

AFFECTIONATE ADMONITIONS

A Bible study focused on the Letter by James

“An Instruction Manual for Living Out Your Faith”

“What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions?”
James 2:14

Table of Contents

Lesson 1	The Whole Letter	“Dear brothers and sisters . . .”
Lesson 2	Chapter 1	“Don’t just listen to God’s Word.”
Lesson 3	Chapter 2	“Show me your faith by your good deeds.”
Lesson 4	Chapter 3	“Wisdom that is from above.”
Lesson 5	Chapter 4	“Draw near to God.”
Lesson 6	Chapter 5	“Prayer that is offered in faith.”

Study Suggestions for this Series:

As you begin each lesson, take some to PREPARE yourself. You will find that it is enormously helpful to calm your spirit and get in touch with The One who invites you to come into His presence. He takes delight in having His children humbly bow before Him and express their honest desire to get to know Him better. There are suggestions at the beginning of each lesson to help you focus on Jesus and His unfailing love for you.

READ the suggested Scripture passage. Take your time. This is not an academic assignment or a textbook. This is God’s Holy Word – His love letter to you. If possible read it in 2 or 3 different translations. You may want to jot down some of your thoughts and observations or even underline some of the phrases that catch your attention.

The heart of the lesson is found in the next section - **REFLECT**. There will be several questions for you to consider. These questions have no right or wrong answers. They are meant to help you understand the passages and to discover the truths that the Holy Spirit wants to teach to you. Feel free to focus on the questions which are of most interest to you. What part of this “instruction manual” could have been written just for you at this time in your walk with the Savior?

Finally, you will want to **RESPOND** - to listen quietly for the still, small voice of the Lord. What is it that the Spirit of God has brought to your mind and how will you follow through with His prompting in the days ahead? Will you let Him enable you to become the person that God Himself created you to be and do the things that He has especially prepared for you?

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An Instruction Manual for Living Out Your Faith – Lesson 1
A Bible study focused on the Letter by James

**If you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free,
and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it."**

James 1: 25 NLV

James, the author of this letter, was one of Jesus' younger brothers. It was not until after the resurrection that he came to understand and to believe that Jesus was really the Messiah and that He came to bring salvation and forgiveness to all those who would put their faith in Him. Soon after that James became a strong leader in the newly formed church in Jerusalem. Because of the intense persecution, many of these new believers had moved to new locations throughout the whole region. They needed to be reminded of not only who Jesus was and why He came to this earth, but what the implications of the Gospel could and should mean to their daily life. Their faith was new and fragile so James spoke to both their questions and their needs.

As you come to your study time, take a few minutes to think about Jesus' invitation to "Come unto Him". What does this mean to you? What would it mean for you to sit with Him, to look into His eyes as He talks and to listen to Him? What are the desires and concerns of your heart at this time? You can tell Him honestly and openly. He will meet you right where you are.

READ - James -

Take your time reading the 5 chapters of this letter – just 108 verses.

Read the book again preferably in a different translation or paraphrase.

If possible, either read the letter out loud for yourself and/or have someone else read it to you.
(It would have been read to the people throughout the early centuries after it was written.)

REFLECT

1. What phrases explain James relationship to the people to whom he is writing and how he feels about them?
2. Why do you think James wrote this letter? What seems to you to be his major emphasis?
3. Make a list of the various themes or concerns that are expressed throughout this letter.
4. If you were going to give this book a title and pick a theme verse, what would you choose?
5. How does James motivate the believers to listen to what he has to say?
6. In his Living Insights Study Bible, Charles Swindoll describes the letter by James as "A Plea for Authenticity". Why do you think this is or is not a well chosen summary of the book?

RESPOND – As you review this letter, what is the prayer of your heart? Sit quietly and listen for the still, small voice of God's Spirit as He guides your thoughts. Are there some verses that are meant for you to take seriously throughout the next few weeks? Take time to write them out and then to re-phrase them and make them your prayer.

AFFECTIONATE ADMONITIONS

An Instruction Manual for Living Out Your Faith – Lesson 2

“Don’t just listen to God’s Word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves.” James 1: 22

Biblical scholars have often compared the letter that James wrote to the Book of Proverbs. In some ways, there are many similarities because of the brief and practical sayings that he used in order to communicate his message. However, the personal connection to the recipients and the passion with which he wrote seem to make these 2 books quite different from each other. James knew that the temptation for these new believers to go back to their old ways of doing things was very real. He was also concerned that they might soon forget what Jesus had taught them about how to live as children of God and His Kingdom. Perhaps, while he does not spend time reminding them about the Holy Spirit in their lives and other doctrinal truths, he knows that the need for practical advice will help them to feel their dependence and need for His power in their lives.

As you come to your study time, take a few minutes to think about Jesus’ invitation to “Seek Him first”. What does this mean to you? What would it mean for you to sit with Him, to look into His eyes as He talks and to listen to Him? What are the desires and concerns of your heart at this time? You can tell Him honestly and openly. He will meet you right where you are.

READ – James 1

Read these 27 verses in several translations if possible. Try reading this chapter out loud and with expression. If possible, copy the chapter in your own handwriting or on your computer.

Title and summarize each of the 8 paragraphs – Is there an admonition or warning? What is the result?

Paragraph 1 – James 1: 2 – 4

Paragraph 2 – James 1: 5 – 8

Paragraph 3 – James 1: 9 – 11

Paragraph 4 – James 1: 12 – 15

Paragraph 5 – James 1: 16 – 18

Paragraph 6 – James 1: 19 – 21

Paragraph 7 – James 1: 22 – 25

Paragraph 8 – James 1: 26 - 27

REFLECT

1. How does James motivate his audience? What reasons does he give to them which would make them listen and respond to his ideas and advice?
2. How is the character of God portrayed? What references can you find to the Word of God and to prayer?
3. Is there any connection or progression between one topic and the next one that you can see?

RESPOND – As you review this chapter one more time, ask God to direct you to the paragraph that He wants you to consider at this time in your life. What is the admonition that you need today? Or is it a promise or an answer that He would like you to receive as His gift to you? You are His prized possession (vs. 18), so receive His Word with gratefulness!

AFFECTIONATE ADMONITIONS

An Instruction Manual for Living Out Your Faith – Lesson 3

What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions?

James 2: 14

In some of the letters in the New Testament, the authors make it very clear that we become Christians through faith, and faith alone. As Paul says in Ephesians 2: 8 – 9, " For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." While some theologians, including Martin Luther objected to the emphasis which James placed on actions, most agree that his concerns are totally complementary to the rest of Scripture. Even Paul continued in Ephesians 2: 10 to write "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works." Clearly and consistently James helped these Jewish believers to grasp the idea that genuine faith will be always be visible in the way we live our lives.

As you come to your study time, take a few minutes to think about Jesus' invitation to "find your rest in Him". What does this mean to you? What would it mean for you to sit with Him, to look into His eyes as He talks and to listen to Him? What are the desires and concerns of your heart at this time? You can tell Him honestly and openly. He will meet you right where you are.

READ – James 2

Read these 26 verses in 2 or 3 translations if possible. Try reading them out loud with expression. If possible, copy the chapter in your own handwriting or on your computer.

This chapter has 2 themes. Give a title to each of them and summarize them.

Section 1 – James 2: 1 – 13

Section 2 – James 2: 14 - 26

REFLECT

1. Why do you think that showing partiality or favoritism is sinful? Does that seem reasonable or extreme to you? Why or why not?
2. How does James explain mercy? What do you think the phrase "you will be judged by the law that sets you free" mean in James 2: 12?
3. "Faith is the path or door to salvation. Your actions are the fruit or product of your salvation." Does this phrase help you to grasp the connection between faith and works?
4. James used Abraham and Rahab as examples of people whose faith motivated them to action. Who has demonstrated for you a "visible faith" recently?

RESPOND – As you consider the truths presented in this chapter, take some time to ponder your relationship to those who are harder to love and are more difficult to show mercy. Does the Holy Spirit want you to consider making some changes in your attitude and actions? Do you think that your faith is clearly seen by others through your "good deeds"? Wait quietly for the Holy Spirit to direct your thoughts and reassure you of His desires for your life.

AFFECTIONATE ADMONITIONS

An Instruction Manual for Living Out Your Faith – Lesson 4

“If you are wise and understand God’s ways, prove it by living an honorable life, doing good works with the humility that comes from wisdom.” James 3:13

Why would James be so concerned about the topics of “words” and “wisdom”? Perhaps it is because what we say and how we think make the difference in all of our relationships. It was true centuries ago and it is still true today. Imagine a family, a classroom, a church, or any group of people who continuously communicate graciously, kindly and always speak truthfully but lovingly. Imagine that in this same group there is no jealousy or boasting or lying or selfishness. While you and I cannot change others, it just might be that this kind of “kingdom living” is exactly what God would like us to envision through the power of His Spirit working in us. Do you agree?

As you come to your study time, take a few minutes to think about Jesus’ invitation to “let not your heart be troubled”. What does this mean to you? What would it mean for you to sit with Him, to look into His eyes as He talks and to trust Him? What are the desires and concerns of your heart at this time? You can tell Him honestly and openly. He will meet you right where you are.

READ – James 3

Read these 18 verses in 2 or 3 translations. Read them out loud a few times. If possible, copy the chapter in your own handwriting or on your computer.

This chapter has 2 themes. Give a title to each of them and summarize them.

Section 1 – James 3: 1 – 12

Section 2 – James 3: 13 - 18

REFLECT

1. Make a list of the various ways that James describes the power of your speech? What impresses you?
2. How would Galatians 5: 22 – 23 relate to James’ concerns for these believers and for you?
3. Can you explain the contrast between wisdom and jealousy and selfishness in your own words – James 3: 13 – 16?
4. Compare and contrast the words of Paul in Philippians 4: 8 – 9 with James 3: 17 – 18.

RESPOND –

As you look back at Chapter 3, are there any ideas that seem to “leap off the page”? If not, read it again more slowly, stopping to focus on one of the word pictures or ideas that the Holy Spirit might be impressing on your mind and heart. Jesus said, “Whatever is in your heart determines what you say” (Matthew 12: 34). Is it time to count on His forgiveness and His promises to you? Ask Him – I John 1: 9, James 1: 5 and Galatians 5: 23. He will be faithful to you always.

AFFECTIONATE ADMONITIONS

An Instruction Manual for Living Out Your Faith – Lesson 5

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. James 4: 8

Promises are only as good as the reliability of the one who makes them, aren't they? So when James tells these believers that their God is a generous God who will give them wisdom and will bless them when they follow His ways and that He will give grace to them and come near to them as they humbly bow before Him, it is a huge incentive. Sometimes we need to be reminded that His promises will never fail. His love for us will never end. His grace is unlimited. He is always willing to draw close to those who want Him to do so!

As you come to your study time, take a few minutes to think about Jesus' invitation to "remain in His love". What does this mean to you? What would it mean for you to sit with Him, to look into His eyes as He talks and to listen to Him? What are the desires and concerns of your heart at this time? You can tell Him honestly and openly. He will meet you right where you are.

READ – James 4

Read these 17 verses in 2 or 3 translations. Read them out loud a few times.
If possible, copy the chapter in your own handwriting or on your computer.

This chapter has a variety of topics and many action words.
Try to organize these thoughts or ideas in a way that will be helpful to you. What are the main ideas?

REFLECT

1. What do you think that James means when he calls these believers, his brothers and sisters, "adulterers"?
2. In the Old Testament God's jealousy for His people was a concept that the Israelites understood.
Read Exodus 20: 5, Psalm 78: 58 and 79: 5.
Do these verses help you to understand what James might mean in verse 5?
3. Humility has been a reoccurring theme in this letter? Why do you think it is an important characteristic for one who belongs to Jesus?
4. Isn't it interesting that the very next paragraph warns against the sin of judging other people? How can you express these ideas in your own words – James 4: 11 – 12?
5. One of the simplest and most direct reminders that James gives is found in James 4: 17. It presents a definition of sin that is penetrating, doesn't it? How is it a good summary of several other admonitions in this letter?

RESPOND – As you take some time to review Chapter 4, what do you think God's Spirit wants you to consider carefully.
In humility and honesty, what will your response be to The One who humbly gave His life so that you might be His child?

AFFECTIONATE ADMONITIONS

An Instruction Manual for Living Out Your Faith – Lesson 6

“The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.”

James 5: 16

Have you ever heard someone say at the end of a conversation or a letter, “Oh, and by the way . . .”? It usually means there is still something very important that they really want to say to you. It could be that as James concluded his letter, he remembered the whole topic of prayer and the importance of fellowship with each other. No doubt, he felt the urgency to communicate these truths both clearly and succinctly. What a loss it would have been for believers through the centuries if we did not have his final “affectionate admonitions”.

As you come to your study time, take a few minutes to think about Jesus’ invitation to “follow Me”. What does this mean to you? What would it mean for you to sit with Him, to look into His eyes as He talks and to listen to Him? What are His desires for you? You can talk with Him honestly and openly. He will meet you right where you are – with your questions and concerns, with your hopes and dreams.

READ – James 5

Read these 20 verses in 2 or 3 translations. Read them out loud a few times.

If possible, copy the chapter in your own handwriting or on your computer.

This chapter has 4 different topics. Give your own title to each one and try to summarize the content.

Section 1 - James 5: 1 – 6

Section 2 - James 5: 7 – 12

Section 3 – James 5: 13 – 18

Section 4 – James 5: 19 - 20

REFLECT

1. How do you think these rather harsh and direct words might apply to the church in America? And to you? Rather than “field workers”, who suffers in our culture because of self-centeredness and short-sightedness?
2. Patience and endurance – how does the counsel in chapter 5 compare with chapter 1: 2 – 4 and 12? Is there any additional motivation or information?
3. Picturing God as a Judge is not a popular idea these days? James refers to it several times throughout his letter. Why? Where else can you find this concept in the New Testament?
John 16: 5 – 11
II Corinthians 5: 6 – 10
II Timothy 4: 1, 6 – 8
Hebrews 9: 27 - 28
Revelation 14: 1 -7
4. How would final paragraphs in this letter encourage or help the believers? Is there any encouragement for you?

RESPOND – What will you remember about this letter written by James? Why do you think it is in the New Testament?

Take some time to read it again, slowly, pausing to reflect on the “affectionate admonitions” that are there for you at this time in your own “journey of faith”. What do you want to do with this information? Are you willing to listen to the Spirit’s promptings and take heed?