

JAMES

LIVING FAITH



James Review



Introduction

This winter we have had what seems like an unusually dangerous flu bug going around. You know how it works with the flu: people around you are sick, you take precautions as best you can, but then (inevitably) you wake up one day with a bit of a runny nose. You tell yourself it's a cold, but soon your body starts to ache, you begin to run a fever, and you are quickly down for days on end. All of these symptoms tell us that we have the flu, but the symptoms are not the root problem. The symptoms simply reveal the presence of the sickness—the virus.

James wrote his letter because he was concerned about the symptoms he was seeing in the lives and practices of professing Christians (both in individuals and in corporate gatherings of the church). James' letter is an attempt to respond to these unhealthy symptoms of sin still rearing its head and to remind his audience of the sufficiency of Christ who cures the sickness of our sin. James was so concerned about these symptoms because of what they revealed about a deeper sickness within those who professed devotion to Christ.

James wanted his audience to be fully surrendered to Christ in every aspect of their lives. By and large, his audience was people that appeared to be genuinely converted. They had been brought forth in new life (James 1:18) and though the virus had been addressed, the healing needed to spread to the symptoms that were stubbornly hanging on. With these things in mind, James wrote to address the wisdom, works, worship, words, and waiting of this early Christian community. And in God's kindness, we have this letter to minister to us as we deal with the lingering symptoms of sin that we each deal with. Let's explore this by looking at what James wrote about wisdom, works, worship, words, and waiting.



Study

Context: James wrote his letter to a group of people who were largely Christian, but likely had non-Christians amongst them. These early Christians were still figuring out what it meant to be devoted to Christ in their lives as well as in their gatherings, ministry, and service as His people. Their sinful inclination to mingle faithfulness to Christ with faithfulness to the world was at the forefront of James' mind. This letter addresses what faithfulness to Christ looks like amongst Christians who are struggling to snap out of faithfulness to the world.



Reflect

- 1.) *Wisdom.* James' understanding of wisdom revolved around the idea that true wisdom is rooted in knowing how to apply the work and character of God to our hearts as we navigate this world. In James 1:5 he encouraged his readers to liberally ask God to give them wisdom and to do so with confidence that God would provide such wisdom. Then in James 3:13-18, he wrote of the differences between worldly wisdom and godly wisdom. According to these verses, what are these differences? How does James' description of godly wisdom reveal the work and character of God to you as you navigate this world?

- 2.) *Works.* In James 1:19-27 and 2:14-26 James addressed the topic of the responsibility of the Christian to live out his/her faith. What does James 1:22-26 reveal about the true condition of the person who hears the Word but doesn't do the Word? In James 2:14-26, James highlighted that "faith without works is dead." Why is it necessary for faith to be actively displayed in our works?

APPLY → As you examine your life in light of James 1:19-27 and 2:14-26, where are the areas in your life where your works need to catch up to your faith? What does this lack of obedience reveal about the sincerity and depth of your faith? Write down these areas and pray that God would give you grace to put your faith to work. Then write down ways that you can ask fellow Christians to join you in pursuing active obedience or to hold you accountable for putting your faith into action.

- 3.) *Worship.* James 2:1-13 is the only time in his letter that James explicitly addressed matters relating to Christians assembling together for worship. In these verses James addressed partiality in the body. Wealthy attenders were being given seats of honor while the poor amongst the people of God were being kept to the side or not being shown honor. How does such thinking amongst the people of God deny the very gospel that they gathered to profess?
- 4.) *Words.* One of the points of application that James continually returned to throughout his letter was controlling or taming the tongue. Nothing reveals the true condition of our hearts more than our words. In James 3:1-12, James used a number of illustrations to highlight the power of the tongue and the damage that our words can cause. How are these realities about words Jesus pointed out 2,000 years ago visibly illustrated in our world where everyone has an opinion and everyone has an outlet to share these opinions (whether that be in conversation with others or in social media)?

APPLY → In a world that demands quick reactions and gives everyone a microphone of some sort (email, phones, social media, etc.), how can you pursue an alternative mindset that is Christ-centered and focuses on using your words in obedience to God's Word? How can you steward your words for the purpose of building up your brothers and sisters in the faith?

5.) *Waiting.* James began his letter with an exhortation towards steadfastness (James 1:2-4), and he concluded his letter with a promise of the coming of the Lord in the face of the sufferings of this world (James 5:7-20). According to James, what is distinct about the Christian hope as we wait through sufferings and trials? Looking at both James 1:2-4 and James 5:7-20. How does God use our waiting and even our suffering for our good?

APPLY → *Warning.* James gave warnings in his letter in regard to giving oneself to worldliness. In James 4:1-3, he highlighted the danger of a worldly perspective in the life of the Christian. James wrote that our conflicts with one another and our prideful perspective towards time (4:13-17) were influenced by the world and not influenced enough by God. What does your attitude toward others whom you have a hard time seeing eye-to-eye with reveal about the condition of your heart overall? What does your perspective on planning and accomplishing your plans and purposes reveal about who you think is in control in your life?

APPLY → As we have looked at James' emphasis on wisdom, works, worship, words, and waiting, you have probably been struck by how far you have to go in your own growth. That's the point. We all have a long way to go, but the key is that we are going. The hope for everyone who is a Christian is not that we will eventually accomplish perfection in our wisdom, works, worship, words, or waiting. Our hope is in Christ who was and is perfect in all of these things. When we trust in the wisdom of Christ and cling to him in the ups-and-downs of this life is when we are growing most in wisdom. When we trust in the finished work of Christ for our righteousness is when we better understand and can live out God-glorifying righteous works in our lives. When we set our eyes on the crucified, risen, and reigning Christ is when our worship will be God-centered with all eyes set upward, and not man-centered with shameful focus placed on who is being shown proper honor and who isn't in the gathering of the church. When we consider Christ, who was perfect in his words and his reactions all the way to the cross, that is when we will better have our words informed with a proper perspective and they will glorify God far more than cause damage to others. And when we wait with eyes set upon the eternal reign of Christ, knowing that this world is not our home, that is when we will be better prepared for the waiting and suffering of this life, because we will wait with eyes not set on the temporal, but with eyes set on the eternal.

How can you look at these exhortations from James through the hope you have in Christ and pursue growth in each of these areas in your life?



Connect

Gospel Connections. In James 1:18, while describing the blessings and gifts of God for His people, James mentioned the greatest gift that God gives: new birth. James wrote, "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth..." This is the gospel in James' words: God in His own will and in accord with His own plans gave us new birth by His gospel. The rest of the book of James, full of instruction and application of the gospel, comes after this gospel. James told his audience that they were given new birth, "that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." They were converted by God in His sovereign grace that they would be a first picture in the unfolding redemptive power of God.

Whole-Bible Connections. The illustration of bearing fruit is used all over the Bible. The illustration is always used to describe the people of God either bearing good fruit or bad fruit in their conduct. The fruit that they would bear would reveal the state of their hearts (think of the symptoms and sickness illustration from the introduction to this study guide). God-glorifying fruit comes from a God-glorifying heart. When James wrote of being “a kind of firstfruits of his creatures” he was writing that his recipients would be some of the first evidences of the redeeming work of God after the earthly ministry of Christ had been completed. That evidence for the power of God in converting sinners and giving them new birth would be seen in the manner in which they lived. This is why James wrote this letter. Bad fruit cannot come from good seed.

Theological Connections. Sanctification is at the root of the book of James. Sanctification is the process of growing by the power of God to look more and more like Christ in this present life. Sanctification is a work of God, but we have a responsibility to pursue growth in line with God’s work. The book of James is a book about sanctification. What does the Christian life look like and how do I apply the gospel to my life? James can help begin to show the way.

Praise Connections.

TAKE MY LIFE AND LET IT BE

Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in endless praise.

Take my hands and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my voice and let me sing,
Always, only for my King.
Take my lips and let them be
Filled with messages from Thee.

Take my silver and my gold,
Not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect and use
Every pow’r as Thou shalt choose.

Take my will and make it Thine,
It shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart, it is Thine own,
It shall be Thy royal throne.

Take my love, my Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself and I will be
Ever, only, all for Thee

*Words by Frances R. Havergal.
Music by Henri A.C. Malan and Lowell Mason*