

The Book Of James With Francis Chan: A 12-Day Video Bible Study

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Devotional

Watch Video At: https://youtu.be/sfQv6_Se_BE

Why would you need wisdom? Maybe you're facing challenges. Or you're worried that you've got it all wrong, that Christianity isn't the right way. If it was the right way, then why would God let you experience suffering or hardship like this?

If the thought has ever crossed your mind, you're in good company with James's audience. "The twelve tribes in the Dispersion" at the beginning of the letter described both the Jews who'd been exiled from Israel and also the Christian believers who'd scattered from Jerusalem after persecution settled in to stay.

A people sent packing due to their faith were familiar with suffering, which makes James's opening exhortation imminently practical for them: "Count it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you meet trials of various kinds." Suffering was part of life, but God wanted His children to greet trials with a counter-intuitive response. Joy.

Human nature hasn't changed in two millennia. We want to know *why* we suffer. But James instead tells his readers why trials should provoke joy: ". . . for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness." The word for testing (*dokimion*) was often used to describe precious metals put through extreme heat to remove impurities, becoming so pure you could see your reflection in it. Similarly, as God tests us and we go through the heat, we reflect His nature more. We are able to endure and remain faithful to Him.

Francis Chan said in the video, "What God wants to do is not just to make you happy. He wants to make you holy. He says He wants us mature, complete, not lacking in anything. Have you ever thought about that as the goal of your life?"

When persecution drove the Christians out into the wider world, many of them had good reason to doubt their faith. Was it really worth all the pain to stay faithful to Christ? James emphatically says "Yes!" and urges them to trust in God's wise guidance. He says the same to us. Don't jump in and out of your faith. Keep in touch with God when people confront you for living according to your faith, and He will get you through.

In what ways do you demonstrate your steadfast faith in Jesus? What does it look like at home or at work or with your neighbor or family members? Think back to the last time you faltered: Were you silent when you should have spoken up? Did you succumb to peer

pressure and actively sin against someone? Whatever happened, confess it to God and pray for wisdom and strength when the next test comes.

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Devotional

Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/gAZI4W-QBww>

Did you ever use the excuse, “The devil made me do it!” after giving in to a temptation? We like to deflect blame from our own poor choices, don’t we? Some people in James’s day even tried to blame God for their own failures. As though He made it impossible for them to resist wrongdoing.

But God doesn’t work that way. James 1:13 clearly states that God is not the source of temptation. Rather, our own desires entice us to take what we want, when we want it. We know the feeling of being baited, like Francis pointed out—God says something is wrong or evil, but we want it anyway. We have a choice at that moment. Just like that fish that’s being lured away, either I go and I grab it, or I swim away.

Our heavenly Father is the source of “every good gift and every perfect gift.” He started by giving us life itself. His love gives us purpose and significance, just because we are His children. All the good things in life are just bonus, extra blessings He chooses to give us.

So don’t listen to the tempter’s deceptive words. Giving in to temptation takes us down a road from temporary pleasure to sin, which, if not stopped, will lead to death. What seems so small can have big consequences: Gossip could lead to a broken relationship. Gluttony can lead to chronic illness. Speeding can lead to car accidents. Our choices point us either toward life or death.

It’s hard to believe that God’s way is best when we’re being tempted. We get easily distracted by the glitter of more things, more attention, more pleasure, right? The promises of pleasure cause temporary blindness. But James tells us not to be deceived. Remember: God gives us a whole new life that is infinitely better than anything the tempter can offer. A kind word can pull someone out of suicidal thoughts. Healthy eating honors the body God gave us. Generosity combats our selfish tendencies.

We often assume that the best way to fight temptation is self-discipline. Grit your teeth and do the right thing. Just say no. And there’s nothing wrong with saying no. But maybe there’s a better approach—also saying *yes* to the kind of life God wants to give us.

Think about your best strategy to fight temptation. You will be tempted—no question about that. What can you do to prepare for temptation? What positive steps can you take today to obey and honor God's way?

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Devotional

Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/SoSPCW9jqNw>

No shortage of Bible studies fills book stores and web sites, offering up unique topics and teachings about God's Word. You are reading one right now. God wants us to read and hear His message of grace and truth. But He wants us to do more than that: He expects us to act upon what we've learned.

This passage opens with a warning still repeated—and needed—in modern culture: “Be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.” Anger, James says, does not produce godly righteousness. Listening, with patience and perseverance, allows us to receive “with meekness” the word of God. We find the source of abundant life in the scriptures, not in our own impulsive, selfish emotions.

James is writing to religious people. They know God's law. But James keeps pushing them, and us, to take the next step. Don't just hear it—do it! Don't just reject the immorality of the culture around you, but also be careful about your own anger and pride. Let your faith show up in your actions.

Do you think of religion as a good thing or not? Do you think your colleagues consider religion a good thing? A lot of people these days consider themselves “spiritual but not religious.” To them, religion seems narrow, restrictive, maybe even hateful toward people outside the religion. But when believers behave according to the Bible's teaching, we look for opportunities to care for those people around us, especially those in the most need.

And beyond that, are you careful about what you say? Maybe you consider yourself religious, too. Maybe you have been a Christian for some time now. You have this faith thing figured out. But James keeps pushing us to put feet to our words, to live what we say we believe.

- Do we listen more than we speak?
- Do we keep our anger in check?
- Are we careful about what we say?
- Do we put into practice what we hear in God's Word?
- Do we let God's implanted Word grow within us?

So what is the next step for you? What issue is James calling you to confront?

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Devotional

Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/bGzB3b-8pJM>

Think about the most famous person you've ever met. How did this happen? How did you react to this person? Now reflect on the scene described in verses 2–3. If this were to happen in your church, what do you think would happen? How would you treat the two people differently?

We can figure out from this letter what the problems were with the people James wrote to. Those people gossiped sometimes. They got angry with one another. And when a rich person showed up at the church door, they shoved poor folks aside to clear the path.

So that's the first challenge James offers in this chapter: Do we show favoritism? It's natural to get nervous around celebrities. No one would blame us for favoring the rich folks who show up to worship with us. We are naturally blinded by the trappings of success and worldly value. But such behavior goes against all the truth of God. The rich don't deserve special treatment; in fact, the poor do. Doesn't the kingdom of God belong to them?

Then James accuses his very religious readers of being lawbreakers. Playing favorites? You're no better than a murderer. You have broken God's law. You deserve His judgment. James is saying that all of us have sinned, even religious folks. All deserve judgment. But guess what? God offers you mercy, so receive it. His mercy triumphs over judgment.

And once we realize how much we depend on God's mercy, it's hard to show favoritism to the rich. Instead, we value the poor, because they have mastered the one thing God wants above all else: relying on Him for everything they have.

If you have been working hard to keep God's rules, talk with a pastor or teacher about the idea of God's "mercy." If you lead in your church, evaluate the church's response to visitors — not just the stated policies, but the actual behaviors. Is favoritism shown? If so, what can you do about it? Finally, can you get involved in a ministry to the poor and homeless in your community? Many such ministries need volunteers and financial support. If you can't find one to connect with, perhaps you could start one.

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Devotional

Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/tj736IXCbs>

Martin Luther, the famous German reformer, wanted to throw the book of James out of the Bible because of this specific passage. He didn't win that argument. In this passage James addresses the question: What is the nature of genuine faith in Christ? In other words, what does it look like? What effect does it have in our lives?

Faith in the fact that there is one God is good, but not remarkable, James says. It puts you on a par with demons. In fact, demons might be a bit ahead of you, because when they think about God, they "shudder." If your belief in God does not result in godly actions, then that faith is essentially "dead."

Body and breath go together. A body without breath is merely a corpse. James says it's the same thing with faith and works. Let's stop trying to rip them apart. When faith is genuine, it results in good works. We trust the Holy Spirit to motivate us. The love of God fills our hearts, so we respond to the needs of those around us.

Now, you can get wrapped up in theological debates about whether faith or works is more important, but that misses the point. True faith changes you. Faith flows into works. The two are inseparable.

Plants grow. That's what they do. Fruit trees bear fruit. And people with genuine faith in Christ put out the fruit of good works. James is not saying that we earn salvation by being good or doing good. He's saying that a fruitless faith is pointless, worthless. It's not really faith.

We should also note a subtle difference between believing *that* and believing *in*. We can believe that God exists, but trusting *in* Christ is the key— that relationship radically alters how we live. When we believe *in* our powerful Lord, like Abraham and Rahab did, we will find that our faith is confirmed by our actions.

Talk with God about your own faith. Do you have "faith with works" or "faith without works?" Ask God to give you the power you need to put your faith into action.

Also, talk with at least one other close Christian friend about this question: *Is my faith more on the inside or the outside?* Both are good. Both are important. But if you just *feel* your faith and don't *show* it, you're out of balance. (It's also possible to tilt the other way, doing stuff for God, but not taking time for personal growth.)

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Devotional

Watch Video At: https://youtu.be/W64hbqSOU_w

Turn on the TV or the radio or the internet, and chances are, you'll hear someone talking. And it's even likely that you'll hear someone criticizing other people. It's easy for us to get swept into that. But God still loves those people, doesn't He? How can we praise God one minute and in the next minute tear down people God loves? This should not be.

James, writing to many believers, must have been concerned about churches in general. Apparently, there were people speaking badly—boasting about themselves, cursing others, picking fights. James tells them all to shape up.

Who is being “called out” by James in verse 1? Why do you think teachers will be judged with greater strictness? Francis said, “We live in a day and age when everyone wants to be the one who gives advice, everyone wants to be the expert, and James is going to argue, are you sure you want to do that? Because God is going to judge you more harshly for being a teacher.”

Show, don't tell. James followed this rule of writing to fantastic effect: ships guided by small rudders, horses guided by small bits, forests set ablaze by tiny fires. He paints these pictures to drive home his point that the tongue—such a small thing—has the potential to cause great damage.

The tongue is a powerful force for all of us, and it affects the way we influence others. Whether you lead a church or a small group or a family, what you say will have a huge impact.

Think about a time harsh words hurt you. Now consider the influence your words can have on your children, your neighbors, your students, your friends. You have great power in your hands—no, not in your hands, but in your mouth. Power to do good or to do harm. How could you help or harm people by what you say this week?

It's impossible to tame the tongue. No human can do it, but God can. Ask the Lord to give you a tongue that seeks to bless Him and bless others. May the words of our mouths be acceptable to Him.

When you find yourself speaking badly about someone, stop—in mid-sentence if you need to. Then say a prayer for that person.

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Devotional

Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/KVUCvd41YB0>

Who is the wisest person you know or have known? Why do you say that? How did they show their wisdom?

In the video Francis described wisdom this way, "Wisdom is about action. It's about character. James says if you have wisdom from above . . . then you're going to be pure. There's going to be a holiness about your life."

The Bible has a great amount of teaching about wisdom. One regular theme is that true wisdom doesn't talk about itself. The wise person recognizes his or her own limitations and does not boast. The wise person knows how short life is and has a healthy fear of the Lord.

James's audience considered themselves wise, and they boasted about it. They liked to be well-respected, and when they saw others who got more respect, they envied them, criticized them, and tried to get ahead of them. Perhaps this started with a genuine desire for righteousness, but this desire was soon clouded by impure motives, by personal ambition.

Let's work for peace. But let's not be drawn in by those who boldly claim that they are wiser than everyone else. Be wary of impure motives. Be careful what you listen to. Think once more about the wisest people you know. They probably don't have all the answers, but they're wise enough to go to God to get the answers.

Do something to honor a person whose wisdom you have been blessed by. If the person is still living, thank them by telling them what they have taught you. If they have passed, then thank God for them, and find some way to commemorate their effect on your life.

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Devotional

Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/mVOBmjwSs-Y>

A good strategy helps tremendously in attaining any kind of goal. Putting an effective strategy together takes wisdom—the kind of wisdom we learned about in James 3. But here, James confronts the ugly, selfish result of false wisdom. The church is fighting, coveting, and speaking evil about one another. They want things their way, but they are looking for answers in all the wrong places.

James’s original readers prided themselves on being religious. But by criticizing others who are not as religious as they are, they reveal how far from God they themselves have strayed. Every time they open their mouths, they’re slandering others. They seem more interested in building their own status than in loving their brothers and sisters.

James is calling them, and us, to humility, to an accurate understanding of our place in regards to God. An essential element of humility is prayer, but not the sort of praying James’s audience had been practicing. “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly. . . .” They were asking with selfish motives, relegating God to the role of benevolent benefactor and assuming He would give them whatever they asked—if they even bothered to ask.

As soon as we say it’s everyone else’s problem and not ours, then it becomes our problem. The solution is not to argue better or to prove that we’re right and others are wrong. The solution is to humble ourselves, to admit where we have fallen short, to pray for the things that God cares about, to mourn over our sinfulness, to receive God’s grace.

Are there “fights and quarrels” in your life? If you’re not seeing eye to eye with someone, do what you can to set that relationship right.

Find a humble way to serve your church or community. Clean up, fix up, help those who routinely get neglected. This is not about you getting props for a good deed, but about showing the love of God to others.

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Devotional

Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/YKYRsvjHZmk>

We all make plans. We have to or things would be a mess. You have to plan to make a presentation for work or study to pass an exam. You have to plan for someone to pick up your kids from school activities if you can't do it. Making plans is not the problem James addresses here. The problem is our attitude about the plans we make.

How would you define arrogance? Do you think it is arrogant to declare your plans without first actually saying the words, "If the Lord wills"? You've heard it before. It can get a little crazy when you visit a restaurant and tell the waiter, "If the Lord wills, I'll have the chicken." Or you get up to use the restroom and say, "Excuse me. If the Lord wills, I'll be back in a moment."

In the video, Francis said it's about asking, "God, am I really in submission to Your will? Am I comparing myself to other people whom I consider more arrogant, that I've overlooked my own arrogance? OK, Lord, I recognize that my life is in Your hand. Every breath is a gift from You. So I surrender it to You now. What do You want me to do?"

The key here is that God's plans trump our plans. We need to be humble enough to recognize that God might have different priorities from ours, and we should be obedient enough to make plans with His priorities in mind.

Sometimes we live as if God does not exist. We conduct our business day to day without thinking a lot about what God wants. We make our plans based on our hopes and dreams, not God's. We may have a rather moral code of conduct, but we're not responding to God's daily guidance.

That's a problem, says James. A few verses earlier he was urging his readers to "submit yourselves to God" and to "draw near to God and he will draw near to you." That humble attitude of submission is crucial if we're going to live for Him in this world. Living in constant communication with God is necessary if we're going to be flexible enough to change our plans based on His desires.

How do we need to change our habits so that we can hear God's daily guidance and follow it?

What plans do you have for your life, your family, your home, your business, your church? Talk with God about these, and then listen. What does He think about all this? If your plans involve others, get them in on the praying, too.

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Devotional

Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/WESWylgapUI>

Do you think this letter is written to all “rich” people ever, to rich people in that time and place, or just to the rich people who were guilty of exploitation? The deeper question is: What are we going to do with this? James really lays into these people, and it makes us uncomfortable. If we can dodge this barrage, we want to. We want to say it’s their problem, not ours. And most of us don’t think of ourselves as rich, do we? We’re always looking at someone else who has more, and we say, Go after them, James. They’re the problem.

But whenever we come to Scripture, we want to see what’s there for us. God wants to speak to us, and we need to be ready to listen, even if it’s uncomfortable. How does God want us to use our resources? That’s the question we want to zero in on today.

In the video, Francis Chan got us off on the right track when he said, “Let’s look at our hearts and go, Why long for these earthly things so much? And, why am I acquiring more and more for myself and neglecting those who are in need?”

In the first six verses of James chapter 5 we learn what God cares about and we learn what makes Him mad. When rich people exploit poor people, that’s a big problem. God will turn the tables in His coming kingdom.

And maybe we should “weep and howl” a little more about the injustice in our world. We should certainly do what we can to help the poor. James has been saying this all along.

But all of that starts in our hearts. We might find it hard to admit how important money really is in our lives. Is it more important to us than God is? How many of our decisions are based on the bottom line rather than our higher calling?

How can we break the mastery of money in our lives? How can we center our hearts on God rather than wealth?

What can you do? Find out more about exploitation in our world today. Share your findings with other believers. Pray together about what you could do to change things.

Also examine your household budget. How do your expenditures reflect your *spiritual* priorities? What might need to change?

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Devotional

Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/4KtqS20Wi-0>

Waiting isn't usually our favorite activity. James uses the word "patience" four times in four verses. Remember that this was the first generation of Christians. When Jesus ascended to heaven, some surely expected Him to return in a week or a month. When the delay stretched on for years, some were losing hope—especially when life was getting more difficult for Christ-followers. But these believers weren't just waiting; they were suffering.

The Bible is full of encouragement for those who suffer, whether that suffering comes in the form of persecution or from some other force. We can even bring suffering upon ourselves. But Scripture keeps reminding us that God still cares, that He has not abandoned us, that He sits with us in our suffering, and that we will come out of this stronger than before.

James provides two examples. First, the "prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord." Jeremiah is the best example of a prophet who suffered for speaking the truth. The second example is Job.

When people are discussing suffering, Job is the go-to Bible book. Why God allowed all of Job's suffering can be an unending debate. But James doesn't get into the why. He wants us to see Job and other prophets as examples of those who have been blessed as the end result of suffering.

James doesn't get into the unfairness of suffering. He acknowledges that it's going to happen and says, "Here's what we can do with the suffering." As you grapple with your or another's suffering, remember these truths from James:

- We can make sure it doesn't divide us ("don't grumble against one another").
- We can trust that being patient, persevering, and riding it through til the end will result in our being blessed.
- We can look to others in the past who have persevered, like the prophets and Job, as examples of those who have gone through profound suffering and come out on the other end.
- Because of Job's example, we can know that sometimes verbalizing the anguish and misery is part of going through it.
- We can know that throughout suffering, God is always "full of compassion and mercy."

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Devotional

Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/Lw3VnSvzCR8>

If prayer is, essentially, talking with God, then there must be many ways to do it. Certainly we want to speak respectfully to the Creator of the universe, but that didn't stop Abraham, Moses, David, Jeremiah, or other biblical heroes from speaking their minds. It's a conversation with a great God who loves us. With that in mind, choose whatever posture or format makes sense.

Scripture indicates great value in both personal prayer and group prayer, and both appear here in verses 13–14. If you're in trouble, pray. Call out to God privately when you need His help. But there is also healing power as the community of faith gathers, with its appropriate leadership, to call upon the Lord.

The connection between sin and sickness is not an easy one to figure out. Do James's words mean that a sick person must have sinned in some way, to bring on the sickness? No! Sometimes that could be the case, but not always.

Earlier, James challenged his readers to humble themselves before the Lord. In this last part of his letter, he shows what that looks like. The church community is praying together, confessing their sins to one another. They accept the fact that they're "only human," but they still expect great things from God when they pray. And when someone strays from the faith, they don't alienate that person with harsh words of judgment. They pray. They forgive. They restore.

The Christian faith is not about setting up some ideal of perfect behavior, but of connecting with God humbly, listening to Him, letting Him reorder our priorities, and living out His passion for the needy. Our faith in Christ changes us. A true faith—a living faith—has the natural outworking of good works. And good works—no matter how good—can't produce authentic faith. Faith is always a gift and never earned.

So as you face trials, as you experience temptation, as you minister to the needy, as you suffer, have faith in God. Trust Him for wisdom. Trust Him for compassion. Trust Him for patience. Trust Him for endurance. Trust Him for healing. Trust Him for the faith that produces a harvest of righteousness.

If you don't already, connect with other believers for group prayer. Talk with a few friends about getting together on a regular basis to pray for the needs of your church and community.

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