

# JAMES

FAITH / WORKS

MATT CHANDLER

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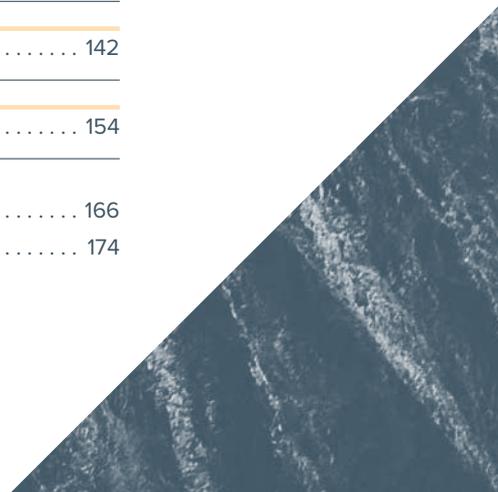
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MATT CHANDLER serves as the lead pastor of teaching at The Village Church in the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex. He came to The Village in December 2002 and describes his tenure as a replanting effort to change the theological and philosophical culture of the congregation. The church has witnessed a tremendous response, growing from 160 people to more than 11,000, including campuses in Flower Mound, Dallas, Plano, Fort Worth, and Southlake.

Alongside his current role as lead pastor, Matt is involved in church-planting efforts both locally and internationally through The Village, as well as in various strategic partnerships. Prior to accepting the pastorate at The Village, Matt had a vibrant itinerant ministry for more than ten years that gave him the opportunity to speak to thousands of people in America and abroad about the glory of God and the beauty of Jesus.

Matt is the author of *Take Heart; To Live Is Christ, to Die Is Gain; Mingling of Souls; The Explicit Gospel* Bible study (LifeWay, 2012), and *The Apostles' Creed* Bible study (LifeWay, 2017). He's also a coauthor of *Creature of the Word* (LifeWay, 2012).

Other than knowing Jesus, Matt's greatest joy is being married to Lauren and being the dad to their three children: Audrey, Reid, and Norah.

# INTRODUCTION

Faith works. This is the message of James. James shows that faith and works are not enemies but friends. Without faith, we could never find the strength to trust God. We would never be able to see above the trials we meet and to keep our eyes focused on the King. We don't work to be saved; we work because we're saved. Without faith, our works are empty service. Without works, our faith is dead. Works authenticate and adorn faith.

To illustrate this tension, James compares the person who has faith but not works to the person who stares at his face in the mirror but then forgets the way he looks as soon as he turns away. But with faith that works, we stay on the journey of being sanctified, knowing we'll be perfected once we reach the other side.

The repeated cry of James is that faith apart from works can never be sustained. We should proclaim this truth because faith makes us doers of the Word, not just hearers. Faith keeps us humble, not proud; directs our tongues to bless, not to curse; and causes us to show mercy, not judgment. Faith leads us to true religion that extends itself in favor toward others. Faith causes us to preach the good news to every tribe, tongue, and nation. Faith impels us to worship our God for all eternity. This is the message of James: faith works.

# HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

*James: Faith/Works* provides a guided process for individuals and small groups to walk through the New Testament Book of James. This Bible study book includes thirteen weeks of content, each divided into three major sections: “Group Study,” “Family Discipleship,” and “Personal Study.” A leader guide is also provided to prepare those who are leading groups through this journey.

## GROUP STUDY

Regardless of the day of the week your group meets, each week of content begins with a group session. This group session is designed to last ninety minutes, with approximately forty-five minutes dedicated to video teaching and another forty-five minutes to group discussion. Meeting even longer than ninety minutes will allow more time for participants to interact with one another.

Each group study uses the following format to facilitate simple yet meaningful interaction among group members, with God’s Word, and with the video teaching.

### **START**

This section includes questions to get the conversation started, a review of the previous week’s study to reinforce the content, and an introduction to the new content for the current week.

### **WATCH**

This section includes key points from the video teaching, along with space for taking notes as participants watch the video.

### **DISCUSS**

This section includes discussion questions that guide the group to respond to the video teaching and to relevant Bible passages.

## FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP

*James: Faith/Works* presents a great opportunity for families to consider the truths of the Book of James together. The weekly “Family Discipleship” section provides discussion and activities that encourage families to engage with this material on a deeper level.

This section will guide your family to consider the truths of the gospel by utilizing the following framework: “Time,” “Moments,” and “Milestones.” Use this framework for family discipleship in your home and on the go. Additionally, you’ll read Scripture together and restate the main point of the week’s group session.

## PERSONAL STUDY

Two personal studies are provided each week to take individuals deeper into Scripture and to supplement the content introduced in the group study. With biblical teaching and interactive questions, these sections challenge individuals to grow in their understanding of God’s Word and to make practical application to their lives.

## LEADER GUIDE

On pages 166–73 at the back of this book, you’ll find a leader guide that will help you prepare each week. Use this guide to gain a broad understanding of the content for each week and to learn ways you can engage with members at different levels of life-changing discussion.

# AN OVERVIEW OF JAMES

The Book of James is a wonderful companion piece to Jesus' teachings as recorded in the four Gospels. James has a strong ethical emphasis that's consistent with the moral teachings Jesus gave to His disciples. James also mirrors the sometimes harsh denunciations Jesus spoke against religious hypocrisy. Like Jesus' teachings, the Book of James is a source of both exhortation and comfort, reproof and encouragement. James is known for being extremely practical, yet it contains some of the most profound theological truths in the New Testament.

**AUTHOR.** James is named as the author in 1:1. A number of New Testament personalities were named James, but only three are candidates for the authorship of this book. James the son of Zebedee died in AD 44, too early to have been the author. No tradition identifies James the son of Alphaeus (see Mark 3:18) as the author. This leaves James the brother of Jesus, also called James the Just (see Mark 6:3; Acts 1:14; 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; 1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 2:9,12), as the most likely candidate.

Scripture identifies James as the brother of Jesus in Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3; and Galatians 1:19. Though he wasn't a follower of Christ during His earthly ministry (see John 7:3-5), a postresurrection appearance convinced James that Jesus is indeed the Christ (see Acts 1:14; 1 Cor. 15:7). James later led the Jerusalem church (see Gal. 2:9,12), exercising great influence there (see Acts 1:14; 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; 1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 2:9,12).

**BACKGROUND.** James was probably written between AD 48 and 52, though nothing in the epistle suggests a more precise date. James's death in AD 62 or 66 means the epistle was written before this time. Similarities to Gospel traditions and Pauline themes are suggestive. If Mark was written around AD 65 and time is allowed for the events of Acts 15 and 21 to have occurred between Paul's first and second missionary journeys, a date between AD 48 and 52 seems most likely.

James led the Jerusalem church. The reference to "the twelve tribes in the Dispersion" (Jas. 1:1) suggests the letter was written to Jewish Christians living outside Israel. The reference to a synagogue in 2:2 also suggests that his audience was Jewish Christians. References to their circumstances (for example, oppression by wealthy landowners, 5:1-6) could refer to congregations anywhere in the Roman Empire.

**MESSAGE AND PURPOSE.** As a general epistle, James was addressed to a broad audience (Jewish Christians) rather than a specific audience (for example, Christians at Ephesus only). There's an obvious concern to address internal and external difficulties that Jewish Christian congregations faced. Externally, they were facing trials (see 1:2), particularly oppression of various sorts exerted by wealthy landowners. It doesn't appear that the oppression was religious in nature. Internally, it appears that dissension was caused by a lack of self-control (see 1:13-17); uncontrolled speech; and false teachings that led to a misunderstanding of true religion (see 1:19-27; 2:1-4; 3:1-8), favoritism toward the wealthy (see 2:1-13), and selfish ambition that opened the door to murder and criticism (see 4:1-12).

James addressed these issues primarily through the application of principles defined by the Old Testament wisdom tradition. The solutions he named reflected the wisdom from above that comes from "the Father of lights" (1:17), who generously gives wisdom to those who ask for it. Wisdom is required for proper speech in worship and for determining who ought to teach (see 1:19-27; 3:1-8). Wisdom is also needed to avoid internal conflicts that create dissension within congregations (see 3:13-18; 4:1-12). The theme of faith in action is also important (see 1:19-27; 2:14-26); James demonstrated that faith that doesn't express itself in good works is useless. Another theme of the epistle is ethics, especially social justice (see 2:1-13; 4:1-12; 5:1-12).

**STRUCTURE.** The Book of James is a letter (an epistle), though only the greeting conforms to the ancient Greek form exemplified in Paul's letters, especially Galatians.

The Book of James has also been compared to Old Testament wisdom literature. Although James contains wisdom elements, such as comparing the wisdom of the world with the wisdom that comes from God, it also contains exhortations and prophetic elements that aren't common to wisdom literature.

WEEK 1

**BROTHER**

SERVANT

# GROUP STUDY

## START

*Welcome everyone to session 1 of James: Faith/Works.*

*Ask participants to introduce themselves with quick answers to the following question.*

**What's one phrase, nickname, or fact that summarizes who you are?**

Today we begin a study of the Book of James. We'll start by simply looking at one verse—the introduction to the letter. Because all Scripture is the inspired Word of God, we can learn a lot from a greeting. James's introduction identifies the theme and tone of the entire letter.

**Have you ever studied a book of the Bible? If so, what was it? How did you see the book differently after you completed your study?**

James is a highly practical letter to Christians in the early church, but it's rooted in deep faith and rich theology. Perhaps more than any other book in the New Testament, James emphasizes the application of Christian belief.

*To prepare for video session 1, pray that God will help each person understand and apply this truth:*

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James had a unique earthly relationship with Jesus, but his letter clarifies what the Christian life should look like for all believers. The Book of James is filled with practical wisdom, calling us to live out genuine faith through good works.

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# WATCH

*Use the space below to take notes  
while you watch video session 1.*

He knows the hairs on your head. He knows all the days that He has for you. In fact, He put you together and put those days together so that you might walk in the fullness of joy, bringing the greatest amount of glory to God.

The sovereign King of glory is not a taker. He is a giver.

God leads us into the fullest possible life by revealing to us who He is.

God is so about God that the Bible itself, first and foremost, is about God. It's not about you.

God makes known to us the path of life.

The “Thou-shalt-nots” are not God trying to take but God trying to lead you to something that's going to bring you more joy than your idea of what's going to bring you joy.

Salvation and obedience are the two ways God draws us into the fullest life possible.

James was written to encourage Christians in an increasingly hostile environment to live lives dependent on God and not give themselves over to the presumed comforts of the world.

## **THREE MAJOR THEMES OF JAMES**

1. Trials, suffering, and difficulty can be expected. They do not surprise the heart of God.
2. This is about progress, not perfection.
3. Riches and comfort will not satisfy the soul.

## DISCUSS

*Use the following questions to guide your discussion of the video.*

**How did James describe himself as he opened his letter in James 1:1?**

**Why is it significant that James, as a Jew, mentioned both God and Jesus?**

**What connotations does the word *servant* have? What does this self-identification reveal about James? What does it suggest about the content of his letter? About his perspective on the Christian life?**

*Read John 10:10.*

**How do the concepts of Jesus giving abundant life and of Christians obeying Him as Lord work together?**

**Do you think of God as being more concerned with either your obedience or your joy? How does your perspective on God affect your daily life?**

*Read Psalm 139:16.*

**How does believing that God created you and knows everything about you affect your willingness to obey Him?**

Matt highlighted three major themes that will run throughout our study of James:

1. Trials, suffering, and difficulty can be expected. They never surprise God.
2. God desires progress, not perfection, as we follow Jesus.
3. Riches and comfort will never satisfy the soul.

**Which common struggle in the Christian life most often threatens to steal, kill, and destroy your joy and satisfaction?**

**On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being spiritually dead and 10 being fully alive in joyful obedience, how would you rate your relationship with God? Explain your rating.**

Progress, not perfection, is James's message on faith and works. Sanctification is an ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in your life that conforms you to the image of Jesus. You hear the Holy Spirit's voice as you read the pages of Scripture.

Our goal is to move closer to being fully alive in Christ by the end of our thirteen-session journey through the Book of James.

**What are your hopes and expectations for studying the Book of James?**

**What remaining questions or comments do you have about this session's video teaching or discussion? What was challenging, convicting, encouraging, or timely for your current circumstances?**

*Close in prayer.*

## **PRAYER REQUESTS**

# FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP

The Book of James teaches us the way faith works. The Christian life involves learning how to live out what we believe about Jesus. Each week this “Family Discipleship” section will help parents walk alongside their children and lead them toward Christ by sharing the truths they’re learning from the Book of James.

“Family Discipleship” will follow a simple, three-part format: time, moments, and markers. Spend time together as a family in God’s Word. Look for moments throughout the day to reinforce the main truth of the week. Celebrate and remember milestones—significant ways God has worked in your lives.

■ **TIME.** Read Psalm 139:13-16. Encourage children to read parts of the Scripture if they’re able. Take turns reading the verses aloud. Explain that God created us and knows every detail about us. Help children see that because God made us, He knows what’s best for us. This is why we love and trust the Bible—because it’s God’s Word.

■ **MOMENTS.** Look for opportunities to point out amazing wonders God has made, especially tiny details in nature. Emphasize the joy of God’s design.

■ **MILESTONES.** Talk about reasons you celebrate birthdays. Look at the calendar and find all of the birthdays in your family. Find December 25 and ask your children what we celebrate on that day. Explain that Jesus grew up in a family and that one day a brother named James would write a book in the Bible. Now almost two thousand years later, your family will spend time each week reading that book. Emphasize that James wrote to teach us how God wants us to live.

# PERSONAL STUDY

## PART 1 / BROTHER

If you could gather all of the people who've ever lived—every person in history—James would stand out from the crowd as a man with a unique relationship to Jesus. The author of the biblical book bearing his name was also Jesus' little brother.

Technically, James and Jesus were half brothers. They shared an earthly mother, Mary, but James's biological father was Joseph, while Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit. He was the only begotten Son of God. Joseph was Jesus' earthly father, but he and Jesus weren't biologically related. James and Jesus, however, were biologically related.

How's that for sibling rivalry? It's not hard to imagine the mixed feelings James must have had growing up with the world's greatest brother—literally. Jesus was God's gift to humanity.

As Jesus' ministry began to grow, opinions about Him also grew increasingly divided among the public and even in His own family.

**Read Mark 3:13-19. Record the names of Jesus' twelve disciples.**

You may have never thought too much about it, but notice that Jesus' own family members were conspicuously absent. Look at their reaction in the next verses.

**Read Mark 3:20-21. What did Jesus' family think about Jesus and why?**



A few chapters later Jesus told the disciples that He had chosen these sobering words:

*A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown  
and among his relatives and in his own household.*

**MARK 6:4**

**Read Mark 6:1-4. Why was it hard for people who knew Jesus to believe in Him?**

**Have you found spiritual conversations to be easier or harder among nonbelieving family and friends? Why?**

Jesus' own family, including James, thought He was getting carried away with the whole religious thing. Put yourself in their shoes, and their reaction seems pretty reasonable. In Mark 3 Jesus' small-group discussion had gone so long and drawn so many people that He wasn't even able to eat. His family thought He was crazy!

Picture the scene. James and his family showed up to talk some sense into His oldest brother, but the house was so packed that they couldn't even get in to see Him. Frustrated and desperate, they had to ask someone to ask someone to ask Jesus to come out. On top of that, religious leaders among the crowd were accusing Jesus of being demon-possessed (see v. 22).

**Read Mark 3:31-35. Why would Jesus' words have been shocking in that moment?**

**What changed about James's relationship with Jesus after he believed in Him? What's the difference between knowing about Jesus and truly knowing Him?**

**When have you heard or spoken a difficult truth that encouraged salvation or spiritual growth?**

We're still prone to do the same thing Jesus' family did. Especially in our comfortable American Christianity, it's easy to discourage people from being too devoted. Maybe you've had an ongoing dialogue in your heart and mind about how seriously you should take the whole Jesus thing. What if your faith meant a change in attitude, lifestyle, or spending? What if it meant sacrifice or hardship? What if it meant doing something that made the rest of the world, even the people closest to you, think you'd lost your mind?

James was literally and biologically related to Jesus, but Jesus said that wasn't enough. The right family can't save you. People often say things like "I've always been a Christian" or assume they are because they were born into a family that occasionally went to church, celebrated Christmas, and maybe even observed Easter. But recall Jesus' words to His own mother and brothers.

Jesus was abundantly clear. Your family can't save you. A relationship with God is a matter of personal faith expressed through active obedience to the will of God.

**Conclude this part of this week's personal study by praying about the following questions.**

- Have I been relying on my upbringing, my family, or my sense of reason to shape my view of God?**
- Does total faith in Jesus seem unreasonable? Are certain areas of my life currently off limits to God?**
- Am I seeking to know and do the will of God?**
- How will I respond to Jesus today?**

**Ask God to reveal Himself to you as you continue studying His Word so that you can know and do what pleases Him as your Heavenly Father.**

## PART 2 / SERVANT

*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

**JOHN 3:3**

This was a radical statement among the Jewish people—God’s chosen people. Jesus told a religious leader the same thing He told His own mother, Mary, and His own brothers, including James. Biology isn’t enough. Tradition isn’t enough.

**Read John 3:1-21. In your own words, summarize Jesus’ teaching on belief.**

We can never be good enough. We need the cross. We need the resurrection. We need Jesus. We’re saved by faith alone by grace alone through Christ alone.

Notice that when Jesus explained our need to be born again, He concluded by saying saving faith must be lived out in active obedience to the will of God our Father. This idea sounds familiar.

**According to Jesus, how do our acts of obedience relate to our faith?**

The people of God are born again into the Heavenly Father’s family. We need a change of heart in order to experience abundant, eternal life with the King.

**Read Ephesians 2:1-10 to see how the gospel becomes effective in our lives.**

**Everyone is or was once obedient to:**

**Why is this an important truth for believers?**

**You're saved by:**

**You're made for:**

**Why are these important truths for believers?**

You haven't been saved by your good works, but it's absolutely clear throughout Scripture that you've been made for good works. Men and women who've been born again confidently walk in the light of Christ, doing the good works God has created them to do.

Faith works. Faith is sufficient for salvation. Faith is seen in good works. God does the saving. You do the serving.

The Book of James begins with the author identifying himself by name and as "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Jas. 1:1). He defined himself by his relationship of active faith and obedient service.

**On a scale of 1 to 10, how likely would someone be to identify you as a servant of Jesus?**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>Would never cross their mind</b>							<b>The most obvious thing about you</b>		

**How would you explain the difference between calling yourself a Christian and being a servant of Jesus Christ?**

Something interesting is going on here that we can easily miss in our English translations. The original Greek text of the New Testament uses James's Hebrew name: Jacob. Not only would the original audience know James, the brother of Jesus and the leader in the Jerusalem church, but they would also catch the author's symbolic identification with his audience.

In biblical history, Jacob was the father of the Jewish nation. After he wrestled with God, God renamed him Israel. Jacob had twelve sons who became the twelve tribes of Israel (see Gen. 32:28; 35:9-11,22-26).

Later in biblical history, the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and the Babylonians then conquered the Southern Kingdom. This period of captivity and oppression came to be referred to as the *dispersion*—the same word James used to address the early church audience: “to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion” (Jas. 1:1).

This simple form of address has profound significance. After Jesus’ ascension, the Christian church was almost immediately persecuted and scattered from Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria, spreading the gospel to the Gentiles (see Acts 1:8; 8:1).

Just as Jesus taught that the family of God is those who do the will of the Father, James presented the church as the faithful dispersion—the holy people of God’s new covenant. In Acts 15:13-18 James publicly declared that the Old Testament prophecy of God’s gathering His remnant was being fulfilled in the church.

James encouraged Christians to faithfully serve Jesus as their King. This encouragement would have been comforting and countercultural. When Jesus is Lord, we pledge our allegiance entirely to Him. This stance will necessarily put us at odds with our culture at some point.

### **In what ways does living for Jesus put Christians at odds with culture?**

The Christian life isn’t easy. Serving God through faithful obedience to Jesus won’t equal health, wealth, and happiness in the earthly sense. In fact, Jesus promised that when we truly identify ourselves with Him, we’ll experience persecution (see John 15:20). James knew it. The early church knew it. It’s still true today.

### **Prayerfully reflect on this question: Am I willing to identify with and live for Jesus, boldly serving Him as my Master, no matter what?**

*[Jesus] said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”*

**LUKE 9:23**