

JAMES Bible Reading Schedule

1 Week

WEEK 1

A thorough reading of James with open hearts has great potential for spiritual change which leads to spiritual growth.

How can we be faithful friends of God like Abraham? Can we resist the pressures of the world, our rebellious human impulses, and the influence of the devil? Can Christians live together in peace as we seek solutions to life's problems? James addresses these issues in his letter as he seeks to motivate Christians to develop a mature and consistent faith and to show how Christians can have loyal friendships with God and with one another.

You can anticipate the message of undivided faith and loyalty toward God. The readers were under pressure from a society that oppressed them economically and abused them because of their belief in Jesus Christ. James calls the readers to patient endurance, submission to God, and serving the ministries of the church faithfully. The result will be maturity, honor, and a glorious life at the coming of Jesus Christ. This book fits our needs as believers right now.

DAY 1 – James 1

I have found fresh nourishment from reading the New Living Translation as many of you realize. I am not saying that I always prefer the wording of the NLT but I like that there is a newness to it for me. I often go back and read the NIV or the ESV as well. But my familiarity with James and the wording in NIV can cause me to skim over some things or not slow down enough to let God speak to me through it. But I find that the whisper of God is more readily heard by me as I am reading this newer translation. For example, verse 2 is well-known with the words, "Count it all joy when you go through various trials." Listen to the NLT, "When troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy." The NLT often has a bit more expression to it helping us understand the meaning in words that we identify with more personally. Obviously, I could highlight 3 or 4 themes in verses 1 to 18 and I encourage you to do so. But let me suggest that the theme of this book might just be verse 22: "But don't just listen to God's Word. You must do what it says." James is a letter challenging believers to live out their faith. There's no benefit to knowing something and not applying it, right?! I love his analogy of looking in a mirror at yourself and walking away forgetting what you looked like. This week, we will read about faith in action, the sin of favoritism, the importance of what we say, humility is essential, the value of generosity, and much more. Ok, now I want you to read this chapter again and decide on 2 or 3 verses or phrases that you will think about and possibly write out your thoughts that come to mind. Then answer this question; how is God speaking to you from chapter one?

DAY 2 – James 2

This chapter seems simpler since there are basically two topics. But it could be that this chapter is actually more complicated and even more challenging than chapter one. My wife has helped me realize that in some situations I have “implicit bias.” Since I don’t want to be a biased person, I have often disagreed with her. But the facts are, I am not being honest with myself or the Lord, if I say I don’t have some degree of bias. My upbringing included bias and my experience has limited my opportunity to know many people from different backgrounds. The local church is sometimes characterized as homogeneous. That means, the same regarding values, ethnicity, economics, etc. Too often this intended or unintended grouping leads to the sin of favoritism. But James suggests that someone poor may have a clearer understanding and receptivity to faith than someone rich which is of top concern, right? After addressing favoritism, James shares some of his most challenging words about faith and works. I have some sense of interpretation with this often misunderstood teaching. The Bible is so clear that faith in Christ is the key to salvation. In my thinking, that is an unchangeable truth. Plus, does God know who has faith and who doesn’t? Absolutely! He even said to those who were boasting of prophesying, casting out demons, and performing miracles, that he actually did not know them. They were unconverted because of the absence of faith even though they seemed to have good works. (Matthew 7:21-23) The focus is faith first and then the plan of God is to multiply one’s faith into action. That’s the plan. But a very important insight into the words and teaching James offers is that faith is “shown” through works. “So, you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.” (V24) The outward evidence of faith is seen by what we do. Jesus said, “You will know them by their fruit.” I believe the emphasis here is on how people understand you (& me) to be people of faith. We can say it with words but nothing speaks louder than our deeds. We are people in this dark world who are called to shine the light of Christ. What did Jesus say? “Let your good deeds shine out for all to see so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.” (Matthew 5:16) Faith saves you and works show that you are saved. That is what I believe James is teaching in these verses. How do favoritism and faith in action speak to you from the wise words of James?

DAY 3 – James 3

With each chapter in the book of James, we get more practical instruction and help for our Christian lives. There’s no question that this chapter brings up a crucial aspect of life – how we use our words! James tells us how important our words are in life. His statement in verse 9 expresses the broad dynamics of what we say. “Sometimes our (tongue) praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God.” From the best to the worst, we praise God but turn around and curse what he has made. Do you see how inconsistent that is? These first 12 verses remind me of the Book of Proverbs which often challenges us concerning what we say. For example, “The tongue of the wise makes knowledge appealing, but the mouth of a fool belches our foolishness.” “Gentle words are a tree of life; a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.” “The lips of the wise give good advice; the heart of a fool has none to give.” (Proverbs 15:2, 4, & 7) It is not surprising to me that the next topic in this letter from James is wisdom. Verses 17 & 18 are especially illuminating to me. Wisdom is often associated with knowledge and intellect, but here wisdom is fully based on character which is revealed by what we say and also what we don’t say. The phrases about wisdom in verse 17 are surprising to me. Are they surprising to you? “(Wisdom) is peace-loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others.” It is natural to think of wisdom as IQ which points to status, a domineering confidence,

and even pushy... overly assertive. But not the wisdom from above which has such humble characteristics. Right? Wisdom tells us to say less and listen more. "Slow to speak, quick to listen..." (James 1:19) How is God speaking to you through this wise chapter?

DAY 4 – James 4

In some ways, there are several themes in this chapter but after a closer look, I think there is one main subject. Do you know what it is? PAUSE It's got to be humility. Even though humility isn't specifically mentioned in verses 11 to 17, the idea of judging others and being critical can easily be understood as the opposite of humility. Plus, boasting with a sense of arrogance about one's plans in life wraps up this chapter as a warning against self-centered confidence. James utilizes a well-known Old Testament passage from Proverbs 3, "God opposes the proud but give grace to the humble." (V6) The idea of pride spills into a love for the world, arrogant criticism, and a propensity to sin. The bottom line is to submit to God and he will lift you up in just the right way, at just the right time. Verses 7 to 10 give us a snapshot of humility with submission to God, resisting the devil, repenting of sin, and being sorrowful for our disobedience. Do you notice any other aspects of humility in these verses? One of my most repeated statements to other believers is this promise, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." (V8) This is the language of worship but also friendship and loyalty. It brings to mind the great commandment, "Love the Lord you God with all your heart..." Because the emphasis of prayer is woven into verses 1 to 3, I want to share a thought or two about prayer. The relationships of the people were described as being filled with jealousy and prone to quarreling. When our relationships are out of whack then our prayer life is deeply affected and mostly ineffective. When we pray primarily with selfish motives those prayers do not reach heaven by any means. Plus, asking God with a humble heart gets God's attention which has such a hopeful sound to it. Each chapter in James has so much to offer us as we desire to live a devoted Christian life to the honor of our God and His Son, Jesus Christ. What has this chapter meant to you?

DAY 5 – James 5

This reminds me of every other chapter in James because it has such important and diverse themes in these 20 verses. The first 6 verses remind me of Matthew 6:19-21 about "treasures in heaven." "Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy; and where thieves do not break in and steal." (6:20) This warning to the rich is followed by the anticipation of Christ's return. Isn't interesting that James includes the topic of the Lord's return in the light of worldly wealth and temporary pleasures? At the Lord's return the faithful will receive their final reward compared to the self-centered person who accumulates earthly possessions for his/her own satisfaction, "the Judge is standing at the door!" (V9) However, as we know from the 21st century, the Lord may not return as quickly as we would desire. So, James says, "Be patient" (V7) and "For examples of patience in suffering, dear brothers and sisters, look at the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord." (V10) The prophets persevere under much suffering because they believed God to be faithful to his promises. We must follow their example. But the high point for me centers around prayer with God answering prayers of faith (VV15-16). The subject of prayer is simply presented in verse 13, "Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray." That launches the rest of James' teaching about Elders praying as well as how a righteous person's prayers are powerful and effective. We honor this approach to prayer as a church with Elders praying for people of New Harvest regularly on Sunday mornings. This also reminds us of how James challenges the

person praying concerning motives (4:3) and unconfessed sin in 5:16, “Confess your sins to each other and pray...” The obstacle of sin is acknowledged by James in these verses. But what an inspiring way to close his letter by reminding us of our mission to rescue wandering souls who would otherwise live apart from God now and even forever. This is our mission. How has God directed your life through this chapter and even through our reading of James this week? He will punish the evildoers and eliminate the nations that refuse to obey the Lord. Peace will come at a price. But the faithful obedient follower can be sure that the justice and righteousness of the Lord will prevail. How do you respond to these words? Also, I might suggest you read 4:1-5 in Micah for the assurance of the Lord’s future reign on the earth.

DAY 5 – Zechariah 9

This is another Advent reading which is less familiar to us, to say the least. The chapter is divided into two parts. The reality of war and the promise of peace. This world is often rattled with war which never seems to cease even though we pray against it. But the promise of our coming King gives us hope. Verse 9 is quoted in the New Testament as Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey. But the message is that the coming Deliverer King will be victorious in battle, yet righteous and humble, even bringing peace to the nations (a sweeping victory). These verses in the second half of the chapter are strongly considered messianic. The covenant gets our attention both for the blood symbolism of the Passover but also the ratification of the new covenant in Christ’s blood. (V11) Verses 16 & 17 culminate Zechariah’s prophecy with incredible hope. I love these words and choose to dwell on them as certain and soon to be completed in God’s timing: “On that day the Lord their (my) God will rescue his people, just as a shepherd rescues his sheep. They will sparkle in his hand like jewels in a crown. How wonderful and beautiful they will be! The young men will thrive on abundant grain, and the young women will flourish on new wine.” As I read through more of Zechariah, his emphasis is on the reign of God over all the earth as I read in 14:9, “And the Lord will be king over all the earth. On that day there will be one Lord—his name alone will be worshiped.” It is hard for me to imagine this coming true until the devil is defeated and cast into the Lake of Fire. So again, this tells us that Advent is a marvelous time to anticipate the reign of Christ who we celebrate as the Incarnate Son of God during Christmas. How does the anticipation of the glorious reign of Christ and His peace filling the earth help you? What does the second coming of Christ mean to you?