

# REAL FAITH IN THE REAL WORLD

## *Practical Wisdom From the Book of James*

### SMALL GROUP LESSON 1

Introduction and James 1:1-18

#### INTRODUCTION

Read together this introduction to James:

*This study is about getting real. It's easy to say we're a Christian, to say we're a good person, to think that we believe all the right things. But James says to us – who are you kidding? What does your life really look like? Do your actions match the high ideals you say you believe?*

*Our current culture can sniff out hypocrisy at a moment's notice. If we want to be a light for Jesus, if we want to show what Jesus is like, our life and our actions need to match what we say we believe! How do we treat people, how do we react to hard situations, what kinds of things come out of our mouths, how do we handle our anger, and what do we do with our money? All of these are indicators of our real spiritual condition. James asks us to look at all these real-life situations and asks us – are we really who we say we are? Are we living what we believe?*

*James was the brother of Jesus and so in many ways he speaks with the same tone and attitude as the Lord Jesus. There's a family resemblance. You will enjoy and be convicted by the practical wisdom that comes from the book of James.*

**Question: What do you know about the book of James? Have you ever read it? What makes you excited to read it now?**

Who is James? There are four men named James in the New Testament

- James - father of Judas (not Iscariot) – Luke 6:16, Acts 1:13
- James – son of Alphaeus – one of the twelve apostles – Luke 6:15, Acts 1:13
- James – brother of John – one of the twelve apostles, one of the sons of Zebedee
- James – half-brother of Jesus, son of Mary and Joseph

It is this last one who wrote the book of James, he was the last one standing.

The book of James was probably written in 45-47AD, one of the earliest letters, about 15 years after Jesus' death. James was martyred in 62AD.

Read these six verses about James in this order:

1. Mark 6:3
2. John 7:5
3. 1 Cor. 15:7
4. Acts 12:17
5. Acts 21:18
6. James 1

**Question: What do you notice about James' journey of faith and how he changed over time? Why do you think he changed so much?**

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James was Jesus' half-brother, he grew up with him and probably spent a lot of time with Him. Was there a family resemblance?

Read each of these pairs of verses:

James 2:5	&	Matthew 5:3
James 3:10-12	&	Matthew 7:15-20
James 3:18	&	Matthew 5:9
James 5:2-3	&	Matthew 6:19-20
James 5:12	&	Matthew 5:34-37

**Question: Do you find that James "sounds" a little like Jesus? What are the similarities? How does this make you feel about studying James?**

### **JAMES 1:1-18 – A NEW WAY TO FACE HARD TIMES**

In this letter, James is speaking to Jewish Christians who are under pressure, outsiders in a Greco-Roman world, suffering from poverty, persecution, and a temptation to tone down their faith so it won't draw too much attention. James faces these issues head-on with upbeat but pointed advice, beginning with how we should handle trials and temptations in our lives. As we read this passage, notice the high regard James has for God and how this understanding of our Lord's character drives his response to life's inevitable crises and disappointments.

Read together James 1:1-12.

**Question: Looking back on the times when you've grown the most in your relationship with God, was it during the hard times or the easy times?**

**Question: In verse two, James says to celebrate or "consider it joy" when facing trials. Is he insane? How is this possible? Does verse 12 shed any light on your answer?**

**Question: How can we "consider it joy" in our trials and yet still be honest about our feelings of sadness, fear, grief, anxiety or anger in the midst of the trial?**

**Question: In verses 2-6, what are some pieces of advice James gives for handling trials?**

**Question: In verses 9-11, what is James talking about? Why should the rich take "pride in their humiliation?"**

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#### **Read together James 1:13-18**

In this passage, the same basic Greek word is used for trials (vs. 2, 12) and temptations (vs. 13,14).

**Question: How can our trials turn into temptations and our temptations into trials?**

**Question: What are warning signs that we are being tempted by evil desires?**

**Question: What have you found helpful in breaking the temptation cycle?**

#### **FOR PRAYER**

As you share prayer requests, think about sharing:

- Trials in your life that you are having a hard time “considering joy”
- Temptations in your life that you would like strength against