

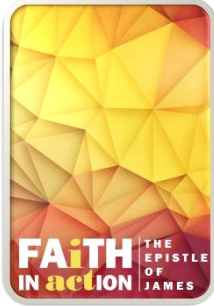
Adult Workbook

Woodlands Church of Christ
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SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Lesson	Date	Lesson Title	Scripture
1.	9/7	Introduction to James and his Epistle	1:1
2.	9/14	Faith and trials	1:2-11
3.	9/21	Faith and its rewards	1:12-18
4.	10/5	Faith and the Word	1:19-28
5.	10/12	Faith and the royal law	2:1-13
6.	10/19	Faith and works	2:14-26
7.	10/26	Faith and the tongue	3:1-12
8.	11/2	Faith and conduct	3:13-18
9.	11/9	Faith against worldliness	4:1-12
10.	11/16	Faith and the future	4:13-17
11.	11/30	Faith and wealth	5:1-6
12.	12/7	Faith and patience	5:7-12
13.	12/14	Faith and prayer	5:13-20



Lesson 1

INTRODUCTION

The Epistle of James is the first in a group of epistles customarily called General Epistles, which includes James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Jude. They are designated as general or “catholic” epistles in the sense that they are universal, not being addressed to any particular individual or church, but to the church as a whole.

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The Setting. It is clear from the letter by James that the early church was experiencing significant problems: divisiveness (1:19-20,26; 4:1), intolerance and favoritism (2:1-7), a uncharitable heart (2:15-16), a complaining and criticizing spirit (4:11; 5:9-11), and the worldly pursuit of wealth and status (5:1-6). He will ultimately tell everyone who wants this world and the kingdom too are nothing more than doubleminded people (4:4; 1:8).

Authorship: There is no question that James wrote the Epistle of James, but which James was the author? Some find at least six men by the name of James in the New Testament. I believe that you can find three who are clearly identified:

1. **James, the brother of Jude** (Jude 1).
2. **James, the father of Judas, not Iscariot** (Acts 1:12)
3. **James, the son of Alphaeus, called “James the less”** (see Mark 3:18, 15:40). He is mentioned in the list of apostles, but very little is known concerning him.
4. **James, the brother of John and one of the sons of Zebedee.** These two men were called “sons of thunder” by our Lord (see Mark 3:17). That he was slain by Herod who at the same time put Simon Peter into prison (see Acts 12:1-2) likely excludes him.
5. **James, the Lord’s brother.** He was a son of Mary and of Joseph, which made him a half brother of the Lord Jesus. In Matthew 13:55 we read: “Is not this the carpenter’s son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?” In the beginning, the Lord’s brethren did not believe in Him at all, but the time came when James became head of the church at Jerusalem. This is equally affirmed in the many references to an influential James in Jerusalem in the writings of Paul (1Cor 9:5, 14; Gal 1:15-2:12).

In Acts 15, this latter James is one of the leaders who has presided over that gathering in Jerusalem. He made the summation and brought the council to a decision under the leading of the Holy Spirit. I believe it was this James whom Paul referred to in Galatians 2:9, “And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.” This James, the Lord’s brother, is the man whom we believe to be the author of this epistle.

Date of Writing: c. A.D. 45–50. There have been those who have said that James wrote his epistle to combat the teachings of Paul; they argue that James emphasizes works while Paul emphasizes faith. However, the earliest of Paul’s epistles, 1 Thessalonians, was written about A.D. 52–56. Therefore, *even Paul’s first epistle was not written until after the Epistle of James*, which was the first book of the New Testament to be written.

The Key Theme: The following are what I consider to be the two key verses of this epistle. “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (James 1:22). And “is not faith without works is dead?” (James 2:20). It is not that James is trying to establish a doctrine – or a

teaching. It is the fulfillment of such an idea of living for Christ that he affirms. And from that, James shows that justification by **faith is demonstrated by works**; it must be poured into the test tube of works (ch. 1–2), of words (ch. 3), of worldliness (ch. 4), with his start a warning to the rich (ch. 5). In other words, faith in action is the way a Christian lives – and ultimately like Abraham – will be justified. But he builds those ideas around the themes of:

1. Suffering (1:12-15). In this is the matter of personal character development to make us complete. While the wicked do suffer (Prov 10:1-6) and his friends do affirm the same (Job 4:7-8), Job has shown that life is not simple and neat and that the righteous do suffer. Even Daniel and his friends did (Daniel 2-5). James will show that in suffering, we are purified and proved (1:12).
2. Christ (5:9; 2:8). Fill in the blank:
 - a. Declares himself a “_____ of God and the _____ Jesus _____” (1:1).
 - b. Says that the _____ gives (1:7).
 - c. Described “our” _____ as _____ (2:1).
 - d. We praise our _____ and Father (3:9).
 - e. Humble ourselves before the _____ (4:10).
 - f. Be concerned about the _____ will (4:11).
 - g. Serve the “_____” (5:4).
 - h. Says that the _____ will return (5:7) and that His coming is _____ (5:9).
 - i. Prophets spoke in the _____ of the _____ (5:10).
 - j. The _____ is full of _____ and _____ (5:11).
 - k. We should pray in the name of the _____ (5:14).

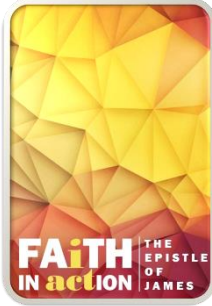
The Message of the Book: The Epistle of James deals with the very practical, but he will not get away from the subject of faith. James was evidently a very practical individual. Tradition says that he was given the name “Old Camel Knees” because he spent so much time in prayer.

Because the book deals with the most practical expression of the ethics of Christianity, the epistle has often been called the Christian’s “Book of Proverbs.” Of course, it does not replace the wisdom of the book in the Old Testament since such divine wisdom is timeless. Yet, it is still true that both emphasize the practical.

In addition to the book of Proverbs, the book has been compared to Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Just as the book of Proverbs focuses almost entirely on the life and lifestyle of the one who would follow Yahweh, the Sermon on the Mount focuses on the life and lifestyle (not so much the collective assignments of a church). Notice the parallels:

1. Rejoice in Trials (1:2; Matt 5:12)
2. Be Perfect or Complete (1:4; Matt 5:48)
3. Ask God the perfect Giver (1:5; Matt 7:7)
4. Testing and its Reward for Believers (1:12; Matt 24:13)
5. Don’t be Angry (1:20; Matt 5:22)
6. Faith Works (2:14; Matt 7:16-19)
7. Blessed are the Poor (2:5; Luke 6:20)
8. Warning to the Rich (2:6-7; Matt 19:23-24)
9. Don’t Slander (4:11; Matt 5:22)
10. Don’t Judge (4:12; Matt 7:1)

The book also uses Old Testament heroes and heroines of faith: Abraham, Rahab and Job. He also refers to Old Testament Scripture. He stated that it “says” (4:5), quotes it (4:6), and finds in it the fulfillment of Christian living (2:8, 11, 23).



Lesson 2

Faith and trials

After his brief introduction, James wastes no time to get to the practical living applications he will make. He begins with two sweeping statements that show a rich, Jewish understanding of life under the sun with God. First, he will address the question of trials and difficulties (1:2-8) and how with prayer and wisdom, people of faith can endure. And in the second (1:9-11), he will address the question of wealth and want and the hardships it creates.

While the tempter is not mentioned by name in these paragraphs, James would have agreed with Jesus that Satan was the source of hardships. The accuser or opposer as he is called (c.f. Jb 1-2, Ze 3) will become openly hostile in the age of Jesus who will be the “strong man” who has gained control of the house without legal rights (c.f. Mk 3:22-30, esp 27). Jesus says he came to bind the strong man (that is, Satan) in order that he himself, as the stronger man (cf. Mk 1:7), might plunder Satan’s house. This is Jesus’s own explanation of the events we encounter in Mark 1-3. And it is the background of James’ words here. While Satan is the inciter to our sin and the father of lies, he masquerades as the good (c.f. 2Co 11:14) and aims to bring disorder and every evil thing – in contrast to the Father of lights (Jm 1:17).

The point James will develop in the balance of things is that while God loves and forgives us, he also allows us to mature and to grow. Whether the road seem easy – or very hard – it is the path that faith will journey. If we maintain a single-hearted devotion, James assures, we will find our way.

About trials (1:1-8). The first thing James says is that testing should be received with joy because it results with steadfastness (1-2). And with it, wisdom will be needed.

The people he addresses is “My brothers.” With reference to the audience of the letter (lesson 1), it will be shown that while he speaks of Jewish things (i.e. the *synagogues* of chapter 2), he is seeing a multi-racial presence of believers in the churches he would have addressed (c.f. Ga 3:28ff, Ro 9:3), even as Jesus did (c.f. Mt 23:8; Mk 3:35; Lk 22:32).

“All” joy is translated elsewhere as “pure” joy. Just as Paul prayed that Colossae would be filled with “all” spiritual wisdom and understanding” (Col 1:9-11), James wants the same complete and pure joy for Christians. Trials can bring that. Christians “meet” or “encounter” trials in that journey which suggests they are unwelcome or unsought. So, James would not encourage us to throw ourselves head long into trials what are *various*, but he encouraged them to remain steadfast.

Christians “meet” or “encounter” trials or testing just as the man helped by the Good Samaritan “fell into the hands of” robbers (Lk 10:30). Although the KJV translates this as temptations, the word is typically neutral as to its moral quality. Instead, it is a “trying of your faith” (KJV) that proves more often the resolve of the subject upon which it is being exercised. While Satan is likened to an

JAMES 1:2-11

2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,
3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

7 For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;

8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

9 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation,

10 and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away.

11 For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

attacker (or pirate, c.f. Mt 4:3; 1Cor 10:13; 1Ti 6:9) and the one tempting one in a trial, trials are the generic reality of experience for all humans, even Jesus (c.f. Hb 4:14-16; c.f. Lk 6:22).

As James notes, there is a purpose that will bring its “full effect” (ESV) in these trials. First, they “produce” Steadfastness” or “endurance.” This highly prized trait that manifests itself in different situations likewise should compel us on, James says, to the full effect of maturity that shows the believer to be both “perfect and complete.” This “perfection” is a word that suggests no deficiencies in character. The second word means “whole” or even “single-minded.” And it should be noted that the reason for the tests will reveal our connection to the character of God and that it is not some unachievable high standard but rather, a stable relationship of a complete God with a person who loyalty and devotion to Him is equally complete.

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Then, comes wisdom that God will give – even Jesus affirms that (Mt 7:7). With wisdom, we can see what the word calls misfortune as opportunities to glorify God and accomplish His purpose in us. In Luke’s gospel (11:11-13), it is the Holy Spirit Jesus said the Father would send. In Proverbs, Wisdom is a lady who seeks to reveal herself to seekers and in the New, the Holy Spirit is God who seeks to reveal Himself to seekers. He was promised to those who would reveal His truth in time (John 14:26; 16:13). God gives this wisdom generously – and without judgment. God gives with finding fault in us – and gives more than enough.

So, ask in faith without doubting. Since God gives abundantly, James says we should not expect God to answer us if we will not believe in His ability. God will not hesitate even though we will hesitate – waffle around like a rudderless boat in the sea. He calls this “double-minded-ness” in verse 8. Israel was warned not worship Yahweh with two hearts (De 26:16, c.f. Ps 12:2). And James has already shown the single-mindedness of God for believers. So, such two-minded people will remain unstable in all he does, not just his spiritual life. This instability is defined as disorder elsewhere (c.f. 1Co 14:33; 2Co 12:20).

About poverty (1:9-11). The “lowly” brother is contrasted with the “rich” brother in verse 10. In the Law, there was consistent law to be concerned for the poor. And in Solomon’s day, when his wealth came from God’s gift, the prophets began to castigate the rich because of their selfish indulgence to the harm of their fellow brother. He will return to this theme in 2:15-16 and say that such compassion is the result of faith – not the regulation of law. But the promise James brings is that the rich man “in his humiliation” will “fade away” through the trials he has just considered.

But who are these rich? The lowly man is a “brother” without question (v.9). One commentary argues “Grammatically, both the terms *brother* and *to take pride in* (verse 9) are linked to the rich man in verse 10” (Nystrom, 55). Ultimately, how would the words of exhortation from James for the rich (in this very context) mean anything if they were not in the community of Christ? It was the disparity between the brothers that itself presented the trial. And like the “cows of Bashan” in Amos 4:1-3 who were promised their judgment even as unauthentic sons of Abraham, so too these rich Christians, who are unauthentic and disingenuous with what their pride is really in, will face judgment for their sin. Even the Corinthians faced the same ungodly, class distinctions they had in Roman society, and faced the ire of Paul (c.f. 1Corinthians 11:17-22). These rich would need the wisdom of God to have a new perspective (they would have never learned in society) to see riches for what they are – transitory and often, an obstacle to begin to accept without reservation the standards of wealth that the world holds up and become dull to see the image of God in the poor around us.

The lowly will likewise rejoice in their testing (of poverty) because it provides them the opportunity to show their faithful endurance and to “inherit the earth” just as Jesus promised. If riches of this world are the treasure of our hearts, just as Jesus promised, for your treasure will be destroyed and stolen (Mt 6:19-20).

Choose what brings “real joy” (1:2).