

Faith Works

Talk is cheap! It's easy to say we have faith in Jesus without putting that faith into action. The book of James is a 'how to' manual sharing wisdom to help us live life the way Jesus is calling us to.

The letter of James is not addressed to anyone in particular (1:2). Unlike the letters of Paul that teach us about spiritual issues such as Jesus' death, the resurrection, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, James deals with more practical topics such as controlling the tongue, temptations and resisting the lure of riches.

A superficial reading of James may give the impression that the author jumps abruptly from one theme to another. But this is because James writes in a circular manner, mentioning several different themes that are addressed again later on in his letter.

It will really help your understanding of the book of James, if you can read through the whole of the book of James before the next time you meet as a small group.

Let's put our faith to work!

James 1

1. The following themes are all mentioned in James chapter 1 – trials, wisdom, wealth or riches, true religion and words. Can you pick out the verses where they are mentioned? What other topics are introduced in chapter 1? Which of these topics do you feel will be most helpful for you to be challenged about?

Read James 1:12-17

2. What are some of the key areas that we can be tempted in?

3. Oscar Wilde said this: "The only way to get rid of temptation is to yield to it. I can resist everything but temptation". Why does James say this is a bad idea? What are the results of continually giving in to temptation?

4. What are the positive benefits of resisting temptation?

5. How does knowing that God is good and gives good things encourage you to fight against sin in your life?

6. What strategies do we have to overcome temptation?

James 2: 14-26
Faith and Love in action

1. What challenge or encouragement did you take away from Sunday's talk on James 1?
2. Read James 2:14-26. What is the big idea of this passage? Or, another way to think about it, what question does this passage seek to answer?
3. In verse 26 James states, "Faith without deeds is dead". How do we grapple with this statement alongside the belief that we are saved by grace alone?
4. We can get caught up in the theological controversy of this passage, but the application is straight-forward. What is this application? What exactly is James calling us to do?
5. James specifically challenges us to help fellow believers who are in desperate need. What believers in need has God placed in your own life?
6. Is there a verse from this chapter that you could memorise this week?

James 3

The power of words

Words can either build others up or cut them down. What does James have to say about how our faith should change the way we speak to and about others?

Read James 3: 1-12

1. Why is it so difficult for us at times to say the right thing instead of the wrong thing?
2. James uses some practical examples to explain why controlling our tongues is a key to maturity. He also compares the tongue to a horse's bit and a ship's rudder. What do these images have in common?
3. The comparison of the tongue with fire is a powerful image. Discuss with the group any experiences you have had where you have seen something of this effect.
4. Read Matthew 12:34. What is the connection of the heart with the tongue?
5. How can we submit our tongues to the control of God's Holy Spirit? What would be the result?
6. What practical advice would you give someone who wanted to control his or her tongue better?
7. What challenges for the week ahead will you take away with you?

James 4

Cynical World

Read James 4:1-12

1. What challenge or encouragement did you take away from Sunday's talk on James 4?
2. What is the difference between pride and a sense of accomplishment?
3. How does pride show up in our work? Home? Church?
4. When we speak against a fellow believer, what attitude are we having toward God and His law?
5. How is constructive criticism and discipleship different from slander? How do we go about this in a godly way? What warning does verse 6 give us about getting this right?
6. What is involved in humbling yourself before God?
7. What can we do this week to help us bring more humility into our lives?

James 5

Responsibility of Wealth

Read James 5: 1-6

These verses can be a slap in the face to our western lifestyles. How do we tackle them without either melting in a heap of condemnation or glossing over them as not being relevant to us?

1. How does James describe the lifestyle of the rich?
2. What is the effect of their lifestyle on others?
3. What is the effect of their lifestyle on themselves?
4. Do you consider yourself to be rich? Do these verses apply to you? If yes, in what way?
5. How can you invest yourself even more in what will matter forever?
6. Are you investing time and money in anything that is not really worth much from an eternal perspective? What are you going to do about this?
7. What do you possess that money cannot buy? Spend some time as a group praising and thanking God for these things.