

Living as a
Christ-follower
in
JAMES

**A unique, verse-by-verse,
life-application commentary**

by Terran Williams.

You may own a Bible, but does your Bible own you?

- It's not enough to own a Bible. Our Bible should own us. After all, it is the main way God speaks to us.
- Did you know that God put every verse in the Bible so that your mind could be totally renewed, so that your life could be deeply changed, and so that your calling could be fulfilled? (See 2 Timothy 3:16-17 if you're not persuaded.) That's why reading the whole Bible again and again is one of the most important things we can do.
- Sometimes, however, the Bible is hard to understand. That's why commentaries are so useful. Most commentaries help you understand the *technical* meaning of each verse. These commentaries do a little of that too, but more than that, they focus on the meaning of each verse *for our lives now*.

What's unique about this commentary?

- Most importantly, it helps you to find *the meaning for your life now* in every single verse of the letter from James.
- It is written with 21st century everyday people in mind.
- It builds on the scholarship of brilliant theologians and commentaries, but doesn't focus on the exhausting technicalities that fill most commentaries.
- It comes with a Group Guide so that you can explore Mark along with others.

A suggested approach to going through James

- Make time every day. Allocate as much time as you need to really hear from God for your life. Read until you are full - don't just *snack* on the Bible, rather enjoy a *solid meal*.
- Take your time as you go through James, starting at chapter one. It doesn't matter if you do the whole Bible in a year, or in five years, just as long as you're *steadily* moving through it.
- Trust God to speak to you every time you read the Bible. Expect to receive just what you need for each day. Invite the Holy Spirit to be your primary teacher as you read.
- Keep two questions in your mind as you read: 1) Do I understand what these verses mean? 2) What do they mean for my life now? ***If you can't find solid answers to either of these two important questions then refer to this commentary.***
- Carry into your day what you sense God saying to you. Perhaps write down the main things you sense God telling you each day. Pray to God about what he has just said to you. Make any needed adjustments in your heart and life as God reveals more and more of his Word, will and ways to you.

Main sources used

Special thanks to (and warm commendations of) ...

- *The 'Today's New International Version' Bible (which is the updated version of the NIV)*
- Donald Guthrie's *New Bible Commentary: Third Edition*
- David Guzik's online commentary (www.enduringword.com)

About this letter

Simply defined, a Christian is a Christ-follower.

This means that, having been saved by his cross and resurrection, *we now follow his leadership and teachings*, through the grace he gives.

James, an earthly brother of Jesus, only became a Christ-follower after Jesus rose from the dead. He devoted himself fully to Christ (whom he describes as 'the glorious Lord Jesus Christ' (2:1). and soon became the leader of the Jerusalem church.

His singular passion was Christ's ability to positively transform a person who had trusted in Christ. And it broke his heart when Christians compromised or failed to take Christ's leadership and teachings seriously. That's what made him write this letter to Christians everywhere. Interestingly, there are at least 20 'echoes' of the teaching of Jesus from the Gospels, especially from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) in this short letter.

It's important to realize that this letter is written to Christians who are already saved. If we compare it with the letter to the Ephesians we notice a major difference. The first half of Ephesians helps us understand the salvation that Christ has freely given us by grace. The second half of Ephesians helps us to 'work out our salvation' with the help of God's grace. Said another way, the first half of Ephesians is about being saved by God's accepting grace. The second half is about being matured by God's empowering grace.

The letter of James is different to the letter to the Ephesians in that it assumes that people already have a grasp of their salvation (as will be seen in 1:1,18,21; 2:1,7; 5:8) - and it focuses entirely on 'working out our salvation', and becoming mature with the help of God's empowering grace. If you're a new Christian who is not secure in your salvation, first read and study Ephesians 1-3, and then once you're secure in your salvation, then turn to the epistle of James (which carries the same tone as Ephesians 4-6) to help you 'work out your salvation' with the help of God's empowering grace.

By speaking of 'God's empowering grace' I mean that God will never instruct us to do anything without also providing the grace we need to do it. He would never ask us to face any situation without giving us the grace to face it. The Christian 'runs' on grace like a car 'runs' on fuel. As we read every instruction in this letter - and there are many - we should remind ourselves, 'God gives me the grace to do this. Although I need to co-operate, I do it in dependence on his grace. Apart from his grace, I cannot do any of this.' We can quote 4:6, which says it beautifully, 'God gives grace to the humble.'

Outline

- FACING TRIALS WELL (1:1-12)
- LIVING A GODLY LIFE (1:13-21)
- WHAT TO DO WITH THE BIBLE AND ITS MESSAGE (1:21-25)
- LOVING ALL PEOPLE THE SAME (1:26-2:13)
- A LIVING FAITH THAT LEADS TO LOVING ACTION (2:14-26)
- TRANSFORMING OUR SPEECH (3:1-12)
- PURSUING REAL WISDOM (3:13-18)
- SELFISHNESS, IDOLATRY AND REPENTANCE (4:1-10)
- FIVE THINGS TO HUMBLY REPENT OF (4:11-5:6)
- PATIENCE IN HARD TIMES (5:7-12)
- ENJOYING A RICH PRAYER-LIFE (5:13-19)