

**Week 1**

# 8 weeks

**TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE >>**

*'Consider it pure joy, my brothers,  
whenever you face trials of many kinds...'*

**James 1:1-18  
&  
Luke 22:54-62**

## >> THE BOOK OF JAMES – A SUMMARY

You might not know it, but James' letter is one of the more controversial books in the Bible. In fact, it's such a hot potato that several key Christians throughout history have even challenged its right to be in the Bible! Martin Luther, the hugely influential 16th Century reformer who spearheaded the beginnings of the Protestant church, called the book 'a right epistle of straw'. He didn't think that it should have the same sort of weight and attention as, for example, the letters of Paul. Why?

Well, it's because at first glance it seems that James (possibly the brother of Jesus) might be undermining the Bible's crucial emphasis on the truth that salvation is only through faith in Christ. Jesus died on the cross and rose again, so that we might be forgiven and have a fantastic future in his Kingdom if we have faith in him. It is all about what Jesus has done, rather than what we have to do! So, in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he writes, 'For it is by grace you have been saved through faith – and this not for yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works' (Ephesians 2:8-9).

However, James apparently writes something very different in chapter 2 of his letter, 'You see a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone' (James 2:24). So, is the book of James really that different from the rest of the New Testament? Is he really contradicting the rest of the Bible's teaching about salvation? Well, in a word, no! Let me explain...

### > WHY SHOULD WE STUDY JAMES?

The closer you look at the book of James, the more you realise that James is really saying something very profound about our Christian lives. What he has to say is something that Paul and the rest of the Bible would certainly agree with! James is basically laying down a core foundation that being a follower of Jesus Christ always results in a changed life, that is different from the world around. If you think you are a Christian and yet there is no change in your life, then perhaps your faith is really not faith at all. In other words, true Christian faith always results in a changed life. So, Paul and James are basically defending the same ground but from different perspectives we cannot earn our salvation it is by faith alone in the death of Jesus Christ (Paul) and this faith will always result in a changed life (James).

James emphasises this in several areas of life. From perseverance to poverty, actions to attitudes, prayer to pride, and suffering to speech. And for those of us in the 21st Century who want to be wholehearted disciples of Jesus, we would therefore do well to pay careful attention to his words, and then change where change is needed!



## **How do I live - JAMES 1:1-18**

The letter that James wrote gives us one of the most compelling portraits of Christian living anywhere in the Bible. Nobody who meets with Jesus can fail to be challenged to change. As we start this new series together you might want to ask yourself how ready you are for God to transform you.

***People who are submitting to Jesus can...***

**> Rejoice in difficult times (v2-8)**

**> Be proud of humble circumstances (v9-11)**

**> Stand firm under great temptation (v12-18)**

***Why are we doing this?***

*“Growing whole-life disciples is the most strategic issue facing the western church”  
Bishop Graham Cray*

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**NOTE:** Throughout the rest of the study, there are several questions for discussion. One or two of the questions allow a more creative approach. Feel free to adapt them as you see fit, but they are some ideas to prompt some more creative thinking! **These are marked by an asterisk \*.**

## > Rejoice in difficult times (v2-8)

- The Bible does not shy away from the harsh reality of suffering that exists in the world and that Christians will face. What is God able to do in us when we are experiencing troubles and difficulties (v2-4)?
  
- Looking back over some of the times when you have faced significant difficulties, how have you coped? What has helped you to get through them?  
*(\* Take a blank piece of paper. On one side, write down a key aspect of God that you know to be true. Then, on the other side, write about a significant difficulty in your life. Sometimes, having the two together in our lives is a tension. Share with, and pray with, 1 or 2 people so that you might be able to cope with this better.)*
  
- What does James say that we need if we are to know joy in the midst of trials (v5-8)? What do we need to remember about God (v5)? Why will this be the critical factor for coping when life is difficult?

## > **Be proud of humble circumstances (v9-11)**

- A great temptation we all face is to be proud of our own achievements, qualifications, status or wealth. What does our culture tend to encourage us to be proud of? In which areas are we likely to be caught out? Why is it so absurd to be proud of these things?
  
- James tells us we can be proud of our humble circumstances. Can you work out why? What happens when we humble ourselves before God? Look at James 4:6 for a clue. (*\* Draw a picture of something that you are tempted to be proud of in your life. Then, together, in a prayerful attitude screw up that picture and discard it as you symbolise your commitment to live humbly before God.*)

## > **Stand firm under great temptation (v12-18)**

- It is vital to make the distinction between facing temptation and giving in to temptation. When we face temptation, who do we tend to blame for it? Other people? Circumstances? Even God? What does James say is the first place we need to look to?
  
- When we are faced with temptation, what can we be absolutely sure about concerning the character of God and his purposes in our lives? How will this make a difference?

## >> A CLOSER LOOK pt 2. (Luke 22:54-62)



Having looked at how being a follower of Christ involves some deep changes, it is now important to consider a further change. This change is something that is right at the heart of being a disciple of Jesus - changing our hearts.

To help us in this, let's think about a person who underwent a complete change. He went from being a "Grade-A" failure into one of the true giants in the church. His name was Peter.

Peter, like James, had a real transformation in his life. He started out as a humble fisherman, but went on to be one of the most influential leaders in the early church. What a change!

**> QUESTION** *Discuss or think about a key time in your life which led to a radical change in your relationship with God. What was it that caused you to change, and how did you change?*

The gospels describe the change in Peter's life. He starts out as a brash and confident disciple, but, in the early years of following Jesus we see that Peter's confidence was misdirected. He was confident in his own ability to follow Christ, rather than recognising his deep need to change. He thought that he was strong enough to be a true follower of Jesus. In fact, in the Gospel of Luke, Peter confidently declares "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and death" (Luke 22:33). And yet, before the day is over, his whole life has been completely shattered - revealing just how frail he really is. A massive change needed to take place in his heart. He needed to realise just how much he needed help.

**> READ** *LUKE 22:54-62*



**> QUESTIONS** *What is happening here? Why do you think Peter followed? (cf. Matthew 26:58)*

*Would you have followed, or stayed away like the other disciples?*

*In LUKE 22:31-34, Jesus predicts that Peter will deny him but Peter insists he won't. Do you think of yourself as a strong Christian, or not?*

As we think about changing our lives to be wholehearted followers of Christ, it can be tempting to think that all we need to do it is to change our actions. However, the Bible reminds us that we're not strong enough to change on our own. Our *hearts* need to change as well as our *actions*. The bible calls this repentance – it's a change in our hearts that results in change in our actions. But the remarkable thing is that then, like Peter, Christ graciously takes the humble person who is broken-hearted over their own sin and uses them to change the world.

**> QUESTION** *After denying that he followed Jesus, Peter “went outside and wept bitterly”. When was the last time you did this about your own attitude to Jesus?*

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## >> MAKING A CHANGE *(James 1:1-18)*



### **WHAT CHANGES CAN YOU MAKE THIS WEEK?**

*It's important to act on what you have studied. Can you think of some specific changes that you can make during this week, as a response to what you have been looking at?*

Here are a couple of suggestions, but there may be others that you would like to define yourself:

- During a difficult time, ask yourself 'In what ways can I persevere during this?' Ask, 'how can this help me 'mature' as a Christian?'
- When tempted to feel proud of your status, in comparison with someone else, stop and think. In what ways might that other person be better off than me?
- When facing a particular temptation, read v16 &17 and ask God to help you resist that temptation.
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## >> MAKING A CHANGE *(Luke 22:54-62)*



*It's important to act on what you have studied. Can you think of some specific changes that you can make during this week, as a response to what you have been looking at?*

Psalm 51:17 says: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart O God, you will not despise." Take time to ask God to break your heart over your own sin.

Then, using the cards (if you haven't already done so), write a prayer to God asking that he would change your heart and life over the next few weeks so that, like Peter and James, you will be someone who will be used by him to change the world.

Why not pray this prayer now and regularly over the next few weeks?