

GROUP GUIDE TO

Living as a Christ follower in James

(Based on the commentary available from www.commongroundchurch.co.za in Free Resources and in Exploring the Bible)

THE BIBLE IN OUR GROUPS

- A Christian cannot happily live without the Bible anymore than a person could happily live without air, food, water, heat or direction. That's why it's important that Christians - *preferably on a daily basis* - learn to breathe its oxygen, feed on its nourishment, drink its refreshment, absorb its energy, and obey its instruction.
- The very first thing that the first church devoted themselves to in their gathering was "the apostle's teaching" (see Acts 2:42) which is now recorded for us in the Bible. That's why God's Word is so central in our gatherings, both our large Sunday ones, and in our small groups.
- Getting into God's Word *together* helps us get even deeper into God's Word, and it helps the Word get deeper into us. Someone said, "It doesn't matter how much of the Bible you go through, what really matters is how much of the Bible goes through you." That's why we explore the Bible alone *and* together. What's more, exploring the Bible together greatly motivates us all to explore the Bible alone.
- The average weekly small group gathering consists of three main components: 1) Bonding time (where we get into each other's lives); 2) The prayer encounter (where we get into God's presence); and 3) Life-shaping conversation (where we get into God's Word). This guide impacts the life-shaping conversation part of the gathering.
- In your group devote five weeks to James, chapters 1-5. Everyone in the group is to read a chapter (usually), with the commentary as an aid, as preparation and based on what you have read, come ready to have a "life-shaping conversation" in the group.

OUTLINE

Week Before

- The small group leader needs to:
 - **Give** everyone a copy of the James commentary either printed out or digitally (assuming they have access to a computer).
 - **Explain** that for the next five weeks we want to “live as a Christ-follower” by inviting God to speak to us through the letter of James.
 - **Motivate** everyone to read and ponder James 1:1-25 in their daily devotions.
 - **Encourage** them, depending on how deeply they want to get into this section of the Bible, to go through some or all of the commentary too.
 - **Ask** everyone to come ready to share next week 1) What major insight into the Bible you discovered (from 1:1-25); 2) What one or two things you believe God said to you through it; and 3) How what he said impacts your life.
 - **Assure** everyone that even if they don’t do this reading they should still come, because they will get much out of the time next week (this is why it’s also suitable to keep inviting new people to the group).

Week One

- **Ice-breaker question:** (Note to leader: an ice-breaker is meant to be brief, to get the ball rolling, to not necessarily be spiritual and to help people get to know each other.) “James 1 speaks about what we’re meant to do with the Bible and its message. Tell us about your first experiences of or your earliest memories of the Bible, and what thoughts and feelings you had about it - whether positive or negative.”
- Read through James 1:1-25 and the associated commentary insights listed below.
- **Discovering Bible insights:** “Of all you read in James this week, what did you find most fascinating or interesting?”
- **Discerning God’s message:** “As you pondered James this week, were there any one or two things that God seemed to be saying to you, specifically?”
- **Responding to God’s message:** “In light of what you believe God said to you, how is your life being changed, or in what ways does it still need to change?”
- Remind people: “This week, please read and ponder chapter 1:26-2:26 in your daily devotions. Based on these verses, try come ready to share: 1) What major insight into the Bible you discovered; 2) What one or two things you believe God said to you through it; and 3) How what he said impacts your life.”

FACING TRIALS WELL (1:1-12)

- 1) *Learn to rejoice in the trials you face.*
- 2) *Ask God for the wisdom you need.*
- 3) *Let the poor forget their poverty, and the rich their riches.*
- 4) *Let the promise of eternal reward and your love for God motivate your endurance.*

LIVING A GODLY LIFE (1:13-21)

- 1) *Understand and overcome temptation.*
- 2) *Be dazzled by the goodness of your Father.*
- 3) *Rejoice that the Gospel has changed you more than anything else could.*
- 4) *Reflect God’s character in conflict situations.*

WHAT TO DO WITH THE BIBLE AND ITS MESSAGE (1:21-25)

- 1) *Be changed by the Bible and its message.*
- 2) *Love the Bible and its message.*
- 3) *Live the Bible and its message.*

Week Two

- Open with an ice-breaker question (not necessarily spiritual - more of a get-to-know-you question): “James 2 speaks about discrimination based on socio-economic class. Tell of a time when you witnessed or experienced the damaging effect of discrimination for whatever reason (i.e. because of race, class, gender etc).”
- Read through James 1:26-2:26 and the associated commentary insights listed below.
- **Discovering Bible insights:** “Of all you read in James this week, what did you find most fascinating or interesting?”
- **Discerning God’s message:** “As you pondered James this week, were there any one or two things that God seemed to be saying to you, specifically?”
- **Responding to God’s message:** “In light of what you believe God said to you, how is your life being changed, or in what ways does it still need to change?”
- Remind people: “This week, please read and ponder chapter 3 in your daily devotions. Based on these verses, try come ready to share: 1) What major insight into the Bible you discovered; 2) What one or two things you believe God said to you through it; and 3) How what he said impacts your life.”

LOVING ALL PEOPLE THE SAME (1:26-2:13)

- 1) *Make sure your faith is the kind that is changing the way you live.*
- 2) *Treat all people the same.*
- 3) *Learn to see the poor through the eyes of God.*
- 4) *If you don’t love all people, you don’t really love any people.*
- 5) *You’re not under the law of Moses.*
- 6) *You are under the liberating law of Christ, love and the Spirit.*
- 7) *Extend mercy to others, or face judgment for failing to do so.*

A LIVING FAITH THAT LEADS TO LOVING ACTION (2:14-26)

- 1) *First possible interpretation: There are two kinds of faith, and only one of them can actually receive salvation.*
- 2) *Second possible interpretation: Faith without deeds is not going to help anyone else.*
- 3) *Belief-change without life-change is not enough to help others.*
- 4) *Make your faith visible through loving action.*
- 5) *It is possible to be genuinely saved and yet still to not be substantially changed.*
- 6) *Mental-assent kind of faith is not enough.*
- 7) *Justification without sanctification is useless to those around us.*
- 8) *Justification should evidence itself in sanctification.*
- 9) *A living faith should lead to loving action.*

Week Three

- Open with an ice-breaker question (not necessarily spiritual): “James 3 speaks of the power of words. Tell us about the person who has encouraged you the most through their words.”
- Read through James 3 and the associated commentary insights listed below.
- **Discovering Bible insights:** “Of all you read in James this week, what did you find most fascinating or interesting?”
- **Discerning God’s message:** “As you pondered James this week, were there any one or two things that God seemed to be saying to you, specifically?”
- **Responding to God’s message:** “In light of what you believe God said to you, how is your life being changed, or in what ways does it still need to change?”
- Remind people: “This week, please read and ponder chapter 4:1-5:6 in your daily devotions. Based on these verses, try come ready to share: 1) What major insight into the Bible you discovered; 2) What one or two things you believe God said to you through it; and 3) How what he said impacts your life.”

TRANSFORMING OUR SPEECH (3:1-12)

- 1) *With greater responsibility from God, comes greater accountability to God.*
- 2) *Though you’re not sinless, you need to sin less and less.*
- 3) *Sinfulness makes you dysfunctional, whereas Jesus begins to make you fully functional.*
- 4) *Self-mastery begins with speech-mastery.*
- 5) *Your words have disproportionate power to impact your life and the lives of others, for good or bad.*
- 6) *Sinful human speech can do great damage to you and to others.*
- 7) *Inconsistent speech is simply unacceptable.*
- 8) *The meditations of your heart inevitably become the words in your mouth.*

PURSUING REAL WISDOM (3:13-18)

- 1) *Wisdom is knowledge applied.*
- 2) *Right living is the combination of right thinking, the right heart, and right actions.*
- 3) *Don’t confuse ‘false wisdom’ with the real thing.*
- 4) *Real wisdom transforms the way you relate to people.*
- 5) *As your life changes, the whole community reaps the benefit of it.*

Week Four

- Open with an ice-breaker question (not necessarily spiritual - more of a get-to-know-you question): “The beginning of James 5 speaks of how excessive self-indulgence is wrong. Complete this sentence, ‘If I’m honest, the material things I would be deeply unhappy to live without are ...’”
- Read through James 4:1-5:6 and the associated commentary insights listed below.
- **Discovering Bible insights:** “Of all you read in James this week, what did you find most fascinating or interesting?”
- **Discerning God’s message:** “As you pondered James this week, were there any one or two things that God seemed to be saying to you, specifically?”
- **Responding to God’s message:** “In light of what you believe God said to you, how is your life being changed, or in what ways does it still need to change?”
- Remind people: “This week, please read and ponder chapter 5:7 till the end of chapter 5 in your daily devotions. Based on these verses, try come ready to share: 1) What major insight into the Bible you discovered; 2) What one or two things you believe God said to you through it; and 3) How what he said impacts your life.’

SELFISHNESS, IDOLATRY AND REPENTANCE (4:1-10)

- 1) *Selfish desires can hurt your relationships.*
- 2) *Selfish desires can hurt your prayer life.*
- 3) *Idolatry hurts God deeply.*
- 4) *Grace is available if you humbly repent of selfishness and idolatry.*

FIVE THINGS TO HUMBLY REPENT OF (4:11-5:6)

Humility is in its very nature repentance from pride.

- 1) *Humbly repent of an ungracious, condemning attitude towards people.*
- 2) *Humbly repent of seeing yourself as the master of your own destiny.*
- 3) *Humbly repent of any failings to do the revealed will of God.*
- 4) *Humbly repent of the excessive self-indulgence that wealth so easily entices you into.*
- 5) *Humbly repent of the exploitation of the poor.*

Week Five

- Open with an ice-breaker (not necessarily spiritual - more of a get-to-know-you question): “A Christian once tried to prove that God was real because of the way God seemed to answer his prayers. His atheist friend said, ‘That’s just co-incidence.’ To which the Christian responded, ‘Yes, but the more I pray, the more co-incidences happen.’ Has that been your experience: the more you pray, the more co-incidences happen? Tell us about it.”
- Read through James 5:7-20 and the associated commentary insights listed below.
- **Discovering Bible insights:** “Of all you read in James this week, what did you find most fascinating or interesting?”
- **Discerning God’s message:** “As you pondered James this week, were there any one or two things that God seemed to be saying to you, specifically?”
- **Responding to God’s message:** “In light of what you believe God said to you, how is your life being changed, or in what ways does it still need to change?”
- “Well done for listening to God in James. There are 65 other books waiting for us, so don’t stop reading through them in your own devotions. Keep expecting God to speak to you through his Word. Also be sure to make use of the other commentaries available on www.commongroundchurch.co.za

PATIENCE IN HARD TIMES (5:7-12)

- 1) *Wait patiently for Jesus’ intervention in your hard time.*
- 2) *Don’t let hard times make you grumble against each other.*
- 3) *Be encouraged by the examples of those who were blessed as a result of their perseverance.*
- 4) *Be encouraged by how God has the power to turn the whole situation around.*
- 5) *Be encouraged by God’s compassion for you.*
- 6) *Be a person whose words can be taken at face value.*

A RICH PRAYER LIFE (5:13-19)

- 1) *Give yourself to petitionary prayer.*
- 2) *Give yourself to praise prayer.*
- 3) *Give yourself to healing prayer.*
- 4) *Give yourself to faith-filled prayer.*
- 5) *Give yourself to grace-mediating prayer.*
- 6) *Give yourself to effective prayer.*
- 7) *Give yourself to earnest prayer.*
- 8) *Bring wanderers back to God.*