

# CLOSER LOOK

A LIFEGROUP STUDY ON THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE



**In the WORD: Walking through the Book of James**  
**Week 1**

Days 1-7 (James 1-2:19)  
Summer 2022

## INSTRUCTIONS TO SMALL GROUP LEADERS

Prior to this first lesson, please have your lifegroup complete days 1 through 7 of *In the WORD: Walking through the Book of James*. This reading will take your group through all of James 1 and up to James 2:19.

## INTRODUCTION

*As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.*

**Do you prefer reading the Bible on your own OR would you rather read a book ABOUT the Bible, Christian living, etc.?**

**Why do you think it's so important for Christians to read the Bible for themselves?**

As believers, we have the privilege of reading God's Word for ourselves. While we know it's so important to read the Bible, sometimes reading the Scriptures can be put on the backburner or can feel a little overwhelming. In the end, no matter how much or how little we read, God loves us and has saved us.

## UNDERSTANDING

*Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says about a particular topic.*

*Have a volunteer read James 1:1-21 (or the Scripture from Days 1-3 of In the WORD)*

**Take a moment to review your answers from days 1-3 of the study. What ideas or verses stood out to you?**

**Was there anything that James said in these verses that was unfamiliar to you? Was there anything that was challenging to you?**

**Twice in these verses, James discusses the idea of suffering as part of the Christian life. How can suffering actually be seen as working for the good of believers? What is suffering able to teach us that sometimes success cannot?**

*Have a volunteer read James 1:22-2:1-7 (or the Scripture from Days 4-5 of In the WORD)*

**Take a moment to review your answers from days 4-5 of the study. What ideas or verses stood out to you?**

**Was there anything that James said in these verses that was unfamiliar to you? Was there anything that was challenging to you?**

**Verse 27 discusses Christians' remaining "unstained" from the world. How is this different from living separately from the world?**

*Have a volunteer read James 2:8-19 (or the Scripture from Days 6-7 of In the WORD)*

**Take a moment to review your answers from days 6-7 of the study. What ideas or verses stood out to you?**

**Was there anything that James said in these verses that was unfamiliar to you? Was there anything he wrote that is challenging to you?**

**What is your reaction to verse 2:10? Does it seem just? Unfair? What do you think James really wants us to understand about our sin?**

## **APPLICATION**

*Help your group identify how the truths from the Scriptures apply directly to their lives.*

**What is one thing from these verses that you really want to apply in your life?**

**How is spending daily time in God's Word affecting your life?**

## **PRAYER REQUESTS**

**Take a moment to ask your group if there are any prayer requests.**

## **PRAY WITH YOUR GROUP**

*Pray over your group's prayer requests, along with the following prayer:*

Father God, thank You for Your precious Word. Thank You that You are willing to not only save us but also to teach us. God, I pray that we would learn much throughout this study and that the deep truths of Your Word would penetrate our hearts and minds and never leave us. Help us to cling and know the truths found in Your Word. In Jesus' name we pray, AMEN!

## LP REMINDERS

- Stay up to date with emails and/or social media for any changes on Lifepoint's meeting times.

## MEMORIZE

"So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." (James 2:17)

## COMMENTARY

James 1-2:19

1:1. The use of slave indicates James's humility and total devotion in service to his Lord. As a "slave" of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, James's words bear authority, for he does his master's bidding and speaks as His representative (2Pe 1:20-21). The 12 tribes in the Dispersion refers symbolically to Jewish Christians scattered abroad.

1:2. The phrase whenever you experience various trials assumes that trials are a normal part of the Christian life. In fact, trials are a given for a faithful disciple (2Tim 3:12). The Jewish wisdom tradition held that the experience of "trials" was proof of a person's faithfulness. Joy suggests an eschatological (end times) hope of deliverance from trials. The joy with which a believer endures trials in the present is a sign of their hope for future relief.

1:3. Knowing (or "because you know") modifies "consider" in verse 2. Knowledge that the testing of your faith produces endurance is the basis for joy. "Endurance" is the ability to persevere through increasing levels of testing or suffering.

1:4. Endurance indicates that further work must be done for the purpose of making the believer mature and complete, lacking nothing. Immaturity and incompleteness are not acceptable long-term states for the Christian disciple.

1:5. The world's harsh treatment tempts us to withdraw and refuse to expose our lack of wisdom for fear of being shamed by our peers, but God gives to all generously and without criticizing. Thus he who lacks wisdom should ask God freely.

1:6-8. A person should ask for wisdom in faith without doubting. The basis for confidence here is not just the fact that we exercise faith, but the person in whom we place our faith—God.

1:9-11. James offered two illustrations of people facing trials: the brother of humble circumstances (the poor) and one who is rich. In relation to eternity, neither the poor nor the wealthy have anything to boast about; they are equals before God.

1:12. Blessed reflects the understanding that a person who walks in the paths set by the Lord sees his plight in terms of the eschatological hope that awaits him. Set within this context, his current troubles seem fleeting.

1:13-18. The term trial (v. 13) connects this group of verses to the preceding section (vv. 2-12). God's relationship to temptation is made clear by two kinds of statements. On the one hand, there are assertions that clarify what God is not or does not do: God is not tempted... and He Himself doesn't tempt. On the other hand, there are assertions as to what things do come from God: every generous act and every perfect gift.

1:13-14. The twofold negative stance ( God is not tempted and He Himself doesn't tempt anyone) emphatically denies that God leads people into temptation. The source of temptation is one's own evil desires. "Desires" focuses on the immediacy that carnal desire creates, spurring a person to act, to be drawn away and enticed like a fish is baited to bite a hook and is then pulled from the water.

1:17. Father of lights refers to God (v. 5), who created the lights that rule days and seasons (Gen 1:14-19). No variation or shadow cast by turning alludes to the fact that God's nature is unchanging and that His promises are secure.

1:18. Message of truth refers to the gospel, by which new birth comes. Firstfruits refers to the best that the harvest produces. God gives good gifts that yield wondrous fruit, not temptation that leads to death through wayward desires.

1:19-27. The focus of this section is on proper Christian conduct, especially regarding use of the tongue.

1:21. Implanted word refers to the gospel as received by the believer.

1:22. The presence of the "implanted word" should produce more than idle listening. True worship leads to putting gospel exhortations into action.

1:23-25. In the contrast between the hearer of the word who looks at his own face in a mirror and yet forgets, and the doer of the word who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres, the distinction is found in whether the one who looks allows "the perfect law of freedom" (the gospel) to shape his life's course. The person who hears and does "the word" puts faith into action and is blessed; his worship influences his life.

1:26-27. James made an observation about true religion. Just as the hearer looks in a mirror and forgets his own face, so the person who refuses to hold his tongue is deceived about his faith. He hears and talks, but he does not act on what he has heard. James's definition of pure and undefiled religion is based on action, not heedless hearing and meaningless lip service.

2:1. This verse commends Jesus as our glorious Lord Jesus Christ and warns that partiality against the poor is inconsistent with faith in Jesus Christ. My brothers shows that James wrote to his readers as believers and urged them to show the reality of their profession. Who is this Jesus? First, Jesus is the object of our faith. We have made a trust or commitment to him. We are believers in Jesus. Second, Jesus is the Lord of Glory. The Greek literally reads, "our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Glory." James gave the title of "Glory" to Jesus, using a term that represents the full presentation of God's presence and majesty. Jesus is the glorious God. This is a remarkable confession to come from Jesus' half brother.

The practice of favoritism involved giving benefits to people who had outward advantages such as money, power, or social prominence. The readers of James were courting the favor of these important people by showing preference for them over the poor. The Mosaic Law had forbidden giving respect to persons of prominence (Deut. 1:17). To these scheming readers James gave a sharp directive, "Stop it!"

2:2-4. These verses illustrate the discrimination. In a Christian assembly a rich man and a poor man appeared. Perhaps both were non-Christians. The meeting could have taken place in the home of a Christian. The rich man wore a gold ring and fine clothes. The poor man appeared in shabby clothes. The word describing the ring of the rich man indicated that he was "gold-fingered." He may have worn gold rings on several fingers. Wealthy people often wore more than a single ring. Shops rented rings to those wanting to give the appearance of wealth. Fine, used to describe the rich man's clothing, means "sparkling" or "glittering." Acts 10:30 uses the same word to describe the "shining" garments an angel was wearing. We would say he was a "smart" dresser.

Shabby, used to describe the poor man's clothing, pictured clothing which was dirty or filthy. The man may have come from work, his clothing stained with the evidence of his labor. The handsome apparel of the rich man earned special treatment for him (v. 3). The greeter gave him a place of special honor. The soiled clothing of the poor man earned indifference to his comfort or feelings. He received the options of standing in some undesirable place or sitting on the floor near the greeter. The greeter showed no concern for his needs.

Verse 4 uses a question to accuse the readers of a pair of evil actions. An affirmative answer is expected. They had indeed discriminated and become evil judges. First, they discriminated among themselves. They were guilty of creating divisions in their midst despite the fact that they had accepted the abolition of class distinctions (see Gal. 3:28). Second, they acted like evil-minded or prejudiced judges, regulating their conduct by blatantly false principles.

They practiced a favoritism toward the rich inconsistent with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for all people. If they continued to practice it, they could not claim to be followers of the Lord who abolished partiality. Deuteronomy 10:17 shows that God practices no partiality. Surely he could not tolerate such action among his own children. A wide difference separated the faith they professed from their partisan practices. We can apply this warning in our relationships with different races, social classes, or economic groups.

2:5–6a. Partiality is contrary to God's plan and threatening to the best interests of believers. James contrasted God's exaltation of the poor with their abuse by his readers. Their practice of discrimination against the poor was contrary to the way God had purposed to treat them. Verse 5 shows how God views the poor. Verse 6a presents the contrasting practices of his readers. It is clear: Christians need to adopt God's outlook for the poor. God chose the poor. Paul used "chose" to describe the election of believers to salvation (Eph. 1:4). In James 2:5 "chose" describes spiritual blessings God has reserved for the poor. God chose the poor to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him.

2:6b–7. The actions of the Christians did not help their own interests. They were pursuing a path of folly. Their treatment of the rich and the poor resembled honoring an executioner while insulting a valued friend. The rich faced three charges. First, they were exploiting the poor by social and economic mistreatment. James 5:4 accuses the wealthy of failing to pay past-due wages. It was a strange twist of circumstances to honor such abusive masters. Second, the rich hauled believers into court and practiced judicial persecution. Notice the actions of the wealthy slaveowners who dragged Paul and Silas into court in Acts 16:19–21. Third, they belittled the Lord Jesus by insulting his person and rejecting his claims. The Jews of Antioch showed this behavior in Acts 13:45. These whom the church welcomed were not Christians but wealthy, Christ-rejecting Jews. The readers of James belonged to Jesus, and their biased actions dishonored his honorable name.

2:8. James designated the command to love your neighbor as yourself (Lev. 19:18) as the royal law. He may have used the term royal because Christ, the true king, set forth the law (Matt. 22:39). In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) Jesus defined a neighbor and discussed the demands of loving a neighbor. Jesus defined a neighbor as anyone in need. He urged us to show our love to neighbors by responding to their needs. Some of James's readers felt they had been obedient to God in the matter of showing love for the poor and needy. Wherever that was true, James gave credit. If they were really putting God's law into practice, this was noble and commendable. The command to love our neighbor as we love ourselves is an impossible standard without the power of the living Christ (John 13:34–35). Whenever Christians have applied this standard, it has remade communities, societies, and homes. Whoever follows this life of service will receive the Lord's commendation at the final judgment (Matt. 25:21).

2:9–11. This section deplores the violation of the royal law. If the readers truly practiced favoritism, they committed sin and stood convicted as lawbreakers. Leviticus 19:15 had warned against the practice of favoritism, against either the poor or the rich. It appealed for fair treatment of our neighbors. Lawbreakers describes persons who have stepped over a line or a limit. Lawbreakers had mockingly stepped over God's boundaries and performed a forbidden practice.

2:12–13. These verses conclude the discussion of partiality by appealing for obedience to the royal law in both speech and action. Those who judge others often forget that they must face God's judgment. The reality of God's coming judgment is an incentive for Christians to speak and act obediently. The standard of judgment in that day will be the law that gives freedom. This is a reference to the gospel (see also James 1:25 and the discussion of the term under "Deeper Discoveries" in chapter 1). In John 8:32–36 Jesus had described the gospel as a truth which sets people free. James echoed these words in verse 12. Those who obey God by faith in Jesus Christ find freedom to serve God and escape from fear of future judgment. Faith in Jesus Christ provides freedom to escape hatred and self-love and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

2:13 James alluded to the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:7 to warn that those who show no mercy will receive none in the final judgment. Stated positively, this means mercy triumphs over judgment. This does not mean we receive mercy from God only when we show mercy to others. If that were true, it would make salvation a matter of God's payment for our good deeds. For those who have given themselves in faith to Christ, God's mercy triumphs over our guilt and judgment. If we have received God's grace, we will stand in the coming judgment. Mercy can rejoice in its victory over condemnation.

2:14-17 In this part of his letter, James emphasized demonstrating the authenticity of one's faith. A mere profession of belief, even if it is orthodox and sincere, is not enough. Such faith is not saving faith. Saving faith involves a vital relationship with Christ who transforms our lives. The word "if" introduces a hypothetical but realistic example of an opportunity to show faith by acts of kindness (v. 15). This kind of faith, the faith that does nothing, is dead (v. 17). It has no life. If a person does not breathe, does not move, has no pulse or vital signs, then we must conclude that the person is dead, no matter how much someone might protest that the person is alive. If someone claims to be a Christian but does not give any evidence of having the life of Christ within, then James would question whether the Christ-life is truly present.

2:18-19 The phrase "but someone" introduces a hypothetical opponent to James's position that true faith must reveal itself outwardly through good deeds (v. 18). James, however, did not buy the argument. He responded with a challenge. He knew it was impossible for authentic faith to remain hidden. Faith is revealed and validated by good deeds. The claim to faith that is not validated by action is an empty claim. James illustrated his point that authentic faith is always life-changing by pointing to the demons (v. 19). Even demons believe in one of the foundational doctrines of Christianity—the existence of one God. However, their intellectual belief is not a faith that is life-transforming. In contrast to the shuddering fright the demons demonstrated, James instructed believers to show the validity of their faith by their deeds (see also Phil. 2:12).