

# Community Groups |

Growing UP | Growing WITH | Growing OUT



*"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup>And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. <sup>25</sup>Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching." – Hebrews 10:23-25 (NIV)*

## Why Community Groups?

Because God created us to live life in the context of relationships! This is an opportunity for you to connect with others as your experience real life-change in your Christian walk.

## What is a Community Group?

A group of 6-10 people who "do life" together as they grow in their love for God, His word, and others. Community Groups encourage folks to take their "next step" in three areas: (1) **Spiritual Growth – UP** towards God, (2) **Relational Growth – WITH** Group members, and (3) **Missional Growth – OUT** to those in the church and world.

Thus, a Community Group is an environment where we are conformed more and more into the image of Jesus Christ (*Romans 8:29-30*). Our conviction is that "real life-change only happens in the context of biblical community."

Not to be left out is the fact that a Community Group is also a place for folks to have fun as they celebrate and share life together! Come join us!

Our journey begins with a six-week study of the book of *James*. The following Study Guide is intended to immerse you into God's word while you grow closer to Him in the context of relationships.

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## Study One | James 1:1-18

### Background

**Author:** James, the half brother of Jesus Christ.

**Date written:** Circa A.D. 45 to 48

**Written to:** The “Diaspora” (or dispersed churches) of Jewish Christians in order to discourage hypocrisy and encourage obedient living.

*Our study of the book of James begins with some challenging statements. Throughout this book, notice the call of the Christian to live a life of humility. Prepare for a great study!*

1. Why does James call his readers to consider their trials to be “all joy” (or “greatest joy”) in 1:2? What should this testing of faith produce and what is the end result of it (1:3-4)? Have you ever experienced difficult circumstances that God ultimately used for His glory and your good? Explain.
2. What is James talking about when he encourages his readers to ask for wisdom (1:5)? Some believe this verse applies to taking tests or exams when we need “wisdom” to do well on them. Is this what James is talking about or is he talking about something more? When you pray, are you confident that God will answer, or do you have doubts (1:6)?
3. Do verses 7 and 8 seem strange to you? James tells his readers to ask for wisdom (1:5) without doubting (1:6), but then adds that they should not expect to receive anything from God (1:7). Why ask God in the first place then? What is meant by a “double-minded man” in 1:8 (see also James 4:8)?

4. What are verses 9 and 10 saying? How does a humble man have a “high position (1:9)?” Why would a rich man take pride in his low position (or humiliation; 1:10)? What does verse 11 say about the pursuits of the rich? Have you found the pursuit of riches to be disappointing? Why or why not?

5. What does James mean when he says “crown of life” in 1:12? If our salvation is the result of grace and not works, how can this crown be the result of our perseverance? (For other references to “crowns,” see 1 Corinthians 9:25; 2 Timothy 4:8; 1 Peter 5:4; and Revelation 4:10.)

6. According to James 1:13-15, who is to blame when we make sinful choices? What sort of imagery is used in these verses to describe this process? What is the ultimate result of this process (see also Romans 3:23)?

7. Who is the source of everything good in the world (1:17)? Do you really believe this? Or do you see good things as the result of your own hard work? What does it mean for us to be “the first fruits of all He created (1:18)?”

### Memory verses:

**James 1:2-3** – “Consider it all joy my brethren, when you encounter various trials, (1:3) knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.” (NASB)

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## Study Two | James 1:19-2:13

*Our study continues with more difficult teaching. Being a “hearer” of the word and not just a “doer?” Living out “pure and undefiled religion?” Let’s dive into the Scriptures!*

1. How difficult is it for you to be “quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger” (1:19)? If the Bible is so clear that we are to do this, why is it so difficult to do? What might happen if we embraced this approach more often?
2. Do you consider yourself to be a “doer” of the word or merely a “hearer” of it (1:22)? Why does James refer to a mere hearer as someone who deludes himself (1:22) and forgets what his own reflection in a mirror looks like (1:24)? How might this apply to your life?
3. How do you live out the “pure and faultless (undefiled) religion” mentioned in 1:27? Is it even possible to live this out in our 21<sup>st</sup> century world? If so, how?
4. How do you show personal favoritism (or prejudice) in your Christian life (2:1)? Who are those in your life (maybe even at church) who wear the “gold ring and fine clothing?” Who are the poor in “shabby (or dirty) clothes” (2:2)? What does 2:4 say about us when we make such distinctions (see also 2:9)?

5. What does *James 2:5* say about how God's perspective compares to that of the world? (Also read *1 Corinthians 1:18-25*.) Do you typically view your circumstances from God's perspective or from the world's (which prizes success, wealth, education, influence, etc.)? Explain your answer.

6. James cites the "second" greatest commandment (*James 2:8*; see also *Matthew 22:36-39*; *Leviticus 19:18*). What does it mean to love another person just as we love ourselves? How would your week look if you obeyed this commandment all the time? Why might this commandment be directly connected to the "greatest and foremost" commandment of loving God?

7. What do verses 9 and 10 say about us in relation to "the law?" Do you ever classify your sin struggles into different "categories" and view some as being less serious than others? What do these verses say about even the "smallest" of sins? How does this reality point you in the direction of Jesus Christ and God's amazing grace that is the foundation of our salvation?

### Memory verses:

**James 1:19** – *"This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger."* (NASB)

**James 2:9** – *"But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors."* (NASB)

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## Study Three | James 2:14-26

*We encounter one of the more baffling issues in the Bible: the relationship between faith and works. Hold on, the discussion promises to be a good one!*

1. What do you think James is asking in 2:14? He seems to be saying that faith without works can save an individual. How do we reconcile this with *Ephesians 2:8-9*, which clearly states that we have been saved by grace through faith and “not as a result of works?”
2. How can faith without works be “dead” (2:17, 26) or “useless” (2:20)? What does dead faith produce? Conversely, what does “living” faith produce and what does it look like? Which kind of faith do you typically exhibit?
3. Does *James 2:18* help give clarity to what James is trying to say? How are faith and works related here? Why does James mention demons and their belief in God in this context (2:19)?
4. If Abraham was justified when he offered up Isaac (see *Genesis 22:1-18*), then how do we reconcile this statement with *Romans 4:2-5*, which clearly states that Abraham was justified (or “declared righteous”) by faith?

5. In what sense do works “perfect” faith (2:22)? How was *Genesis 15:6* fulfilled because of Abraham’s “perfected” faith? How do faith and works correspond in this idea of justification?
6. Why do you think James references Rahab the harlot in 2:25? How was she different than the great patriarch Abraham (see her story in *Joshua 2*)? Given these differences (and some of the similarities), what does this verse communicate to you about how God works in and through the lives of others (even the most unlikely of folks)?
7. If your head is swimming at this point, don’t worry. The bottom line is that while salvation is solely on the basis of grace through faith, our obedience to God and His word is also very important to Him. In the coming week, what specific ways can you demonstrate your faith by your obedience (or works)? Share this with others in your group and ask them to pray for you.

### Memory verses:

**James 2:17** – *“In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”* (NIV)

**James 2:24** – *“You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.”* (NASB)

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## Study Four | James 3:1–18

*This chapter focuses on a small, yet powerful thing – the tongue. Prayerfully approach this chapter and ask God to grant you a teachable heart as you study it.*

1. Given that the context of this chapter deals with the taming of one's tongue, why does James issue this warning to teachers in 3:1? What is the connection between teachers and the tongue and why will teachers incur stricter judgment?
2. What point is James trying to make with the imagery of a bit in a horse's mouth (3:3) or the rudder of a ship (3:4)? Can you think of additional metaphors that describe this phenomenon?
3. How does the image of a small flame differ from a horse's bit and a rudder of a ship? Instead of directing something in an orderly fashion, what is the result of an uncontrolled fire? How does the tongue function in both constructively and destructively?
4. How is our tongue an iniquity ("restless evil," 3:8!) and how does it defile our *entire* body (3:6)? What does James mean when he writes that the tongue can be set on fire by hell? Would you say that this accurately describes your tongue? Why or why not?

5. How can it be that the same instrument that we use to bless (or praise) our Lord and Father is also used to curse others who have been made in God's image? What is James' point in asking about the fresh and bitter (or salt) water as well as the fig tree and olive vine? In what ways do you need to focus on speaking blessing to God rather than curses towards others?

6. Verses 13 through 17 make a slight transition towards the issue of "wisdom." Is godly wisdom (or wisdom "from above," 3:15, 17) according to James demonstrated by vast human intelligence or by some other means? How does this compare to the world's understanding of wisdom?

7. Given James' descriptions of wisdom "from above" (3:13 and 17)) and "earthly" or "demonic" wisdom (3:14-16), what is the connection between wisdom and the tongue? Share with others in your group how you struggle in the area of "earthly" wisdom (i.e. jealousy, selfish ambition, etc.; see also *Galatians 5:19-21*) How can you live out wisdom "from above" (see also *Galatians 5:22-23*) throughout this week as you interact with others at home, work, church, etc.?

### Memory verse:

**James 3:17** – *"But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy."* (NASB)

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## Study Five | James 4:1-17

*Our passage this week focuses on the importance of embracing humility, which leads to healthy interactions with others from the body of Christ and a deeper dependence upon God.*

1. James uses some pretty strong language to describe his readers (“wage war,” “murder,” “lust,” “adulteress people,” etc.) Why do you think he does this? What does this language say about the destructive nature of quarrels and conflict within the body of Christ?
2. How might you be quarrelling currently with others? How might you be envious of others? What are you asking God for “with wrong motives” that are rooted in your selfish pleasures (4:3)?
3. In verse 4, James warns us not to be “a friend of the world?” What does this mean? Why would friendship with the world lead to hostility toward God? How are you living as a friend of the world (see also *Matthew 10:22* and *Romans 12:9*)?
4. Why is God “opposed to the proud, but (yet He) gives grace to the humble” (*James 4:6*; quoting from *Proverbs 3:34*)? Does this relate to being a friend of God or the world in 4:4? Does this relate to submitting to God and resisting the devil in 4:7?

5. Verse 9 seems a bit depressing, doesn't it? When read, however, in the context of the chapter and more specifically verses 8 through 10, what is James saying here? How might the key Christian virtue of humility be related to these verses (see also the Beatitudes of *Matthew 5:1-12*)?

6. What is your response to *James 4:13-15*? How do these verses impact the way that you think about your future plans (either the distant future or the near future)? Are you humbled by God's sovereignty and the temporary nature of this life? What changes can you make in how you spend time this week that reflect these truths?

7. This chapter focuses on the importance of embracing true humility, which requires dependence upon God and His control over our circumstances. The opposite of this is self-reliance, boasting and arrogance (*James 4:16*). How might you be living arrogantly instead of humbly?

### Memory verses:

**James 4:10** – *“Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord and He will exalt you.”* (NASB)

**James 4:14-15** – *“Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. (4:15) Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.’”* (NIV)

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## Study Six | James 5:1-20

*Our study of the book of James ends with an emphasis in chapter 5 on wealth and riches. You may think you know what he's going to say, but hold on to your seats!*

1. Yikes! James doesn't waste anytime addressing the rich does he? Why will misery come upon the rich? What does his language in 5:2-3 tell you about the lasting value of wealth? Even if you are not wealthy, does the desire to obtain wealth capture your heart? Why is this so?
2. How might have the attitude and actions of these rich folks incurred God's wrath (*James 5:4-6*)? Is there any connection between their attitude and the boasting and bragging that precedes this section (*James 4:13-17*)? How might these verses steer us clear from the pursuit of worldly wealth?
3. Why does James urge his readers to patiently await the Lord's second coming (*James 5:7-12*)? What might the connection be between the Lord's coming and the preceding verses on riches? How does the Lord's coming encourage you to endure through your suffering? Do you struggle to patiently await our Lord's coming?
4. Have you noticed James' warnings against incurring judgment in this chapter (5:4-5, 9, and 12)? How might making an oath (in 5:12) result in God's judgment against us? Even though you may not make many "oaths," do you struggle to let your "yes be yes" and your "no be no?" Explain your answer.

5. Starting in verse 13, James turns his attention to the importance of prayer. What are some of the things or situations for which James encourages his readers to pray? What does it mean to offer a prayer “in faith” (*James 5:15*; notice too the consistency with *James 1:5-6*)? How do these verses impact your approach to prayer?

6. What is the relationship between confession of sin and prayer and righteousness (*James 5:16*)? How do you think “righteous” is to be understood in this verse? Do you need to confess your sins to one another, seeking forgiveness from our Father in heaven? If so, do you believe that this confession will have an impact on how your prayers are received?

7. What does it mean for someone to “stray” (or “wander,” NIV) from the truth (*James 5:19*)? Have you ever kept someone from straying from the truth? If so, share that story. What was their response? Do you know of any Christians currently who need to be kept from wandering from the truth? How is prayer vital to this process?

### Memory verses:

**James 5:12** – *“But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment.”* (NASB)

**James 5:16** – *“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”* (NIV)

# Resources for James | TBC

For further study of the book of James, see the following Bible Study Resources:

<http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/james.pdf>

<http://net.bible.org/bible.php?book=Jam&chapter>

