptations faced by the rich and the poor be different?
  - In what way might both the rich and the poor put their trust in money?
9. Jesus describes riches as deceitful (**Mark 4:19**). What does he mean by that?
10. Look at **Hebrews 13:5**: How can you keep your life free from the love of money? What's the connection with contentment?

## *Recap & Reflect*

How should we as Christians correctly view riches?

Reflect upon your own mindset towards riches. Examine yourself: do you put too much trust in them? If yes, repent, receive the Lord's forgiveness, and ask him to give you his vision of riches and a heart of contentment.

# Session 3

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## TRIALS, TEMPTATIONS & AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE

*Read James 1:12-18*

1. Considering **v12**, biblically, what does it mean to be blessed?
  - What are the alternatives to remaining steadfast under trial?
  - The word 'test' in v12 is the same as tempted/tempts in v13. How might times of trial result in times of temptation?
  - What temptations might be specific to times of trial and difficulty?
  - Given this, why is remaining steadfast under trial synonymous with loving God?
2. What is 'the crown of life'?
  - Why might we struggle to let our future reward influence the way we see and handle suffering now?
3. Look at **v13**: what's the implication of 'when he is tempted'?
  - Why might someone think God is tempting them?
    - What might be the consequences of thinking like this?
4. Why is the fact that God cannot be tempted, and tempts no one, both reassuring and sobering?
5. Considering **v14**, what does James teach us about the root of our temptations?
  - What's a 'lure'? - what does it mean to be lured?
  - How would you describe the relationship between internal and external influences in temptation?

- How can understanding the way temptation works help direct our fight against sin?
  - How can we change our desires?
- 6. Look at **v15**. In what ways does sin bring forth death?
- 7. Considering **v16-17**, while temptation does *not* come from God, what does?
  - In what ways might we be deceived (v16) about the origin of good gifts in our lives?
  - How might being deceived on this affect the way we see good things and respond to them?
    - How does knowing where they come from help us rightly enjoy good things?
- 8. What encouragement is there in knowing God does not change like the shifting shadows?
- 9. Look at **v18**: If temptation and sin bring forth death, what does God's work bring forth?
  - How does he do it?
    - Look at **Ephesians 1:13**. What does this have in common with what James writes?
      - What is the word of truth?
    - Look at **John 1:13**. Do we become Christians because we decide, or *God* decides?
  - What does it mean to be 'a kind of firstfruits of his creatures'?

## *Recap & Reflect*

In what areas do you currently face temptation? How does what James teaches in today's passage both challenge and encourage you?

Take time to meditate on verses 12 and 17. Reflect on God's promises and let that grow your eternal perspective towards your trials and sufferings in the present moment.

# Session 4

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## HEARERS & DOERS OF THE WORD

1. Has anyone ever told you you're a good listener? Why?

- What makes a good listener?

*Read James 1:19-27*

2. Look again at **v19**. Before we look at the reason James gives, why is it wise to be 'quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger'?

- How are those three things (hearing, speaking, anger) - and the speed at which we do them - linked?
  - How are you doing in these areas? Do you find them easy?
  - In what ways are these qualities perfected in Christ?

3. Considering **v20**, what reason does James give for being slow to anger? And why is he right?

4. Considering **v21**, why might putting away filthiness and wickedness be linked to receiving the implanted word with meekness?

- How might 'putting away' and receiving the implanted word be the fruit of being 'quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger'?
- How does the implanted word save our souls? What's the word, who implants it and how does it save us?

5. Look at **v22**. How common is hearing but not doing the word, do you think? Why?

- Why do we deceive ourselves if we do this?
- What does Jesus have to say about this?
- There is a saying, 'actions speak louder than words.' Do they? Why or why not?

6. Re-read **v23-25**. Given James' illustration, in what ways is God's word like a mirror?
  - In **v23-24**, why is James' use of someone looking in a mirror a fitting one for someone who hears but doesn't do?
  - Do you have any practices that help you be a good hearer and doer of the word?
  
7. In **v25**, James mentions 'the law of liberty'. Can religious law keeping bring freedom?
  - Given this, what does James mean by this term?
  - Why does perseverance in doing matter? Why is it easier to start something than finish it?
  - Look at **Hebrews 12:1-2**. How is Christ our example in persevering in doing good?
    - What motivated him?
  - How might a failure to persevere in doing good show itself in our lives?
  - 'The road to hell is paved with good intentions.' Discuss.
  - What does it mean that the person who is a doer of the word will 'be blessed in his doing'?
  
8. Look at **v26**. Why is a failure to control our tongues a warning sign of deeper problems, and especially of self-deceit?
  
9. In **v27**, how does James describe the kind of religion God approves of?
  - Why do these things matter so much to God?
    - How do we know these things matter to God, and what's the link between that and being a hearer and doer of the word?
  - Look at **Matthew 25:34-40**. What motive is there here for caring for the vulnerable?
  - How are you doing these things at the moment? If not, what steps could you take to do so?
  - How might the world stain us, and what might this have to do with caring for the vulnerable?

## *Recap & Reflect*

Where do you struggle to apply the Word you hear? Where does the power to be a doer come from? Ask God for his help to tackle these areas where you might be deceiving yourself.

Reflect on how Jesus is the perfect embodiment of what it is to be a hearer and doer of the word, slow to speak and slow to anger. Reread verses 26-27 and consider how he lived a perfectly pure religion during his life on earth.

# Session 5

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## MERCY OVER PARTIALITY

1. What kind of people would be in your perfect church?

*Read James 2:1-13*

2. Considering **v1**, why is showing partiality while believing in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, contradictory?

3. Considering **v2-4**, what judgment, or assumptions, is a person who behaves like this making?

- Why might we/a church show partiality like this? What's underneath such an attitude?
- Imagine two people like James describes came to our church one Sunday morning. How might a scenario like the one James depicts play out? What stages might there be?
- What else does the Bible have to say about judging by external appearances? Why does it highlight this as an issue?
- What other kinds of people might we/churches/church leaders show partiality to?
  - Are you prone to doing this?
- Considering the gospel, are we the rich man or the poor man?
- How does the gospel free us from evaluating people like this?

4. Look at **v5**. In what ways might this be true? What might James be referring to?

5. Considering **v6-7**, how might the rich oppress and blaspheme Christians and Christ?

6. Look at **v8**. What does James say is the 'royal law' of scripture?

- Look at **Luke 10:25-37**. What was the lawyer wanting to know?

- How do the attitude and actions of the Samaritan exemplify what it means to show no partiality?
  - Look at **Romans 13:8-10**. Why does loving our neighbour sum up God's law?
7. Considering **v8-9**, how does partiality break God's law? (How is it a failure to love your neighbour as yourself?)
  8. In **v10-11**, what consequence of showing partiality does James give? What's his logic?
  9. Considering **v12-13**: what motive does James give us for showing mercy and not partiality?
    - Thinking more widely, what other motives are there for doing the right thing?
    - Which motives work best for you, do you think?

## *Recap & Reflect*

How does the gospel change the way we view and treat both the rich and the poor?  
How does it change the way we view ourselves?

Pray for Jesus to give you his eyes, to see and love people the way he does, regardless of their material worth.

# Session 6

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## FAITH & WORKS

1. If you're wondering whether someone might be a Christian or not, what sort of things do you look at?

*Read James 2:14-26*

2. Why does getting the relationship between faith, works and salvation right matter?
  - How do 'religious' people tend to see the relationship?
  - How do 'secular' people tend to see it?
3. How does what James writes in **v14-17** relate to what has come already in James?
4. Considering the example James gives in **v15-16**, what do the person's words *seem* to say, but their actions *definitely* say?
  - How would genuine faith have caused the person to respond differently?
5. According to **v18**, what is the relationship between faith and works?
6. Look at **v19**. What point is James making?
  - Why is having correct beliefs not the same as having saving faith?
  - What kind of 'churches' or individuals might be guilty of this?
7. How are the two examples James uses of false faith (in **v15-16** and **v19**) different? How might we categorise these?
  - Is it possible to have genuine believers (maybe even churches) with different emphases? For example, can one be into worship, or deep theology, or sports ministries, and another into care for the poor/needy? 'You have your care for the poor, I have my love of worship ministry, or great teaching, or outreach through sport'?
8. Look at **v20**: Is James being insulting when he describes people as 'foolish'?

9. Read **Genesis 15:1-6**: this is a key passage for the New Testament writers to understand the role of faith in salvation and being declared righteous by God.
- What is remarkable about Abraham believing God's promise?
  - When God asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac (Gen 22), and Abraham obeys, what does this tell us about Abraham's faith?
  - If Abraham's faith was not genuine, how might Abraham have responded?
  - Overall, did Abraham obey first or believe first? What led to what?
10. Compare what James writes in **v21-24** to what Paul writes in **Romans 4:1-12**. How do what James and Paul write complement (rather than contradict) each other?
- How are James and Paul using the word 'justified' differently?
11. Look at **v25**: Who was Rahab? In what ways did she believe in God and demonstrate that by what she did?
- If Rahab's faith was not genuine how might her behaviour towards the spies have been different?
12. Why might James choose Rahab as an example alongside Abraham?
13. In what ways does your faith change the way you live? Can you give any examples of when your behaviour would have been very different if you did not trust God?

## *Recap & Reflect*

Summarise the biblical view of the relationship between faith and works.

How well do you hold faith and works together? Do you personally tend more to just 'faith'? Or are you tempted to trust in your works for your salvation? How might you use what you have learnt today to change your tendencies?

# Session 7

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## TAMING THE TONGUE

1. How powerful are words? Why?

*Read James 3:1-12*

2. Considering the passage as a whole,

- When James talks about the tongue, what is he really addressing?
- What illustrations of the tongue's power, or influence, does he use?

3. Considering **v1**, what might motivate someone to become a teacher within the church?

- Why might God judge those who teach with greater strictness?
- Should that deter you from teaching the gospel to others?

4. Look at **v2-4**: Why does control of the tongue have implications for self-control in other areas of our lives?

- How easy do you find it to control your speech? Are there any specific times/places you find it harder?

5. Look at **v5-6**. How might the tongue do damage far beyond its size?

- Fires can quickly get out of control and spread. How and why might what we say with our tongues behave similarly?
- What would it look like for an 'entire course of life' to be set on fire by the tongue?
- How is the tongue set on fire by hell?
- How would you group/categorise sinful patterns of speech?

6. Look at **v8**. In what way is the tongue a 'restless evil'? And what has this got to do with taming wild animals?

- James combines 'restless evil' with 'full of deadly poison'. What animal does this suggest and why might James be making that suggestion?
7. In **v9-10**, what inconsistency is James highlighting?
- How might you bless God and curse others?
  - Does the way you speak differ according to different situations you find yourself in? Does that matter?
8. According to **v11-12**, what is James suggesting is the underlying problem for our tongues?
- Read **Matthew 15:10-20** - what does Jesus say about where the problem lies and what's the solution?
  - How can you get control of your tongue?
9. How have words had an impact on your life or those close to you - for good or bad?
- Have your words had a positive or negative impact on others? Can you give any examples?
  - If you had to summarise for someone, why does our speech matter?

## *Recap & Reflect*

What is your biggest takeaway message from this passage? In what ways do you need to implement change in how you use your tongue? Pray for the Holy Spirit to purify and transform your speech from the inside-out.

Can you remember a time, or times, when you have hurt someone with your words? Take a moment to reflect on and pray about the situation. Consider apologising to the person this week and asking for forgiveness.

# Session 8

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## THE MEEKNESS OF WISDOM

*Read James 3:13-18*

1. In **v13** James mentions meekness. When you think of someone being 'meek' what sort of person do you picture?
  - How would you define meekness? Is it the same as 'weakness'?
2. To help understand what the Bible means by meekness, look at some other occasions this same word is used (sometimes it is translated as gentleness): **1 Corinthians 6:21** and **2 Timothy 2:25** (= gentleness); **2 Corinthians 10:1**; **Galatians 5:23, 6:1**; **Ephesians 4:2**; and **James 1:21**.
  - How do these verses give insight on what is meant by 'meekness'?
3. Considering **v13**, how do the issues James raises link to what has gone before?
  - What does it mean to be wise and understanding? (Look at **Job 28:28** for some help!)
  - How might we assess how we are doing at growing in wisdom and understanding?
4. Why does James say our good conduct/good works should be done in the 'meekness of wisdom'? What's the alternative to doing them in meekness?
  - Why might thinking about/talking about/doing good works lead to the opposite of doing them in meekness?
5. Why does true wisdom produce meekness?
6. How is Jesus our example when it comes to meekness flowing out of wisdom?
7. In **v14-15**, James contrasts true wisdom, and the meekness it produces, with another kind of wisdom.
  - What does this other sort of 'wisdom' produce?

- What is its source and nature?
  - How might jealousy and selfish ambition motivate someone's conduct (even when that conduct appears to be good works)?
8. Look at **v16**. Why do jealousy and selfish ambition lead to disorder and vile practice?
- In particular, how might they be linked to discord or relational breakdown (issues that James begins to pick up on in v17 and chapter 4)?
9. In **v17** James describes a wisdom that is from above. How does this link to what he has said previously in **James 1:5** and **James 1:17**?
- How might a person whose life is marked by this 'from above' wisdom deal with:
    - disagreements?
    - failure or inconsistency in others?
    - people with differing degrees of social capital (like wealth, influence, academic level)?
  - Think of a recent disagreement you had... would the meekness of wisdom have changed the way you responded?
10. Considering **v18**, James has described how true wisdom produces peaceableness in those who have it. What does it mean to 'sow in peace', or 'make peace'?
- How does righteousness grow out of peacemaking?

## *Recap & Reflect*

Take time alone to reflect on this passage. Let the Spirit guide you in examining your own heart. Pray to see the areas where you struggle with jealousy and bitterness. Lay these situations at the Lord's feet. Ask for and receive forgiveness. Go on to seek the wisdom from above and consider how an approach marked by meekness and wisdom might differ from your approach until now.

# Session 9

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## PASSIONS, PRIDE & THEIR EFFECT ON RELATIONSHIPS

*Read James 4:1-10*

1. Look at **v1-2**: What does James say is at the root of quarrels and fights?
  - How might this be true between friends, family, a married couple or church members?
  - When you're involved in a quarrel, do you tend to think that you or the other person is principally to blame? Why?
  - How are 'passions', 'desires' (literally, *over-desires*) and 'coveting' different but linked?
2. Considering **v3**, why might our prayers go unanswered?
  - How might you know if this is the case for you?
  - How might allowing God's priorities to shape our prayers influence our desires and thus conflicts?
  - Read **Psalm 16:11**. What does this tell us about where we should look for our desires to be fulfilled?
3. Look at **v4**. To call people 'adulterers' is strong! Why does James do so? Why is sin spiritual adultery?
  - Given what James has said so far, what might 'friendship with the world' look like - for you or a church?
4. Considering **v5**, God also desires something passionately. What is it? And what does this mean?
5. In **v6** James talks about the proud. How are quarrels and fights linked to pride?
  - How do you know if you're proud? Are you?
  - How might God oppose the proud? What form might this take?

6. How does what James writes in **v6-7** provide us with a better way of handling conflict?
  - How do we practically submit ourselves to God?
  - How do we practically resist the devil?
  - 'Behind our sin lies the fact that we do not resist temptation long enough.' Discuss
7. Considering **v8**, how do we draw near to God, what's that got to do with heart and hands, and what's the promise if we do?
  - What does it mean to be double minded and do you recognise this in yourself? (Think also of **James 1:6-8**)
  - How might 'cleansing our hands' and 'purifying our hearts' have an impact on our quarrels?
8. In **v9-10**, what does James tell us should be a right response to our pride and quarrels?
  - What's the promise if we humble ourselves before the Lord and repent?
  - What does it mean to be exalted by God?

## *Recap & Reflect*

Why and how do our passions, coveting, and pride destroy our relationships with God and those around us?

Write down:

- The main things you pray for
- Tensions that you have and who you have them with

Then make a list of things that you tend to:

- Over-desire
- Covet
- Be proud of

Following what was discussed today, how might these things be linked? Can you recognize negative patterns as James describes in this passage?

Once you have taken time over the first exercise, meditate on v7-10, and take heart. Draw near to God and ask for humility and purified desires. Pray for help in breaking these patterns.

# Session 10

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## WHO ARE YOU TO JUDGE YOUR NEIGHBOUR?

Read James 4:11-12

1. If your speech was recorded for a week, how much criticism of others would it pick up?
2. What reasons might lie behind our speaking badly of others or judging them?
  - Is there a difference between speaking evil of someone and judging someone?
3. Is there a right form of judging/evaluating another person? (If yes, give examples). How does this differ from the kind of judging James talks about here?
  - How do you know when your right/wise/biblical evaluation of someone else or their conduct drifts into judgmentalism?
4. How might this kind of wrong speech show itself in churches or Christian friendship groups?
5. When we judge or criticise someone else we often do so based on our evaluation of their motives. How good are we at rightly evaluating motives? Do you have an example of when, in retrospect, you got this wrong?
6. Why is speaking badly of others, or judging them, equivalent to speaking evil against the law and judging the law? (For help, see **Leviticus 19:16-18!**)
  - How do our words of judgement/criticism of *others* condemn *ourselves*?
7. How does how we speak of others tell us something about what we think of God?
8. According to **v12**, what danger is there in being a judge?
  - How is sitting in judgment on the law similar to what happened in Eden (**Genesis 3:1-7**)?
  - How do we see this desire to be our own lawmaker and judge - deciding for ourselves what is right or wrong - in our culture today?

9. How does the gospel get to the root of why we judge and criticise others?

- o How can it help us to stop doing it?

## *Recap & Reflect*

Of all that was discussed today, examine your own life and summarize:

- One motive that you recognize is behind your judging and criticizing of others
- One way this plays itself out in your everyday life
- One danger/consequence of our judging others
- One way by which the gospel can transform this particular sin

# Session 11

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## MAKING PLANS AND MAKING MONEY

1. What principles guide your decision making?

*Read James 4:13-5:6*

2. Considering the passage as a whole, what overall themes run through it?

3. In **v13-14**, what sort of person, or behaviour/attitudes, is James taking aim at?

- How do you make plans?
- How does the way we plan our lives/futures reveal things about what we truly believe?
- Look at **Proverbs 16:3, 9, and 19:20-21**. How would you synthesise these into a way of making plans?

4. Considering **v14**, what biblical theme is he drawing on?

- Look at **Ecclesiastes 6:12** and **Psalms 39:4-5**. Is this how you view your life? Why or why not? Why might it be wise to?

5. How do the two attitudes displayed in **v13** and **v15** differ?

- Which approach might give you more security and purpose in life and why?

6. How does James define sin in **v17**?

- Why does remembering this description of sin matter?

7. Considering **5:1-6**, does James denounce wealth *in and of itself*? Why does it matter that we get what James is saying right?

- If we apply this today, who is James aiming his critique at?

8. Look at **Matthew 6:19-21** and **1 Timothy 6:6-10** and **17-19**. How should these verses shape our view of wealth and wealth creation?

9. In **5:1-3**, what future does James foresee for the unjust rich?
- Re-state what James is saying in **v2-3** using modern examples.
10. How do **v4-5** give us a basis for social justice?
- What meaning does the term 'Lord of hosts' carry, and why might this explain why James uses it here?

## *Recap & Reflect*

What would be a correct biblical mindset in making and talking about future plans? Going forward, try to bring this into your decision making and speech habits.

Summarize in a few bullet points how James specifically, and the Bible generally, views wealth and wealth creation. Examine your heart, your finances, your work motivations, and your spending habits. Do they align with what you have learnt? Where might you need to make changes and what will those look like practically?

# Session 12

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## PATIENCE & SUFFERING

1. Can you think of a time when you had to be patient about getting something before you could enjoy it?

*Read James 5:7-12*

2. In **v7**, James says 'therefore' - what's he referring back to in **v1-6** that explains why he says it?
3. Considering James's illustration of the farmer, what would become of an impatient farmer?
  - o Considering **v7-8**: How might impatience for the Lord's return show itself in a Christian's life, especially when life is hard?
4. Look at **v9**. How are grumbling, suffering and patience linked?
  - o What impact can our grumbling have on others (who may also be suffering)?
  - o How might knowing the judge is standing at the door change the way we speak and behave?
5. Considering **v10**: How did the prophets suffer? How did they demonstrate patience?
  - o Are there any heroes of the faith - either biblical or after, whose attitude to hardship and suffering have inspired you?

In **v10**, James adds 'in the name of the Lord.' Why and why might this matter for us?

6. Considering **v11**, how did Job demonstrate steadfastness? (For example, read **Job 19:25-26**).
  - o How does Job's life reveal the compassion and mercy of the Lord? Is that how it would have seemed to Job?

7. Looking at **v10-11** again, is it the trouble free or the steadfast who are blessed? What does this mean for the way we tend to view life?
8. Considering **v12**, look at **Matthew 5:34-37**. What similarities/differences do you see?
  - Why should a Christian not need to use oaths?
  - Practically, what does it mean for your “yes” to be yes and your “no” no’?
    - When you say you’re going to do something, do you always follow through and do it? How might people make excuses/defend not doing this?
  - Why can it be hard to be a person of your word?

## *Recap & Reflect*

What has today’s passage taught you about suffering and being patient? What role does your speech play in this?

Think of a time when someone didn’t keep their word to you, for example by breaking an important promise, or by not doing something they said they would. How did that make you feel?

Reflect on how quickly you are to promise something. Do you tend towards overcommitting and then not being able to keep your word? Consider whether you need to think more carefully before saying yes (or no) to something, or whether you should put more effort into keeping your word.

# Session 13

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## THE POWER OF PRAYER

1. Do you pray more when life is good or when it's not so good?

*Read James 5:13-20*

2. Considering **v13**, generally, why should the suffering pray?
  - Why does James need to remind us to pray when suffering? Why might we not pray?
3. Why should the cheerful sing praise?
4. Considering **v14**, why should the sick ask for prayer?
  - All three situations (suffering, cheerful, sick) call for a response to God. What does this tell us?
5. In **v14**, who are the sick to call?
  - Why does it matter that it's the elders as a group and not just someone seen as having a gift of healing?
  - Why might someone not call the elders to pray over them?
  - What are the elders to do? Why?
  - In the Old Testament, what did anointing with oil symbolise? Why might this explain why James describes the elders doing this for a sick person?
6. Considering **v15-16**, where does the power of prayer lie and why does it matter to get this right?
  - Does this mean God will always heal? Why or why not?
7. What is the link between sickness and sin? Is sickness always, sometimes, or never a result of sin?
  - Why does this help make sense of the self-examination suggested in v16?

- Why does this area require great sensitivity? And why might this explain the calling of the elders?
8. Considering **v16**, what are some implications of prayer being powerful?
- What are some reasons we don't pray?
  - Why does James stipulate that it's the prayers of a 'righteous' person that have great power?
  - What does the example of Elijah have to do with prayer and sin?
9. Look at **v19-20**. What might wandering away from the truth look like?
- Why does looking out for one another matter?

## *Recap & Reflect*

Recap what this passage teaches you about prayer – when to pray, with whom, what attitude to have.

Take time now to pray for others, for those who are sick and suffering, for those who have wandered from the truth, not forgetting to confess your own sins as well.

## *Leader's Notes*

The notes are here to help you lead a group and answer tough questions. The idea isn't to read the "right" answer out after each question, but rather to give you support or a helpful nudge in guiding your discussion in the right direction. Feel free to use them as best suits your group.

# Session 1

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## TRIALS, STEADFASTNESS & WISDOM

1. Think about joy and suffering - are they related in any way?

- Generally speaking, are you more joyful when things are going well, or badly?

*Read James 1:1-8*

2. In v1, how does James describe himself?

- What could he have said and does the fact he doesn't strike you in anyway?

*[James is Jesus' half-brother, yet he describes himself as a servant; and he describes Jesus as 'the Lord'.]*

- Consider the following verses: **Matthew 13:55; Mark 3:20-21; John 7:3-5; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8; Acts 15:12-13**. What do these tell us about James' personal story?

- How might this influence the way he thinks about himself?

3. How does he describe the people he's writing to?

*[12 tribes; dispersion - Jewish people living in the gentile world, who have become Christians. They are believers scattered in the world.]*

- What is the implication of James calling Christian believers 'the 12 tribes' and 'the Dispersion'?

*[James is saying that the church - Jews and Gentiles are the one true people of God, the new Israel]*

- What impact should the fact that as Christians we are scattered in the world, and not grouped in ghettos, have on our lives?

- How might this influence the kind of things James covers in the letter?

*[James will address real life issues. It's not a letter written for the monastery or nunnery, but the world]*

4. In **v2**, what does James say we should do when we meet trials?

- Does 'count it all joy' primarily refer to our *emotional* response to trials or the way we *think* about them?

*[James does not say, 'feel joyful in trials' but 'count it' - consider it - reckon it all joy. Right thinking precedes any emotional change.]*

- Why might the way we handle trials be closely linked to the way we think about them?
  - How could James' words be misused by someone trying to help someone else going through trials?

5. James says, 'when you meet trials of various kinds'. What does that word 'when' imply?

*[Suffering is not a matter of 'if' but 'when'. It is a normal part of life and a normal part of the Christian's life.]*

- He describes the trials as 'various.' What does that mean?

*[Trials are going to take many different forms. They will come but they will not be all alike]*

- Give some examples of trials you've been through recently, or the form they might take in others' lives.

6. What reason does he give in **v3** for why we should count it all joy when we face trials?

*[Trials are a test of our faith and produce steadfastness.]*

- How *do* trials test our faith and why does this result in steadfastness?

- What is steadfastness?

*[It's endurance, patience, perseverance, keeping-on-keeping-on, being unwavering despite the circumstances]*

- Look at **Hebrews 12:1-2**. Who is our model of steadfastness/endurance [same word in Greek]? How did he endure? How does this link to what James is saying here?

- Why is steadfastness important in the Christian life?

7. Look at **v4** What impact does growing in steadfastness have on us?

*[It enables us to become 'perfect and complete'. This is about being a person of mature and deep faith, not moral perfection.]*

8. In **v5** James brings up the subject of wisdom. How would you define wisdom?

*[It has been defined, helpfully, as skill in living]*

- Why might trials and a need for wisdom be linked?

*[Often, when we are going through hard times, we feel out of our depth, we don't know what to do; we know we don't have the wisdom to get through.]*

- When you have/are going through a hard time, have you ever felt this lack of wisdom?

- How does James say we should respond to this lack, and do you?
- Look at **Proverbs 2:1-6**. How does this compare to what James writes here?
- Why do we need to ask God for wisdom, rather than just produce it/grow in it ourselves?
- How does James describe God's response to our prayers for wisdom? Why should that encourage us?

9. In **v6**, what does James say should be our attitude to praying for wisdom?

- What does it mean to doubt - and how does the idea of being double minded (**v8**) help us understand what James is getting at?

*[James is using doubt as a way of describing split loyalties, - double mindedness. It's when we try to hedge our bets between God and the world, between God's way of seeing trials and the world's; trying to keep a foot in both camps - to live by worldly wisdom at the same times as by God's wisdom. And the reason we do this is because we don't fully trust God and his wisdom... we doubt.]*

- Why is James' illustration of a wave a fitting one for the person who doubts/is double-minded when it comes to God's wisdom?

*[A wave, while being full of energy, is in reality driven by tides and wind. In addition, the wind whips up waves, making their tops whiter and more frothy. The person who doubts is likewise more subject to the circumstances of his/her life – emotionally they will be more up and down, their responses to difficulties – or success - more unstable and superficial. Their responses will not be grounded in faith, prayer, and the character of God but the nature of the circumstances themselves.]*

- Considering **v8**, how is the person who doubts different from the one who is steadfast?

# Session 2

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## RICHES: A BIBLICAL MINDSET

1. Do people tend to view the rich or the poor as more 'blessed'? The famous or the unknown? The beautiful or the 'plain'? Why?
  - o To what extent do you think this value system influences the modern western church?

*Read James 1:9-11*

2. In **v9-10**, James compares two types of persons and two positions. What are they and, given the comparisons made, what does each term mean?

*[The two types of person: the lowly and the rich; two positions: exaltation and humiliation. The lowly refers to those whose financial situation is humble - they've got no financial wealth to speak of. Exaltation refers to a high position, humiliation to a low one. The world's way of viewing what these positions mean will be very different from a gospel-shaped world-view.]*

- o Do you consider yourself rich or poor?
  - Why might we have a distorted view of our wealth?

*[We tend to compare ourselves 'upwards'. We look at those who have more than us, and think that in comparison we're 'poor'. If we compared ourselves to those below us we would (rightly) see ourselves as rich.]*

- Why can riches have a corrupting influence on our characters?

*[We can look down on those who have less than us; we treat them badly; we value others by what they have; we have greater capacity to indulge ourselves and seek pleasure in this life not the next.]*

- In what ways does our culture (in particular the media and advertising) encourage us to define ourselves by our wealth?
3. James has been talking of trials (**v1-8**) and will pick the subject up again in **v12**. This suggests his comments on the rich and the poor are connected to how we view and handle suffering.

*[The rich will be tempted to put their trust in their wealth - it helps them get out of trouble, pay for better health care, enjoy life etc. In contrast, the poor may have to rely more on God, prayer, the kindness of friends. However, the poor may also resent their lack of financial power and the help it could give them. This might drive bitterness. In terms of helping others - the rich may hold on to their wealth, rather than share it. They may see others' suffering as deserved, and keep their money for their own 'rainy day'; or they may be generous to help. Likewise, the poor may hold on to what little they have, or be sacrificially generous. The issue is not so much the wealth but the heart.]*

- How might the rich view their wealth during suffering? How might it affect the way they respond (or not) to others' suffering? How might the poor's lack of wealth affect the way they respond to suffering?
4. In **v9** James talks about boasting. What sorts of things do people normally boast in?

*[Possessions; success - of ourselves or others, whose success might 'rub off on us' - like parents boasting of children; important people we know etc]*

- Why is boasting generally seen as socially unacceptable? Do you see any evidence of a changing attitude to boasting, of it becoming more acceptable?
- How does the gospel undermine boasting? (See **Romans 3:27-28**).

*[It removes the reasons we normally boast: we aren't accepted by God because of our success/possessions etc, but only by his grace]*

- Given what James says in **v9-10**, what does he mean by 'boast' and how is this connected to the gospel?

*[He means to take pride in our position: that both the poor and the rich can boast in their position because it tells of the gospel. The poor are*

*exalted by the gospel - they have nothing that the world thinks as valuable, yet Jesus lifts them up. The rich are so sinful Jesus had to die for them, they are no more worthy than the poor, yet Jesus did die for them. Rich and poor can boast in the grace of Christ.]*

- 'The gospel humbles the rich and lifts up the poor.' Discuss.

*[Use this question if the two above have not drawn out how the gospel is for both rich and poor]*

5. In **v10** what reason does James give for the rich boasting in humiliation?

- How can we keep our mortality before our eyes?

*[There is no 'one way' to do this. Examples might include: thinking often of your death, of what you will leave behind, of what people will say at your funeral, of how not even your great grandchildren will likely know your name; by attending others' funerals; by taking the opportunity to view the dead body of a friend/relation when it is laid out prior to a funeral; to take walks in graveyards when you are passing one and take the time to read the gravestones.]*

6. In **v11** James compares the rich to the beauty of flowers. What does that comparison teach us?

- Why do we need to remember that success or fame are fleeting?
- What does it mean for the rich to 'fade away' in the midst of their pursuits? For example, how might someone 'fade away' while still living? How might they 'fade away' during and after death?

7. Read **Luke 16:10-15** and **19-31**

- How does what James teaches mirror what Jesus said?
- How does the rich man of Jesus' parable display the kind of sins James may be alluding to?

8. Read **Proverbs 30:7-9**:

- How might the temptations faced by the rich and the poor be different?

- o In what way might both the rich and the poor put their trust in money?

*[The rich person will, naturally, look to their wealth to help them - it pays for university, health care, leisure activities etc. When faced with problems, their wealth helps them overcome them. However, while the poor may have less they may still look to money as their security - they may save it and spend it very carefully. They may work hard at trying to earn more. They may wish they had more, resenting those who do, or take part in things like the lottery to try and win it.]*

9. Jesus describes riches as deceitful (**Mark 4:19**). What does he mean by that?

*[Riches promise you what they ultimately cannot give you: security and happiness. To have money helps, but it can also hinder virtuous character of formation and faith.]*

10. Look at **Hebrews 13:5**: How can you keep your life free from the love of money? What's the connection with contentment?

# Session 3

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## TRIALS, TEMPTATIONS & AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE

*Read James 1:12-18*

1. Considering **v12**, biblically, what does it mean to be blessed?

*[The word blessed can also mean happy. So, biblically, we might say to be blessed is to find one's contentment and joy in God. In addition, in the Old Testament, blessing comes with living in covenant relationship with God (Deuteronomy 28:1-14) and having a life profoundly shaped by God's word (Ps 1). So, to be blessed is to reap all the fruit of knowing and loving God, not least of which are a stability, rootedness and fruitfulness in all of life's seasons.]*

- What are the alternatives to remaining steadfast under trial?
- The word 'test' in v12 is the same as tempted/tempts in v13. How might times of trial result in times of temptation?
- What temptations might be specific to times of trial and difficulty?

*[Different people will experience different temptations in times of trial, but they may include anger at God (or others); doubting the goodness of God; self-pity; self-condemnation (because they blame themselves for their troubles); resignation among others.]*

- Given this, why is remaining steadfast under trial synonymous with loving God?

*[To remain steadfast says that we love God more than sin]*

2. What is 'the crown of life'?

*[It is the future, eternal reward for believers who have been faithful; it is the commendation of Christ: 'well done, good and faithful servant!']*

- Why might we struggle to let our future reward influence the way we see and handle suffering now?

3. Look at **v13**: what's the implication of 'when he is tempted'?

*[Temptation is common to all. It's not if, but when. It is a normal, to be expected part of the Christian life.]*

- Why might someone think God is tempting them?

*[For example, someone might say things like: 'God put me in this situation, it's his fault I'm facing this' Or, 'God made me like this, with these desires. The fact I'm being tempted is his fault, not mine.']*

- What might be the consequences of thinking like this?

*[Someone who thinks like this may be more prepared to give in to temptation. They may also think unworthy thoughts of God and be angry at him, thinking him to be two-faced: telling them not to give in to temptation while at the same time tempting them.]*

4. Why is the fact that God cannot be tempted, and tempts no one, both reassuring and sobering?

*[He can never be tempted to turn against us and so will never turn against us; however, there is also never an excuse for giving into temptation - it's never something God wants]*

5. Considering **v14**, what does James teach us about the root of our temptations?

*[We are tempted, and then sin, because we have wrong desires within. The desires are ours. That is the root of our temptation.]*

- What's a 'lure'? - what does it mean to be lured?

*[A lure is like a bait. It pretends to be good when in fact it is leading you into a trap. Fly-fishermen use lures that look like flies/insects to tempt the fish to bite the hook.]*

- How would you describe the relationship between internal and external influences in temptation?

*[External influences work on our desires - they entice us by appealing to our desires. We face an enemy with us just as much as an enemy outside us.]*

- How can understanding the way temptation works help direct our fight against sin?
  - How can we change our desires?

*[You might also consider that it is not always our desires that need to change but how we seek to fulfil them. The desire may be good: to be loved, secure, have deep relationships. But how we seek to fulfil them may not be.]*

6. Look at **v15**. In what ways does sin bring forth death?

*[The first sin brought physical death into the world and, ultimately, sin leads to eternal death. However, sin also brings forth death in our lives before we die. It kills our virtues and characters; it destroys peace and hope and joy etc]*

7. Considering **v16-17**, while temptation does not come from God, what does?

- In what ways might we be deceived (v16) about the origin of good gifts in our lives?

*[We might credit ourselves, or others, with their origin, or think we deserve them or have earned them.]*

- How might being deceived on this affect the way we see good things and respond to them?

*[We may misuse good things - forgetting they have a good purpose derived from the good God who gives them; we will not cultivate gratitude and thankfulness; we will think they are 'ours' and hold on to them too tightly, not sharing/giving up when we should; we may mistake them for god-things as opposed to good things and come to love them, or trust in them, too much.]*

- How does knowing where they come from help us rightly enjoy good things?

8. What encouragement is there in knowing God does not change like the shifting shadows?

9. Look at **v18**: If temptation and sin bring forth death, what does God's work bring forth?

*[New life/new birth]*

- How does he do it?

*[His will and word]*

- Look at **Ephesians 1:13**. What does this have in common with what James writes?

- What is the word of truth?

*[The word of truth is the gospel.]*

- Look at **John 1:13**. Do we become Christians because we decide, or God decides?

*[We are born again by God's will. God chooses us and calls us and gives us the faith to believe and regenerates our hearts. However, our response to that work, our 'decision' is a genuine, free decision. We are not coerced.]*

- What does it mean to be 'a kind of firstfruits of his creatures'?

*[The first fruits is the first batch of the harvest. It's a sign that the rest of the harvest is on its way]*

# Session 4

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## HEARERS & DOERS OF THE WORD

1. Has anyone ever told you you're a good listener? Why?
  - o What makes a good listener?

*Read James 1:19-27*

2. Look again at v19. Before we look at the reason James gives, why is it wise to be 'quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger'?
  - o How are those three things (hearing, speaking, anger) - and the speed at which we do them - linked?

*[If we fail to cultivate listening skills, we will be in danger of leaping in with our response before we've actually properly heard the other person. And if we 're not listening carefully but instead saying what we want to say, we're likely to get angered more easily. So, being a careful listener, is key to being measured and nuanced in our own speech, and not given to anger.]*

- How are you doing in these areas? Do you find them easy?
- In what ways are these qualities perfected in Christ?

3. Considering v20, what reason does James give for being slow to anger? And why is he right?

*[He says that the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. When James refers to the righteousness of God, he has in mind something different from the righteousness that is counted to us in Christ that Paul talks so much about. James has in mind the righteous life God wants us to live - the kind of life that reflects God's righteousness to the world. Us getting angry over things - especially getting angry quickly, without properly listening and reflecting - does not achieve that righteous life, and neither does it encourage it in others, as they will respond to our anger with their own.]*

4. Considering **v21**, why might putting away filthiness and wickedness be linked to receiving the implanted word with meekness?

*[It is through hearing and understand God's word, and taking it to heart, that we can become aware that certain attitudes and behaviours are wrong and want to stop doing them.]*

- How might 'putting away' and receiving the implanted word be the fruit of being 'quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger'?

*[Being quick to hear etc are attitudes that put us in a better position to hear God speak to us through his word. That receptivity means we will hear the word, act on it and part of that will entail putting away wrong behaviours etc.]*

- How does the implanted word save our souls? What's the word, who implants it and how does it save us?

*[The word is God's word, more specifically the gospel. It is implanted by God's Spirit, who brings us to new birth through it. It saves us by bringing us to repentance and faith in Christ.]*

5. Look at **v22**. How common is hearing but not doing the word, do you think? Why?

- Why do we deceive ourselves if we do this?

*[We think we're doing what God wants, that we're 'spiritual' by hearing God's word, but we're not if we don't go on and do it. In fact, we're blind to the real state of our hearts and lives.]*

- What does Jesus have to say about this?

*[Think of the parable of the wise and foolish builders, Matt 7:24-27.]*

- There is a saying, 'actions speak louder than words.' Do they? Why or why not?

6. Re-read **v23-25**. Given James' illustration, in what ways is God's word like a mirror?

*[God's word shows us what we are really like - the good and the bad. It shows us who we are in Christ, but it also shows us where we still have to grow and change. Also as we respond to that word, either well or badly, it reveals the state of our hearts.]*

- In **v23-24**, why is James' use of someone looking in a mirror a fitting one for someone who hears but doesn't do?

*[When we look in the mirror and see something wrong, we act on it - we brush our hair, fix the make-up, do up the zip etc So, when we read something in God's word that shows us something we need to do, we should do it. If we don't it would be like someone walking away from a physical mirror knowing something is wrong but not putting it right.]*

*[When we look in the mirror and see something wrong, we act on it - we brush our hair, fix the make-up, do up the zip etc So, when we read something in God's word that shows us something we need to do, we should do it. If we don't it would be like someone walking away from a physical mirror knowing something is wrong but not putting it right.]*

- Do you have any practices that help you be a good hearer and doer of the word?

7. In **v25**, James mentions 'the law of liberty'. Can religious law keeping bring freedom?

*[The answer is no. Religious law keeping can bring about a degree of morality, but at the cost of self-righteousness and pride. It can also bring despair as we realise we can't do what the law says. So rather than free us, law further imprisons us - to sin and to despair over our sin.]*

- Given this, what does James mean by this term?

*[James is referring to the entirety of God's word - what the Jewish people called the torah. The whole counsel of God - **the law** that convicts us of our sin and **the gospel** that shows us the way to peace and righteousness through Christ. It gives liberty - from sin, judgment, despair and death.]*

- Why does perseverance in doing matter? Why is it easier to start something than finish it?
- Look at **Hebrews 12:1-2**. How is Christ our example in persevering in doing good?

- What motivated him?

- How might a failure to persevere in doing good show itself in our lives?

*[Someone might become cynical or slow to serve others; they might be more self-centred, feeling that they've 'already done their part.' They might neglect the means of grace, such as prayer, Bible reading and*

*church attendance – the things that can fuel a desire to do good works for God’s glory.]*

- ‘The road to hell is paved with good intentions.’ Discuss.

*[For example, plenty of people have the intention of doing something good - whether that’s some act of service or generosity. Fewer people start to do it. Even fewer carry it through to completion. Genuine, saving faith will show itself in the desire, the doing and the finishing of good deeds.]*

- What does it mean that the person who is a doer of the word will ‘be blessed in his doing’?

*[There is reward in this life for doing good. The ability to do good is itself a gracious gift of God; there is a joy in seeing others helped and blessed by your actions; there is growth in faith and trust as we see how God helps us achieve things we would otherwise not have done. There is gratitude and worship in seeing how he has used someone like us.]*

8. Look at **v26**. Why is a failure to control our tongues a warning sign of deeper problems, and especially of self-deceit?

*[The words we say are like a window on our hearts. If our tongues are out of control it’s because our hearts are. We can pretend otherwise, but if we do we are deceiving ourselves.]*

9. In **v27**, how does James describe the kind of religion God approves of?

- Why do these things matter so much to God?

*[They are a reflection of his character. He is a good of love, justice and righteousness, who cares for the vulnerable, as the verses below show.]*

- How do we know these things matter to God, and what’s the link between that and being a hearer and doer of the word?

*[We know because God tells us in his word: see Psalm 68:5-6; Deuteronomy 10:17-20, 24:19-22; Micah 6:6-8, Is 1:16-17. When we hear this word, and understand it, and let it change the way we treat the vulnerable, we are being hearers and doers who put into practice the religion God approves of.]*

- Look at **Matthew 25:34-40**. What motive is there here for caring for the vulnerable?

*[When we do it, we do it not just for Christ but to Christ.]*

- How are you doing these things at the moment? If not, what steps could you take to do so?
- How might the world stain us, and what might this have to do with caring for the vulnerable?

*[We can be conformed to the world's way of seeing the poor and vulnerable - among other things, that their poverty is their fault, or we should keep our wealth for ourselves by pursuing the comfortable life.]*

# Session 5

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## MERCY OVER PARTIALITY

1. What kind of people would be in your perfect church?

*Read James 2:1-13*

2. Considering v1, why is showing partiality while believing in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, contradictory?

*[Christ is the Lord of glory, yet he humbled himself for us. He did not show partiality towards us. We were/are unworthy of his attention, but he gave it freely.]*

3. Considering v2-4, what judgment, or assumptions, is a person who behaves like this making?

*[They're making a judgement about the worth of an individual - based on their appearance of their wealth]*

- o Why might we/a church show partiality like this? What is underneath such an attitude?

*[There are many potential reasons, but for example, as well as making generalised judgements as to someone's 'worth' we may think that this person would be useful (or not!) to know – that I or my church might benefit from befriending them – so our motive for showing partiality might be selfish or self-seeking, or because we mistakenly think the Lord's work depends on the wealthy and influential.]*

- o Imagine two people like James describes came to our church one Sunday morning. How might a scenario like the one James depicts play out? What stages might there be?
- o What else does the Bible have to say about judging by external appearances? Why does it highlight this as an issue?

*[The choosing of David: 1 Samuel 16:6-7; The gospel is for Jew and Gentile - God does not show partiality: Romans 2:9-11. Judging by*

*external appearances fails to rightly evaluate the heart, or the worth of the person as an image bearer of God. It can also lead us to make wrong assumptions about someone's trustworthiness or giftedness etc.]*

- What other kinds of people might we/churches/church leaders show partiality to?

*[The intelligent, high-ranking. The famous. Those we think are 'strategic'. Race/colour.]*

- Are you prone to doing this?
- Considering the gospel, are we the rich man or the poor man?
- How does the gospel free us from evaluating people like this?

*[When we understand we're the poor man, we won't be partial]*

4. Look at **v5**. In what ways might this be true? What might James be referring to?

*[To choose the poor does not mean God favours them; though the prophets make it clear he has special regard for them. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says the poor are blessed, and elsewhere warns the rich, as do the other NT writers; See also what Paul says about those who are called: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; God simply does not choose based on 'worth'.]*

5. Considering **v6-7**, how might the rich oppress and blaspheme Christians and Christ?

*[James is likely referring to a specific local situation, but it's still worth thinking how this might happen today.]*

6. Look at **v8**. What does James say is the 'royal law' of scripture?

- Look at **Luke 10:25-37**. What was the lawyer wanting to know?
- How do the attitude and actions of the Samaritan exemplify what it means to show no partiality?
- Look at **Romans 13:8-10**. Why does loving our neighbour sum up God's law?

*[Paul lists several of the Ten Commandments that refer to how we are to behave towards others. Negatively speaking, to break any of these commandments is to fail to love the person we are sinning against – who is also our neighbour. Positively speaking – and taking the*

*commandments Paul gives – to honour someone else’s marriage, to protect the life of another, to honour their property and to refuse to feel jealousy or envy towards them is to love them.]*

7. Considering **v8-9**, how does partiality break God’s law? (How is it a failure to love your neighbour as yourself?)

*[If we were poor we would not want others to be partial against us. Rather, we would want them to care for us and to do us good. Therefore, to love our neighbour as ourselves is to treat them as we would want to be treated if we were in their shoes.]*

8. In **v10-11**, what consequence of showing partiality does James give? What’s his logic?

*[James is arguing that to show partiality is to break God’s law. Therefore, someone cannot congratulate themselves that they are keeping God’s law – and thus are living a good life - because they don’t commit adultery or murder, when all the time they’re showing partiality against the poor. So, to show partiality is to be a law-breaker, it is to be one whom God’s law condemns.]*

9. Considering **v12-13**: what motive does James give us for showing mercy and not partiality?

*[It is the motive of eternal judgement – to live knowing that one day we will give an account for the mercy we have, or have not, shown to others.]*

- Thinking more widely, what other motives are there for doing the right thing?
- Which motives work best for you, do you think?

# Session 6

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## FAITH & WORKS

1. If you're wondering whether someone might be a Christian or not, what sort of things do you look at?

*Read James 2:14-26*

2. Why does getting the relationship between faith, works and salvation right matter?

*[If we take the message of the Bible seriously, then there are few things more important than getting the answer to the question, 'How are we saved?' right. Are we saved by what we do (good works, or having the right doctrine) or by God's grace? Allied to this is another question: what should motivate our good works, or a life of integrity? Is it the fear of facing God's judgement/hope of earning his favour, or is it the knowledge that we already have his favour? In summary, what is the root and the fruit? Christianity teaches us that salvation by God's grace, through faith, is the root and good works the fruit. Legalistic religion (and secularism) teaches that good works are the root and the earned approval of God or others is the fruit/reward.]*

- How do 'religious' people tend to see the relationship?

*[In two possible ways - both of which James draws out later: that you are saved by your good works; or, that having right doctrine is what 'saves' you.]*

- How do 'secular' people tend to see it?

*[That there is no such thing as salvation, but what matters is living a good life (a life of good works; or, that being 'spiritual' or being sincere/'a person of faith' is what matters, of whatever faith.)*

3. How does what James writes in **v14-17** relate to what has come already in James?

*[In 1:26-27 James wrote about the religion that God approves of: care for the needy/vulnerable; in 2:1-8 he described the sin of partiality - especially a partiality against the poor, and the command to love our neighbour.]*

4. Considering the example James gives in **v15-16**, what do the person's words seem to say, but their actions *definitely* say?

*[Their words seem to express love and care for a brother or sister. Their actions display a lack of love, and a failure to see this other person as a brother or sister. Therefore, their actions suggest that they do not love their neighbour as themselves, and they are not a true member of God's family.]*

- How would genuine faith have caused the person to respond differently?

5. According to **v18**, what is the relationship between faith and works?

*[Genuine faith will show itself by good works. That is, good works are the evidence of true faith.]*

6. Look at **v19**. What point is James making?

*[You can 'believe' right doctrine, but still not be saved. Having your doctrine correct is not the same as trusting God for your salvation and then living that out in good works.]*

- Why is having correct beliefs not the same as having saving faith?
- What kind of 'churches' or individuals might be guilty of this?

*[Those that elevate or highly value doctrine, without connecting that to heart trust of God, the need for the new birth, and the changed life that results. Head and no heart, rather than head and heart.]*

7. How are the two examples James uses of false faith (in **v15-16** and **v19**) different? How might we categorise these?

*[We might say the first is more feelings based, the other more intellectual. The first is 'feel good' the other 'think right'. Neither is the gospel.]*

- Is it possible to have genuine believers (maybe even churches) with different emphases? For example, can one be into worship, or deep theology, or sports ministries, and another into care for the poor/needy? 'You have your care for the poor, I have my love of worship ministry, or great teaching, or outreach through sport'?

*[The answer is yes and no! Yes, it is possible to have different emphases according to our gifting and callings, but all true faith must result in love for our neighbour, especially the needy, or it is not true faith.]*

8. Look at **v20**: Is James being insulting when he describes people as 'foolish'?

*[No, he is drawing on the book of Proverbs that distinguishes between the wise and foolish person. The wise person fears God - they seek to live all of life trusting in God and the wisdom of his ways. Whereas the foolish person thinks they can live life according to their own moral standards etc. So here, in calling someone foolish, James is drawing attention to the fact that they are not living according to God's wisdom - which is trust in him.]*

9. Read **Genesis 15:1-6**: this is a key passage for the New Testament writers to understand the role of faith in salvation and being declared righteous by God.

- What is remarkable about Abraham believing God's promise?

*[By now he and Sarah his wife are very old. They have years of infertility and dashed hopes behind them. Yet, Abraham believes that God can – and will – do what he says.]*

- When God asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22), and Abraham obeys, what does this tell us about Abraham's faith?

- If Abraham's faith was not genuine, how might Abraham have responded?

- Overall, did Abraham obey first or believe first? What led to what?

*[Abraham first believed that God could, and would, give him a son through Sarah, and that through that son a great nation would come and the world would be blessed. That son was Isaac. Then when God told him to sacrifice Isaac, Hebrews tells us that Abraham believed that 'God was able even to raise him from the dead' (Hebrews 11:19). It was because Abraham believed that he acted and was willing to sacrifice Isaac. So faith – trusting in God and his promise - came first, but resulted in action – works.]*

10. Compare what James writes in **v21-24** to what Paul writes in **Romans 4:1-12**. How do what James and Paul write complement (rather than contradict) each other?

- How are James and Paul using the word 'justified' differently?

*[Paul uses justified to refer to our legal status before God - the declaration of 'not guilty' that comes with faith in Christ's atoning work on our behalf. James uses it in the sense of our faith being proven to be genuine by our works - one might say our faith is found not guilty of being a false faith. How we live our lives proves it's the real thing - it justifies our profession to be genuine Christians.]*

11. Look at v25: Who was Rahab? In what ways did she believe in God and demonstrate that by what she did?

*[See Joshua 2:1-7; 6:17, 22-25]*

- If Rahab's faith was not genuine how might her behaviour towards the spies have been different?

12. Why might James choose Rahab as an example alongside Abraham?

*[They are complete opposites: Abraham was the father of the Jewish people, Hagar a gentile. Abraham a man, Hagar a woman. Abraham a wealthy, successful nomad, Hagar a prostitute. It demonstrates that faith showing itself in works holds for all people.]*

13. In what ways does your faith change the way you live? Can you give any examples of when your behaviour would have been very different if you did not trust God?

# Session 7

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## TAMING THE TONGUE

1. How powerful are words? Why?

*Read James 3:1-12*

2. Considering the passage as a whole,

- When James talks about the tongue, what is he really addressing?

*[He's addressing not the organ itself, the little muscle we call 'the tongue', but how we use it: the words we say and the power of them – our conversation and what lies behind it.]*

- What illustrations of the tongue's power, or influence, does he use?

3. Considering **v1**, what might motivate someone to become a teacher within the church?

*[Someone may desire to become a teacher in the church because they feel called by God, and equipped by him to teach, or because they see a need and think that, in the absence of anyone else stepping forward, they should at least try to fill that need. These are noble and good reasons. Less good reasons are the desire for a position or a platform, or a desire to impose one's own beliefs on a congregation and change the position or direction of a church to better fit their own beliefs.]*

- Why might God judge those who teach with greater strictness?

*[Someone who teaches is claiming that they know the truth. If they then fail to live by it, while requiring others to, they are doubly guilty; Because to instruct others about God is a serious thing – get it wrong and the impact on others' lives can be great. They are judged with greater strictness because the possibility for harm is greater.]*

- Should that deter you from teaching the gospel to others?

4. Look at **v2-4**: Why does control of the tongue have implications for self-control in other areas of our lives?

*[Jesus said that what we say is an overflow of what the heart thinks or feels. Thus, if we are gaining control of our speech it's likely that is because things are beginning to come into right order in our hearts: we want to honour and glorify God, not just 'fly off the handle' or criticise others out of a self-love.]*

- How easy do you find it to control your speech? Are there any specific times/places you find it harder?

5. Look at **v5-6**. How might the tongue do damage far beyond its size?

- Fires can quickly get out of control and spread. How and why might what we say with our tongues behave similarly?
- What would it look like for an 'entire course of life' to be set on fire by the tongue?

*[How we speak and what we say can have a profound impact on our relationships and friendship circles, our ability to work in teams or hold down a job etc. Thus, the course of our life can be very negatively impacted by a failure to gain control of our tongues.]*

- How is the tongue set on fire by hell?

*[In as much as the way we think or view the world, or what we value is influenced negatively by evil/ungodly sources, so what comes out of the heart – our speech – will be similarly influenced by 'hell'.]*

- How would you group/categorise sinful patterns of speech?

*[For example: Untruths; boasting; verbal assaults on others; swearing; false promises; gossip etc]*

6. Look at **v8**. In what way is the tongue a 'restless evil'? And what has this got to do with taming wild animals?

- James combines 'restless evil' with 'full of deadly poison'. What animal does this suggest and why might James be making that suggestion?

7. In **v9-10**, what inconsistency is James highlighting?

- How might you bless God and curse others?
- Does the way you speak differ according to different situations you find yourself in? Does that matter?

8. According to v11-12, what is James suggesting is the underlying problem for our tongues?

*[The problem is the spring and the type of tree - in other words, our hearts. What we say is the overflow of our hearts.]*

- Read **Matthew 15:10-20** - what does Jesus say about where the problem lies and what's the solution?
- How can you get control of your tongue?

*[Awareness, repentance; address the heart; prayer; growth in fruits of the Spirit]*

9. How have words had an impact on your life or those close to you - for good or bad?

- Have your words had a positive or negative impact on others? Can you give any examples?
- If you had to summarise for someone, why does our speech matter?

# Session 8

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## THE MEEKNESS OF WISDOM

Read James 3:13-18

1. In **v13** James mentions meekness. When you think of someone being 'meek' what sort of person do you picture?

- o How would you define meekness? Is it the same as 'weakness'?

*[It is not the same as weakness! It has been described as 'strength under control'.]*

2. To help understand what the Bible means by meekness, look at some other occasions this same word is used (sometimes it is translated as gentleness): **1 Corinthians 6:21** and **2 Timothy 2:25** (= gentleness); **2 Corinthians 10:1**; **Galatians 5:23, 6:1**; **Ephesians 4:2**; and **James 1:21**.

- o How do these verses give insight on what is meant by 'meekness'?

3. Considering **v13**, how do the issues James raises link to what has gone before?

*[He has already addressed the subject of wisdom (1:5-6), of meekness (1:21) and of good works (2:14ff). Now he combines them.]*

- o What does it mean to be wise and understanding? (Look at **Job 28:28** for some help!)

*[In the immediate context of this passage, and the wider context of the rest of James and the New Testament as a whole, to be wise and understanding is to be someone who lives in the light of Christ, the gospel and eternity. It is to have your life more shaped by a heavenly/eternal/Christ-centred mindset than an earthly one of jealousy, envy and selfish ambition. It is to be more shaped by the truth of Christ, than the deceitful of darkness. In addition, Job 28:28 tells us that to be wise is to fear God, and to have understanding is to turn away from evil. That is a neat summary of the above!]*

- How might we assess how we are doing at growing in wisdom and understanding?
4. Why does James say our good conduct/good works should be done in the 'meekness of wisdom'? What's the alternative to doing them in meekness?
- Why might thinking about/talking about/doing good works lead to the opposite of doing them in meekness?
- [If we think we are saved by good works, or if we compare ourselves to other favourably based on our good works, or are critical of others because of their lack of them, it will breed pride in our hearts, not humility - the pharisee praying beside the tax collector is a case study in this.]*
5. Why does true wisdom produce meekness?
6. How is Jesus our example when it comes to meekness flowing out of wisdom?
- [Jesus was meek - lowly and humble of heart, and yet strong. He was perfect in his attitudes and moral responses, without giving in to the fear of man.]*
7. In **v14-15**, James contrasts true wisdom, and the meekness it produces, with another kind of wisdom.
- What does this other sort of 'wisdom' produce?
- [jealousy and selfish ambition]*
- What is its source and nature?
- [earthly, unspiritual, demonic]*
- How might jealousy and selfish ambition motivate someone's conduct (even when that conduct appears to be good works)?
8. Look at **v16**. Why do jealousy and selfish ambition lead to disorder and vile practice?
- In particular, how might they be linked to discord or relational breakdown (issues that James begins to pick up on in v17 and chapter 4)?
9. In **v17** James describes a wisdom that is from above. How does this link to what he has said previously in **James 1:5** and **James 1:17**?

- How might a person whose life is marked by this 'from above' wisdom deal with:
  - disagreements?
  - failure or inconsistency in others?
  - people with differing degrees of social capital (like wealth, influence, academic level)?
- Think of a recent disagreement you had... would the meekness of wisdom have changed the way you responded?

10. Considering **v18**, James has described how true wisdom produces peaceableness in those who have it. What does it mean to 'sow in peace', or 'make peace'?

*[By the words we use, or the tone or body language we adopt, we can either inflame situations/disagreements or bring peace. By choosing to ignore insults, or by recognising our reputation does not matter as much as we think it does, we can sow peace in conflictual situations. By saying sorry, or not bringing up past hurts we can sow peace.]*

- How does righteousness grow out of peacemaking?

*[As before, James is talking of the righteousness of a good/upright/righteous life lived according to God's ways (not our legal standing of righteousness in Christ)]*

# Session 9

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## PASSIONS, PRIDE & THEIR EFFECT ON RELATIONSHIPS

*Read James 4:1-10*

1. Look at **v1-2**: What does James say is at the root of quarrels and fights?

*[It is our passions and desires – the things we want and the strength with which we want them. And when we cannot get what we want, we fight. The thing itself may be good or bad, but either way it has become an idol in our heart, and we need it to feel good about ourselves and life in general.]*

- o How might this be true between friends, family, a married couple or church members?

*[When someone is not giving us what we want – maybe their attention, time, support or respect – and when these things matter a lot to us because they have taken on the form of an idol in our heart, then we will resent it and quarrel – either by actively going on the attack, or passively by withdrawing from them emotionally.]*

- o When you're involved in a quarrel, do you tend to think that you or the other person is principally to blame? Why?
- o How are 'passions', 'desires' (literally, over-desires) and 'coveting' different but linked?

*[We might say that a passion is something we feel strongly about – it matters to us; a desire is something we want – too much; and to covet is to want something someone else has, or we can't get, and it eats away at us.]*

2. Considering **v3**, why might our prayers go unanswered?

*[Strictly speaking, our prayers are always answered, just not in the affirmative! But James highlights one reason why God may not give us what we want – because we're asking for selfish/self-centred reasons. The thing itself might be good, but the reason we want it is not.]*

- How might you know if this is the case for you?

*[When we are not getting what we are asking God for in prayer, it should prompt us to examine our motives, and our responses to the fact that we are not getting it. If we are finding our reaction is anger or frustration, or a cooling in our love for God, these would be signs that our desire for this thing is not coming from a place of faith and trust in God's goodness to us.]*

- How might allowing God's priorities to shape our prayers influence our desires and thus conflicts?

*[Consider the two great commands, to love God and neighbour. If these are shaping our hearts and then our prayers – and we are praying for our love for God and others to grow, and for opportunities to serve him and others, it is highly likely to also influence what we're wanting in life and how we handle conflicts with those we know we are called to love. In addition, know what really matters in life will put the 'failure' of others to give us what we want into perspective.]*

- Read **Psalm 16:11**. What does this tell us about where we should look for our desires to be fulfilled?

*[The psalm says that fullness of joy is found in the presence of God and at his right hand are 'pleasures for evermore.' But who, or what, is at God's right hand? Christ. So, ultimately all our deepest desire for joy and pleasure are met in Christ. Every other good thing we desire may give us a taste of heaven, but he is the real thing.]*

3. Look at **v4**. To call people 'adulterers' is strong! Why does James do so? Why is sin spiritual adultery?

*[In the Old Testament, the prophets frequently used the image of adultery to describe the way God's people had turned away from him – their true husband - and run after other gods/idols – their illicit lovers. James is saying that when someone wants something so much they are prepared to fight and quarrel over it, that thing has taken on idol-like proportions in their heart, and they too have become adulterers. They have given their heart to another.]*

- Given what James has said so far, what might 'friendship with the world' look like - for you or a church?

4. Considering **v5**, God also desires something passionately. What is it? And what does this mean?

*[Genesis 2:7 tells us that God created man and breathed life into him – he has made us with a ‘spirit’, and it is this spirit that the Lord is jealous for. He passionately desires that who we are at our deepest level is in right relationship – one of worship – with him (John 4:23-24). It is the jealousy of one who loves us so much he does not want us running after false lovers – the idols of our hearts.]*

5. In **v6** James talks about the proud. How are quarrels and fights linked to pride?
- How do you know if you’re proud? Are you?
  - How might God oppose the proud? What form might this take?

*[God may oppose the proud by bringing circumstances into their lives that humble them, that help them realise that they do not know everything and cannot do everything – that they are not ‘God’. He may even use their pride – their overconfidence – to bring them down.]*

6. How does what James writes in **v6-7** provide us with a better way of handling conflict?

*[It is to pursue the path of humility – to know that we are not always right and do not know everything, and that what we do and the motives behind what we do are either wrong or mixed at best. To have such an attitude means we will be more humble about our opinions. In addition, to submit to God is to want to see his will and his ways play out in our attitudes and relationships – not least to seek to love those we are in potential conflict with. Then James says we are to ‘resist the devil’ – in a conflictual situation this means we are aware that there is a battle on and the enemy of our souls has a vested interest in seeing our pride grow, or the relationship destroyed.]*

- How do we practically submit ourselves to God?
  - How do we practically resist the devil?
  - ‘Behind our sin lies the fact that we do not resist temptation long enough.’ Discuss
7. Considering **v8**, how do we draw near to God, what’s that got to do with heart and hands, and what’s the promise if we do?

*[We draw near to God through repentance and faith. Repentance is turning away from the wrong things we think, say and do – in James’s words, we ‘cleanse our hands’ (what we do) and ‘purify our hearts’ (what we think and therefore say). And to approach God with faith is to place our trust fully in him and his word – which is again to purify our hearts, and to turn away from our ‘double-mindedness’.]*

- What does it mean to be double minded and do you recognise this in yourself? (Think also of **James 1:6-8**)
  - How might 'cleansing our hands' and 'purifying our hearts' have an impact on our quarrels?
8. In **v9-10**, what does James tell us should be a right response to our pride and quarrels?
- What's the promise if we humble ourselves before the Lord and repent?
  - What does it mean to be exalted by God?

# Session 10

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## WHO ARE YOU TO JUDGE YOUR NEIGHBOUR?

*Read James 4:11-12*

1. If your speech was recorded for a week, how much criticism of others would it pick up?

2. What reasons might lie behind our speaking badly of others or judging them?

*[There may be valid reasons for criticisms of others' behaviour. However, often when we vocalise these we are doing so to make ourselves look or feel good. Instead of trusting in Christ's justification and righteousness we have to create our own. And so criticism of others becomes a form of self-justification. As such it can display our feelings of inadequacy or insecurity.]*

- Is there a difference between speaking evil of someone and judging someone?

*[Yes and no! Yes, because (as we will discuss in the next question) there are times when we are called to make judgements about others. No, because when we are speaking evil of another we are making judgements about them: that they are less worthy/moral than us, that we are better people than they are. These kind of 'judgements' come from our prideful and sinful attitudes.]*

3. Is there a right form of judging/evaluating another person? (If yes, give examples). How does this differ from the kind of judging James talks about here?

*[There is: we are called to judge teachers by their fruit and doctrine; those who claim to be brothers by the divisive impact they have on churches etc. We also make appropriate judgements all the time - is this someone I'd like to employ or work with, do they have the necessary skills etc? Is this someone I'd like to marry? Is this person's behaviour wise/godly, or are they the kind of person Proverbs tells me to avoid (Proverbs 13:20)? This differs from a judgmental attitude that is more about making me look/feel good by making this other person look bad.]*

- How do you know when your right/wise/biblical evaluation of someone, or their conduct, drifts into judgmentalism?

*[We must constantly be on our guard for this. We should consider questions such as, am I thinking the best of them or putting the worst spin on things? Am I in possession of enough information to make the kind of judgements I am making? Do I want the best for them, and am I praying for that? Is their reputation safe in my hands? Do I feel better about myself because I am speaking them down?]*

4. How might this kind of wrong speech show itself in churches or Christian friendship groups?

5. When we judge or criticise someone else, we often do so based on our evaluation of their motives. How good are we at rightly evaluating motives? Do you have an example of when, in retrospect, you got this wrong?

6. Why is speaking badly of others, or judging them, equivalent to speaking evil against the law and judging the law? (For help, see **Leviticus 19:16-18!**)

*[The law tells us to love our neighbour and not slander them: If we don't, it is like us saying 'the law's wrong, I know better than it; I know better than the God who gave it.']*

- How do our words of judgement/criticism of others condemn ourselves?

*[We often criticise people for the very things we do ourselves, even if in different forms. For example, we may criticise someone as being a judgmental, critical person! In doing so, our own words condemn us. They show us we know God's law but do not do it.]*

7. How does how we speak of others tell us something about what we think of God?

*[If we lack mercy or grace in the way we speak of others it is likely that our hearts have not adequately understood God's heart of mercy and grace towards us. If we are judgemental towards others, we have likely not understood that God sees the depth of sin in our own hearts and will one day stand in judgement against us. If we speak ill of people it is likely we do not understand how God speaks words of love and life and blessing over us – even though we deserve the opposite.]*

8. According to **v12**, what danger is there in being a judge?

*[We put ourselves in God's place. But only he can save. Thus to make ourselves the judge cuts us off from the real judge and the only one who can save us.]*

- How is sitting in judgment on the law similar to what happened in Eden (**Genesis 3:1-7**)?

*[In the Garden Satan tempted Adam and Eve to question what God had said they could and could not do. In wanting to decide for themselves what was good and evil they put themselves in the place of judge.]*

- How do we see this desire to be our own lawmaker and judge - deciding for ourselves what is right or wrong - in our culture today?
9. How does the gospel get to the root of why we judge and criticise others?
- [We can judge and criticise others as a form of self-justification. We feel better about ourselves in our own eyes and (we think!) in God's eyes by bringing others down. This may be from pride or deep-seated insecurity. But the Gospel tells us we are freely justified by God's grace to us in Christ, so we don't need to judge and criticise others to earn God's favour. We already have it.]*
- How can it help us to stop doing it?

# Session 11

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## MAKING PLANS AND MAKING MONEY

1. What principles guide your decision making?

*Read James 4:13-5:6*

2. Considering the passage as a whole, what overall themes run through it?

*[Both parts (4:13-17 and 5:1-6) begin with 'Come now...' - suggesting James is addressing a common theme. The first is addressed to those who live for profit and self, the second those who live for riches.]*

3. In **v13-14**, what sort of person, or behaviour/attitudes, is James taking aim at?

*[Those who live for themselves, their own plans, and for profit/selfish financial gain.]*

- How do you make plans?
- How does the way we plan our lives/futures reveal things about what we truly believe?
- Look at **Proverbs 16:3, 9**, and **19:20-21**. How would you synthesise these into a way of making plans?

4. Considering **v14**, what biblical theme is he drawing on?

*[The idea that our lives are but a breath. Ecclesiastes addresses this - life as hebel - which literally means mist/breath/smoke - something you can't grasp.]*

- Look at **Ecclesiastes 6:12** and **Psalms 39:4-5**. Is this how you view your life? Why or why not? Why might it be wise to?

5. How do the two attitudes displayed in **v13** and **v15** differ?

- Which approach might give you more security and purpose in life and why?

6. How does James define sin in **v17**?

- Why does remembering this description of sin matter?

*[We tend to think of sin as wrong things we do - sins of commission. We can forget sins of omission. If we only think in terms of commission we will tend to think we are doing better than we actually are.]*

7. Considering **5:1-6**, does James denounce wealth *in and of itself*? Why does it matter that we get what James is saying right?

*[James is not denouncing wealth but wealth hoarded for selfish purposes. This matters because great good can come from wealth that is used for God's glory and the good of others. If we take a negative view of wealth creation, in and of itself, it may perpetuate poverty and injustice.]*

- If we apply this today, who is James aiming his critique at?

8. Look at **Matthew 6:19-21** and **1 Timothy 6:6-10** and **17-19**. How should these verses shape our view of wealth and wealth creation?

9. In **5:1-3**, what future does James foresee for the unjust rich?

- Re-state what James is saying in **v2-3** using modern examples.

10. How do **v4-5** give us a basis for social justice?

*[There is such a thing as 'fraud' - unjust employment conditions are sinful; James says that the Lord of hosts hears the cries of the exploited. If he does, we should too. There is a coming day of judgment - the day of slaughter.]*

- What meaning does the term 'Lord of hosts' carry, and why might this explain why James uses it here?

*[The Lord of hosts = the lord of heaven's armies/hosts of angels. Wealth causes us to think we are godlike - powerful and the rules don't apply to us. Knowing that God is the Lord of hosts reminds us, he is far more powerful than us.]*

# Session 12

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## PATIENCE & SUFFERING

1. Can you think of a time when you had to be patient about getting something before you could enjoy it?

*Read James 5:7-12*

2. In v7, James says 'therefore' - what's he referring back to in v1-6 that explains why he says it?

*[In v1-6 he described how Christians can face oppression by the rich. To rightly handle this, they need to know that God's judgment will surely come one day, and they need to be patient for that day to arrive.]*

3. Considering James's illustration of the farmer, what would become of an impatient farmer?

*[He'd either sow or harvest too soon - either way, he'd eventually pay the price with a poor harvest.]*

- o Considering v7-8: How might impatience for the Lord's return show itself in a Christian's life, especially when life is hard?

*[1. They might quit the faith/give up - thinking 'this doesn't work, Jesus isn't helping me, he isn't coming back, there is no justice.' 2. They might take matters into their own hands - for example, if someone else is responsible for their suffering they may become bitter, seek vengeance/get angry. 3. If their struggle is against sin, they may give in and stop fighting against the sin in their lives - thinking Jesus' return is not happening anytime soon.]*

4. Look at v9. How are grumbling, suffering and patience linked?

*[When we are suffering, we might grumble about the circumstances of our lives, expressing our unhappiness and discontent about the way our life is going. However, in v9, James is talking about grumbling against one another. When we suffer we might grumble against those we think are the cause of our suffering, or those who we think are not helping us enough in our suffering (for example, in*

*the church), or even against those who are not suffering and as a result we are envious of. James gives patience as an antidote to this: patience as we wait for the coming of the Lord when he will put all things right and bring about perfect justice. When we keep that in mind we won't grumble about our circumstances or others – justice will be done, all wrongs will be righted.]*

- What impact can our grumbling have on others (who may also be suffering)?
- How might knowing the judge is standing at the door change the way we speak and behave?

*[Keeping in mind the Lord's return does not just change the way we wait for the judgement of others, it keeps our own judgment in mind - if Jesus could walk in the door at any moment, there are some things we wouldn't say or do!]*

5. Considering **v10**: How did the prophets suffer? How did they demonstrate patience?

*[Nearly all suffered in some way, either physically, or through verbal abuse, or just that their message was not heard. They demonstrated patience in that they rarely got to see the fulfilment of their visions.]*

- Are there any heroes of the faith - either biblical or after, whose attitude to hardship and suffering have inspired you?
- In **v10**, James adds 'in the name of the Lord.' Why and why might this matter for us?

*[You can suffer as a believer not because of the Lord, but because you're being rude/obnoxious!]*

6. Considering **v11**, how did Job demonstrate steadfastness? (For example, read **Job 19:25-26**).

- How does Job's life reveal the compassion and mercy of the Lord? Is that how it would have seemed to Job?

7. Looking at **v10-11** again, is it the trouble free or the steadfast who are blessed? What does this mean for the way we tend to view life?

8. Considering **v12**, look at **Matthew 5:34-37**. What similarities/differences do you see?

- Why should a Christian not need to use oaths?

*[We should be so trustworthy as to make these unnecessary]*

- Practically, what does it mean for your “yes” to be yes and your “no” no’?
  - When you say you’re going to do something, do you always follow through and do it? How might people make excuses/defend not doing this?
- Why can it be hard to be a person of your word?

# Session 13

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## THE POWER OF PRAYER

1. Do you pray more when life is good or when it's not so good?

*Read James 5:13-20*

2. Considering v13, generally, why should the suffering pray?
  - o Why does James need to remind us to pray when suffering? Why might we not pray?

3. Why should the cheerful sing praise?

*[The danger when life is good is that we think we're responsible for our successes. Praise reminds us that everything we have is a gift.]*

4. Considering v14, why should the sick ask for prayer?

*[To be healed; to be encouraged knowing others are with us in our difficulty; because sometimes we need other people's faith to carry us.]*

- o All three situations (suffering, cheerful, sick) call for a response to God. What does this tell us?

*[We should be prayerful, praying people, whatever circumstances we are going through]*

5. In v14, who are the sick to call?

- o Why does it matter that it's the elders as a group and not just someone seen as having a gift of healing?

*[We should not think that James is promoting some sort of special healing ministry within a church. Calling the elders should mean calling the leaders entrusted with shepherding the flock. They should be godly, wise and insightful men, full of the Spirit and faith. This spiritual discernment may be necessary if sin is playing a part in the person's sickness as James goes on to suggest may sometimes be the case.]*

- Why might someone not call the elders to pray over them?

*[They may be embarrassed, or not want to bother them; they may not trust them, or think they have sufficient faith for healing. They may recognise sin is at the root of their health problem and not want to have to confront that.]*

- What are the elders to do? Why?

*[The elders are to come and pray over the sick person and anoint them with oil in the Lord's name. Prayer is the means of bringing God's healing presence to bear upon the situation. It is to ask for his will to be done and his kingly rule to come. Oil, as we will see below, is a symbol of his presence, through the Spirit.]*

- In the Old Testament, what did anointing with oil symbolise? Why might this explain why James describes the elders doing this for a sick person?

*[It symbolised setting apart/consecration to God, of kings and priests. The same is true for the sick person - it symbolises them being set apart for the Lord's special attention; but also, the consecration of a sinner repenting and coming back to God as a result of sickness. It's a symbol of the Spirit, and so anointing with oil may remind us of the Lord's presence and power to heal and restore.]*

6. Considering **v15-16**, where does the power of prayer lie and why does it matter to get this right?

*[The power of prayer is not in prayer itself but in God who we pray for. 'True' prayer, the prayer that has power with God, is an expression of faith in God – not faith in prayer, or ourselves for praying. This matters because it means that even if we have only a little faith our prayers can bring great results because God is great. This can give us great assurance and increase our faith. But if we think the power of prayer lies in the prayer itself, or the fervency, or volume, or length of our prayer we'll never have real assurance we have done enough for God to hear us and answer us, and we will, overtime, become spiritually exhausted.]*

- Does this mean God will always heal? Why or why not?

*[No. We know that the Lord told Paul that he would not be healed, that his power was made perfect in Paul's weakness; we know that Timothy was sick and Paul prescribed wine... presumably he was not healed instantaneously by prayer. In addition, in 4:13-15 James has already*

*encouraged us to view life through the sovereignty of God, not our own desires.]*

7. What is the link between sickness and sin? Is sickness always, sometimes, or never a result of sin?

*[The answer must be sometimes. See John 9:1-3 for an example where sickness/disability was not a cause of sin, and John 5:14 and 1 Corinthians 11:28-30 where it is.]*

- Why does this help make sense of the self-examination suggested in v16?
- Why does this area require great sensitivity? And why might this explain the calling of the elders?

*[To label someone's sickness a result of their sin (or lack of faith) when it isn't, or to falsely reassure them when it is, can do great damage.]*

8. Considering v16, what are some implications of prayer being powerful?

*[This can be God's means to bring about real change, healing and repentance in our and others' lives. We should pray!]*

- What are some reasons we don't pray?
- Why does James stipulate that it's the prayers of a 'righteous' person that have great power?

*[For two reasons: firstly, we are counted righteous in Christ. Because of Christ we can approach God's throne of grace with confidence. Knowing our righteousness in Christ can give us great boldness and confidence in prayer. But secondly, knowing we have been made righteous in Christ will cause us to want to grow in practical, lived-out righteousness; to grow to become more like Christ. If we are not doing this, but rather are deliberately continuing in a life of sin, it should make us question whether we have been made righteous at all, but also we should not think we can live in frank sin and still expect God to graciously hear us. In fact, his refusal to hear our prayers may be one means he uses to bring us to face up to the sin in our lives.]*

- What does the example of Elijah have to do with prayer and sin?

*[He was a man of prayer, he was righteous, and his prayers were answered. But also, the situation the people of Israel found themselves in*

*was as a result of their sin... as James is suggesting might sometimes be the case with sickness.]*

9. Look at **v19-20**. What might wandering away from the truth look like?

*[Someone might stop coming to church, or come intermittently; they might start questioning central parts of the gospel, or the need for repentance and faith; they may begin to excuse their own or other people's sins.]*

- Why does looking out for one another matter?