

## Reading Schedule for June 25-July 1, 2018

Even though we are only progressing through James at a very slow pace, it still will only take two weeks for us to get through this book. You can anticipate a return to the Old Testament beginning July 2. However, let's get the most out of James, which is a very practical book about everyday issues in our Christian journey.

**June 25 - James 3:13-18:** "Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness." (v.18) I like the phrase "harvest of righteousness." This is the culmination of a life ordered according to wisdom from God. The heart of the peacemaker is to move graciously towards others, even in the midst of tension. This kind of posture in the Christian community is very attractive because it is so contrary to the world's competitive nature. Most prevalent in our world is jealousy and selfish ambition because of disappointment with people. We read this kind of angst on Facebook all the time. A Christ-empowered life is one that honors Romans 12:18, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." This will truly reflect Christ. How do you respond to this deep and thought-provoking paragraph?

**June 26 - James 4:1-6:** "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures." (v.3) The whole idea of praying to God for my selfish desires is challenged in these verses because of the self-centered nature of these kinds of prayers. James teaches us that we should pray to God and ask him to work in our lives, and those around us, but we want to do it in a way that desires God's will over our own will. 1 John 5:14-15 come to my mind as I think about praying in line with God's will. It is important for us to pray with a desire to honor God and advance his kingdom. Prayers that gratify self-centered desires do not make their way to heaven. James culminates this paragraph by reminding us that humility is the right posture towards God. How do you respond to these "stretching" truths that James presents in these six verses?

**June 27 - James 4:7-10:** "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (v.7) This is one of the shortest readings I would ever suggest. But I thought that it was really a pathway to meaningful prayer. With the sense of surrender to God, and then a heart to confess one's sins, along with the humility to seek God, knowing that he will uplift our gloom and bring us joy, is the right posture for prayer. Jesus gives an example of resisting the devil in Luke 4:1-13. He did not have to prove himself, but he used the Word of God and stood firm against the enemy as the deceptive Evil One tried to tempt Jesus. Humility does not have to be forfeited because it means that we are trusting in God. If we trust in God, we will draw near to him and he will lift us up in just the right way as he crushes the attempts of the devil to bring us down. What aspect of this powerful paragraph gets your attention? Why?

**June 28 - James 4:11-17:** "If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them." (v.17) This wraps up the emphasis on humility throughout these verses as we desire to submit to God's will. Sin is a very interesting subject in the Bible. We think of sin as the negative things that we are not to do. But here, sin broadens its definition by saying that we sin when we know what the right thing to do is and we don't do it. Is there any question in your

mind whether we sin every day? It is challenging us to live a surrendered life with God's purposes in mind. The Lord has things mapped out before us, and as we are sensitive to the Holy Spirit we will fulfill those opportunities. The Apostle Paul said it this way, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10) The author James challenges us to live with a humble surrender to God as the only pathway that leads to life. What stands out to you in these thought provoking verses? How does this broaden your understanding of sin?

**June 29 - James 5:1-6:** "Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes." (v.2) The way that Jesus spoke about this truth was to tell us that the treasures that really matter were the ones from heaven. Jesus said in Matthew 6:21, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." He told us not to store up treasures that are temporary and fade away, but rather be rich in the things towards God. A worldly treasure of money and possessions is very alluring, and affects all of us since we live in the United States. There is no question we are the wealthiest country in the world. I know there is poverty, and many struggle with day to day living, however the largest portion of wealthy people in the world are found in America. These words about trusting in riches are especially challenging for us. The Apostle Paul shared similar words in 1 Timothy 6:17-19. Is there anything you need to confess in the area of trusting in riches?

**June 30 - James 5:7-12:** "You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near." (v.8) This is the most succinct statement in the paragraph about the topic of being patient. If we are patient, then we will not grumble. If we are patient, we will endure suffering. When we are patient, we will remain steadfast, even as Job is given as an example of patient endurance. I refer back to the first chapter, when we were challenged to consider our trials as purposeful because God will use them to strengthen us. (1:2-4) The phrase "do not grumble" for me can be convicting because it has to do with complaining and having a negative attitude. I can slip into that kind of response too easily. How do you respond to this message about patience?

**July 1 - James 5:13-20:** "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective." (v.16) This is the most powerful verse to me, as it encourages me to be honest with others in my life so that I not only am forgiven by God, but have the support of others. It also associates healing with the power of prayer. It encourages me to pray in faith. There is a message here that we almost miss, that one of the most powerful aspects of God's healing work is forgiveness. It says in verse 15, "they will be forgiven." Intercessory prayer is such a gift from God, inviting us to pray for those in our lives who we are concerned about and are going through difficult circumstances. The righteous person's prayer has great power and can be especially effective. Do you believe those words? How do you respond to this message about prayer? What stands out to you from the Book of James?

**PRAYER: Please pray for the community that surrounds our church. We will be picking up trash this Saturday and visibly seeing the needs that exist in our neighborhood. Let's pray for God's work in this community.**