

SLOW FOOD: JAMES (28 studies)

Slow Food studies explore a single point of interest in each section rather than attempting a full analysis. The first person singular is normally used, in order to encourage personal application; for group study, it can be pluralised. Cross-references (listed in Biblical order) reflect on one or two ideas in the study. Sections may be combined.

The context of James could be just before the Council of Jerusalem in AD 49, which would make it one of the earliest writings in the New Testament. On the other hand, it could be an edited selection of sayings from his sermons, published after his martyrdom in AD 62. The writer is James the Lord's brother: for the story of his change from unbelief to discipleship, see 1 Cor 15:7; Acts 1:14; 15:13-21; 21:18; Gal. 2:12. It is less a letter in the strict sense than a tract on the practical Christian life, addressed to Christians outside Jerusalem (probably mostly Jewish) and addressing common misconceptions. Its tone is lively, occasionally intemperate, often unexpectedly gentle – but always challenging. We are sometimes too 'spiritual' for our own good; does our faith actually 'work'? Even though there are surprisingly few mentions of the name of Jesus Christ, one notices similarities in wording with the Sermon on the Mount.

Recommended commentaries include Alec Motyer *The Message of James* (BST), a reprint of *The Tests of Faith* (1970); George M Stulac *James* (IVP NT Commentary Series 1993); Tom Wright *Early Christian Letters for Everyone: James* (SPCK 2011); Douglas Moo (Tyndale 2nd ed 2015).

1:1-4 What is James' recipe for me to grow into a mature Christian? What kind of 'joy' is he talking about? *Matt 5:11-12; Luke 8:13; 1 Pet 1:6-8.*

1:5-8 If I am facing some crisis, or a need to make a big decision, what confidence can I have that God will help me to think through it to find his will? *1 Chr 10:14; Ps 37:3-7; Prov 16:3.*

1:9-12 Am I relying on my natural talents and assets to qualify me for an honoured place in Christ's kingdom? *Phil 3:7-8; 1 Tim 6:17; 2 Tim 4:8.*

1:13-15 What mistakes could I be making with regard to a testing or temptation I am undergoing? *Prov 5:22-23; Heb 4:15-16; 1 John 4:4.*

1:16-18 Is what is happening to me a sign that God has changed his mind towards me? *Num 23:19; Mal 3:6; Rom 8:19-23.*

1:19-21 Do other people find it easy to tell me what I need to know? Does God? *Prov 17:27; Eccl 5:1-2; Luke 10:38-42.*

1:22-25 The fact that I am doing this study probably means that I read the Bible more or less regularly. How far have recent studies affected my actual behaviour (a) in private (b) in public? *Ps 19:7-11; Luke 6:46; 2 Cor 3:18.*

1:26-27 Am I better at talking like a Christian than behaving like one? *Ps 139:23-24; Matt 12:34-35; 1 John 2:15-17.*

2:1-7 Am I socially prejudiced? Why would this matter? *Job 34:19; Luke 6:20; Luke 15:1; 1 Cor 1:26.*

2:8-11 Think of someone I am going to meet today. How many of the Ten Commandments will I break if I fail to love that person 'as myself'? *Matt 22:37-38; Rom 13:8; 1 Tim 1:9.*

2:12-13 Are Christians supposed to be 'soft' on those who do wrong? If not, what underlying attitude is required? *Job 22:6-11; Matt 18:32-35; Luke 6:37-38.*

2:14-19 How can I tell whether I am exercising true saving faith? *Job 31:19-20; Lk 10:31-34; 1 Jn 3:17-18.*

2:20-26 Does being 'justified by faith' mean that I am more, or less, committed to serving other people in whatever ways I can? *Rom 4:20-22; Tit 3:8; Heb 11:17-19.*

3:1-5a Am I sufficiently aware of the importance of what I say and the way I say it? *Ps 106:33; Prov 16:23; Isa 50:4.*

3:5b-12 Do I use my tongue to heal or to wound? *Prov 15:4; Isa 6:5; Mark 15:13.*

3:13-18 Why are wisdom and peacefulness so closely connected (v17)? What if there is some cause of disagreement between me and someone else? *Eccl 9:17-18; Rom 14:19; 2 Cor 6:6-7.*

4:1-3 Why can't I get what I want? *Ps 37:4; Ps 66:18-19; Gal 5:16-17.*

4:4-5 Do I still think I can please the world and God? *John 15:19; 1 Cor 6:19-20; 1 Jn 2:15.*

4:6-10 Why should I humble myself before God? How difficult is this? *Ps 51:17; Isa 57:15-16; 1 Pet 5:6-9.*

4:11-12 'Don't bad-mouth each other, friends' (*The Message*). Aren't I allowed to disagree with a fellow-Christian? *Acts 13:37-39; Rom 14:4, 10; 2 Tim 2:25.*

4:13-17 'There's always more you could do.' Do I find this thought depressing or energising? *Prov 16:3; Ps 127:1; Matt 25:25; 1 Cor 15:58.*

5:1-3 Given the imminence of the Second Coming, is there any point in insurance, investments or savings? *1 Cor 7:29-31; 1 Tim 5:8; 1 Tim 6:17-18.*

5:4-6 How far should Christians go in opposing injustice and oppression caused by wealth? *Isa 62:6-7; Ezek 16:49; 1 Pet 2:23.*

5:7-9 How seriously do I take the Bible's teaching about the return of Christ to judge the world? *Mark 14:62; 1 Cor 1:7-8; 2 Thess 1:8-10.*

5:10-12 Do I lose my patience easily? *Prov 14:29; 1 Cor 13:4; Col 1:11.*

5:13-16a If I have run into trouble (of whatever kind), am I neglecting the help that is available? *Ps 50:15; Ps 71:20; 2 Cor 1:8-11.*

5:16b-18 Have I got to be like Elijah before my prayers are answered? *1 Sam 12:23; 1 Kings 18:37, 42; Ps 66:18; Luke 22:32; Col 4:12.*

5:19-20 How far has someone got to 'wander from the truth' before I give up hope for them? *1 Kings 17:21; Ezek 34:11, 16; 1 Jn 5:14-16.*