



JAMES

FAITH + ACTION

Tabernacle Baptist Church, Penarth
5 Small Group Studies

The Book of James

Faith + Action

	Page
Introduction by Pastor Roger	1
Week 1 James 1: Attitudes and Action	4
Week 2 James 2: Faith and Action	8
Week 3 James 3: Wisdom in Action	12
Week 4 James 4: Love in Action	16
Week 5 James 5: Honesty in Action	19

Introduction and studies 2 and 4 by Roger Grafton

Studies 1,3 and 5 by Jonathan Bugg

Introduction from Pastor Roger

The Book of James was the theologian Soren Kierkegaard's favourite book in the New Testament because of its emphasis on practical daily Christianity. However, it was Martin Luther's least favourite book of the New Testament because to him it seemed to contradict Paul's "*Justification by faith*" in Romans and Galatians. In fact, Luther disliked the Book of James so much that he wrote in his preface of the New Testament that "St. James' Epistle is a perfect straw-epistle compared with (Romans and Galatians), for it has in it nothing of an evangelic kind." This epistle certainly provokes very strong feelings!

Whilst there are at least 4 possible candidates called James who could be the author of this letter (James the father of Judas [Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13], James the son of Alphaeus [Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18] James the son of Zebedee and brother of John [Matt. 4:21; 10:2; 17:1]), the author is traditionally thought most likely to be the half-brother of Jesus, one of four sons from Mary and Joseph (Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3).

He was the leader of the Jerusalem Church between AD48 and AD62 (Acts 12:17; 15:13-21; 21:18; 1 Cor 15:7; Gal 1:19; 2:12). The Early Church called James 'James the Just' and later on he was nicknamed 'Camel Knees' because he was constantly on his knees in prayer! He was not a believer until after the Resurrection (Mark 3:21 & 31; John 7:5) but Jesus appeared to him personally after the Resurrection and he became one of the leaders of the early church. He was present in the upper room with the disciples (Acts 1:14) and it seems likely that he was with them when the Spirit came at Pentecost.

There are all sorts of other things that we know about James. He was probably married (1 Cor 9:5). He is referred to by Paul as a "*pillar*" and also as "*an apostle*" (Gal 1:19) but he was not one of the twelve (Gal 2:9). After Jesus' death and resurrection he was a leader of the church in Jerusalem.

Some people date the letter in the early 60's AD. However, there are

many indications that it was probably written before AD50.

- ♦ Its distinctively Jewish nature suggests that it was composed when the church was still predominantly Jewish.
- ♦ It reflects a simple church order - officers of the church were just called elders or teachers (James 5:14; 3:1)
- ♦ No reference is made to the controversy over Gentiles becoming Christians or Gentile circumcision, indicating that the letter was probably written before Paul's missionary journeys.
- ♦ The Greek term 'synagoge' ("synagogue" or "meeting") is used to designate the meeting place of the church (James 2:2) rather than the later term 'ekklesia' or church.

If this information does indeed point to an early dating, then this letter is the earliest of all the New Testament writings with the possible exception of Galatians.

The recipients are identified explicitly only in James 1:1 as "*The twelve tribes scattered among the nations.*" Some hold that this expression refers to Christians in general but the term "twelve tribes" would be more naturally applied to Jewish Christians. Furthermore a Jewish audience would be more in keeping with the obvious Jewish nature of the letter. For example, the use of the Hebrew title for God, "Kyrios Sabaoth", Lord Almighty, is a distinctly Jewish name. That the recipients were Christians is clear from James 2:1 and 5:7-8. It has been suggested that these were believers from the early Jerusalem Church who, after Stephen's death, were scattered as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Syrian Antioch. This would account for James' reference to trials and oppressions, his intimate knowledge of the readers and the authoritative nature of the letter. As leader of the Jerusalem Church, James wrote as a pastor to encourage and instruct his dispersed congregation in the face of their difficulties.

Characteristics that make this letter distinctive are:

- ♦ Its unmistakeably Jewish nature

- ◆ The emphasis on vital Christianity characterised by good deeds and faith that works in practical ways
- ◆ Its simple organisation
- ◆ Its familiarity with Jesus' teaching preserved in the Sermon on the Mount
- ◆ It is written in excellent Greek which is not always the case with other New Testament writings!

This letter has always been controversial with people arguing in the past about who the author is and whether it should even be in the Bible or not! I hope that as we study it together over the next five weeks you will come to see the Spirit has clearly been at work in the authorship of this book. It becomes apparent through this Spirit breathed epistle that our faith is demonstrated not in our spirituality and how much Scripture we learn or how often we go to church, but in how we live our whole lives and in the practical outworking of it as we seek to serve one another and our community.

Pastor Roger

James Chapter 1

Attitudes and Action

Introduction

I guess when you think about it, most of the Christian life could be summed up as having the correct attitude to things, so this study is about the attitudes we have to various issues in life.

Read James 1: 2-4, 12: Attitude to Suffering

What an opening line! “Hi, it’s me James: Be happy when the going gets really tough because it’ll be the making of you!” Where is the “Hi, how are you doing?” Abrupt introduction aside, can you think of a time of testing that on looking back was the making of you and in what ways do you feel that your experiences have taught you perseverance matured you? Did you consider it pure joy when you suffered trials? Do you now?

Read James 1:5 Attitude to asking in Prayer

In 1 Kings 3:5-13 Solomon asks for wisdom & is given so much more.

- What do you think God feels about what we ask for?

Read Matt 6:33 7:7-11, 1 Peter 3:10-13, Hosea 10:12, John 5:30.

- Why do you think our priorities in prayer are so often out of step with what God desires of us? What can we do differently to honour God?

Read James 1:6-8, 16-18 Attitude to Answered Prayer

- How often do you pray actually expecting with 100% certainty that you will get what you have prayed for?
- Why do we harbour such doubt?
- Do we think God should give us absolutely anything we ask for, and if not why?

Imagine a person who prays for a lottery win. In winning the many millions they are suddenly overwhelmed with the ability to do and own

things that they are not emotionally equipped for, and ultimately as has been the case far too often to refute, they end up emotionally, spiritually and often physically and financially worse off. If instead they had sought the wisdom of God and the will of God, they would have been content and at peace with what they had. Should God therefore answer our prayers even if they are well meant, or should He give us what will benefit us the most?

- How do you understand the reference to our being “a kind of first fruits”? How does this fit in with the earlier statements about maturing?

Read James 1: 9-11. Attitude to Wealth and Position

Wild flowers are so frail and delicate, they really don't ever last very long. With this in mind, James isn't very encouraging to read if we are rich is it? But here's the rub – Compared with almost a third of the world's population which exists on less than 70p a day (a US dollar) we are extremely rich and comfortable. Now read those verses again and discuss what challenges they raise in our lives.

- ♦ What does it say to us about our position in society?

Read James 1: 13-15, 19-21. Attitude to Sin

“Dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed”. So often we try to justify our sin, we say are weak, we can't help it, the Devil makes me! James suggests something far more practical – we want to! We cannot ever be tempted to do something we just do not want to do, but we can easily be tempted to something that deep down we'd like to do.

- ♦ Does this teaching challenge anything in your life?
- ♦ Have you ever excused yourself for a sin that these verses suggest was totally your fault?
- ♦ If the word planted in us can save us, what should we be doing instead of making excuses?

Some people believe that the only way to stop sinning is through the power of the Holy Spirit, others believe that we have to take responsibility and make an effort.

- When the latter verses say: “BE quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” how does this fit with your understanding of sin? Did you ever imagine that you had a part to play in gaining righteousness?

Read James 1: 22-25. Attitude to Challenge

With a face like mine, sometimes the best thing one can do when looking in the mirror is to then quickly forget. All the time I forget what I really look like, it remains possible to fool myself in to believing that I actually look like Steve McQueen or Jason Statham. The thing is that we all often see and then forget. Take the news for example: In July 2011 a 15 year old Bridgend girl was beaten to death by her 15 year old ex-boyfriend, In 2005 the **7/7 London Bombings** killed 52 People, in March 2004 the **Madrid bombings** killed 191 people died and in 2001 the **9/11 attacks** in New York killed 2996 people.

- Now be totally honest: how many people had to die before you can remember exactly where you were when you heard the news?

I would venture to suggest that in general, this is because we have become desensitised to the bad news so much, that it has to be bigger or more shocking for it to impact us. The problem is that **if we are able to desensitise** ourselves to the pain and hurt in the world, how easy is it do you think, to desensitise ourselves to the word of God? How often do we sit and hear sermons that challenge us, and yet we struggle to recall the next week what it was about. If we struggle to recall what it was about, how much more have we forgotten to deal with the issue it raised in our hearts?

- Do you come to church **expecting** to hear from God, be challenged and maybe even surprised?
- When was the last time you were so struck by the word of God that you can remember where you were, what the word was, and if it was a sermon, who was preaching?
- If it was more than a month ago, how do you feel about this?
- Did you respond to the challenge, change something in your life, an opinion or practice maybe?

“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”

- Do you? Why have you given the answer you have and if it was no, what will you do (if anything) to change that?

Read James 1: 26-27. Attitude to Religion

My parents used to be quite religious about going shopping on Thursday mornings to the point where they would get anxious if Thursday passed without that trip to the shops. There are others who are quite religious about watching Strictly Come Dancing. One can be religious without faith, and Religion without Christ is empty and worthless.

- Do you think it is **only** their uncontrolled tongue that threatens to make a person's religion worthless? If not "only the tongue" then what else?

Jesus says in Matthew 7.21 "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but only they who do the will of my father who is in heaven." That he goes on to explain that even those who do things in his name may be turned away suggests that it is possible to be religious, to be a church goer and yet not pleasing to God.

- What do you feel about that statement?

The early Christians were persecuted because they did not take part in the pagan practices of the day and stood out in the crowd by living their faith. It was to be 300 years before there was any real bible to speak of, yet the church grew because of the faithful living of the believers. It has been said that you are the only bible some people will ever read.

- If that is the case how will we make a difference for Christ?

James Chapter 2

Faith and Action

Introduction

James chapter 1 finishes with an exhortation to true worship. Real religion, says James, is shown in the way we treat the least and the last amongst us. Listening to and knowing the Word of God is not enough – we must do what it says as well. Our faith and therefore the outward proof of our salvation is demonstrated in the way we treat widows and orphans (the poor) and how we try to live holy lives.

In James chapter 2 this theme is continued as the author talks about the way that we treat the poor inside our church community. He has a stark warning to give on this point: anyone who breaks one part of the law is guilty of breaking all of it. Since the whole law is summed up in the royal law “Love your neighbour as yourself” then anyone who treats the poor amongst us badly is just as guilty as someone who is a murderer or an adulterer! You may not have killed someone or you may not have committed a gross sexual sin but if you don’t honour the widows, the orphans and the poor then you are just as guilty as those who have. James finishes the first part of chapter by reminding us to have mercy because mercy triumphs over judgement.

In the second half of the chapter James continues with his theme of faith and works. It was this part of the epistle that Luther found so difficult to grasp and felt that it contradicted the “greater” epistles of Galatians and Ephesians. However, a careful reading of the whole text shows us that actually James chapter 2 compliments and completes these other two epistles brilliantly by showing what the practical outworking of our faith should look like.

The argument of scripture which is fleshed out by James runs

something like this:

1. You cannot be saved by your good works or good deeds (Is 64:6; Rom 3:28).
2. We are saved by grace through faith alone. It is a free gift from God (Eph 2:8).
3. Once we are saved we should want to become more Christ-like and follow his example as Lord (Phil 2:3-5).
4. Our faith is demonstrated by the way we act in faith (like Abraham) and the way we act in mercy (James 2:18 & 21).

Works are not the opposite of faith; they are an essential part of it!

Read James chapter 2 verses 1-13

Labels aren't just found packages that come through the post or tins of food. We apply them to people all the time, sometimes without even knowing it. We say they are funny or boring, clever or stupid, friendly or unfriendly. There are all kinds of ways we can categorise and label people, and our labels can have a profound influence on the way that we then treat them. As you might suspect James had a few words to say about this.

Tuning into God

Before beginning the study, take a few moments to prepare your heart. Reflect on judgemental words and thoughts you've had this week. Take a few moments before you answer the following questions to confess them to God. Allow yourself to experience his mercy.

As a group pause before beginning to answer the study questions. If someone needs prayer, then minister to them. Hear one another's 'confession' and pray the prayer of faith, "And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven." (James 5:15)

- ◆ How do you personally react when someone comes into church who is wearing dirty old clothes, is drunk or has bad body

odour?

- ♦ Why is it wrong to give preferential treatment to those how have money? As long as everyone is welcome what does it really matter where they sit or how we treat them once they are here?
- ♦ Verse 5 says God has chosen the poor to be rich in faith. Is God guilty of showing favouritism in this way?
- ♦ How can “the royal law” (V8) guide our treatment of both poor and rich?
- ♦ In what sense is violating one law as serious as breaking every law? Is telling a white lie or stealing a pen from work or having a lustful thought really as serious as murder or adultery? Is someone who looks down on the poor really as guilty as someone who is a child molester?

Read James chapter 2 verses 14-26

“It is easier said than done” is a cliché that certainly can apply to our Christian life! It is much easier to talk about God than to obey him. Some people might say that believing in God and having faith in him is enough for the Christian believer but James points out that even the demons believe there is one God. That certainly doesn’t make them Christians! That is why someone can have all his or her doctrine perfectly straight and still have missed out on God’s will. James puts us straight on this point.

- ♦ According to James what good is faith without deeds? Explain why you think he says this.
- ♦ How does James answer the objection, “You have faith, I have deeds”? Which is most important?
- ♦ James gives two Old Testament examples of faith in action. The first is the familiar story of God testing Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham obeyed but was stopped by an angel at the last minute. How was Abraham’s

faith made “complete” by what he did?

- ◆ The second Old Testament example is Rahab, the prostitute who hid two Israelite spies sent to Jericho before Israel’s attack. How did Rahab’s belief affect her actions? In what ways were her actions costly to her? Does our belief affect our actions enough today even if it’s going to be costly?
- ◆ How does James’ closing analogy in verse 26 summarise his teaching on faith and actions?

Putting it into practice

- ◆ Towards what people or groups of people do you tend to show favouritism? Are there any groups or individuals you don’t think should be in church? Are there any people you would rather not mix with? Be honest!
- ◆ In what ways can you change your attitudes and actions? What might help you?
- ◆ In what ways can you bring your actions more into line with your beliefs in this coming week?

James Chapter 3

Wisdom and Action

James is a letter sent not to keep a congregation who see their salvation as the end of the story comfortable, but rather it is sent to a collection of people that James wishes to follow him in a deeper discipleship of Christ. Like much of the bible, this is not a book heavily focussed on the afterlife but rather it is rooted in how to be a kingdom people here and now.

Read James 3:1-2

This is one of those passages that make me shudder when I realise what I've got myself into. It is true of course that as a minister, there is an expectation that I will be beyond reproach, that my behaviour and conduct will be exemplary. But there is the word that a lot of this hinges on: Exemplary. A good example.

A good example is something that we are to seek to emulate. When reading a passage about elders, teachers, bishops or whatever, rather than saying "that bit doesn't apply to me!" how about thinking, "why should they be expected to behave so? Why do they have to behave better than anyone else?" Once you have asked that question, you will hopefully remember that the answer is so that everyone else will see their example and emulate them, seeking to live lives that follow the good example.

Read Philippians 3.17 and 1 Corinthians 11.1

- Can you think of someone who has been such an example that you have sought to emulate them? (for good conversation try not to all say Jesus!)

Some see this verse at the start of James 3 and assume that the whole passage is meant solely for teachers, but commentators believe, that the reference to teachers was to attract attention of the reader, rather than limit its applicability. So, as we read this chapter in James, we should do so knowing that this is the example we should

all be following. It is not just something for the pastor or visiting preacher. This is to encourage us all to aspire to examples set us, so we may do as it says in Philippians 1.27 'Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.'

Read James 3:3-8

We live in a world where we are able to communicate so quickly and easily with others that we don't always take a period of contemplation beforehand. When James wrote this letter, he would have considered carefully what he was going to say and may even have had a scribe to write for him while he pondered on the next bit. The letter in NT days was the only alternative method to talking face to face.

- Discuss what other things of modern society might also come under James' heading of the tongue today?

In the 1950's a pioneer researcher of body language called Albert Mehrabian found that the average message consists of 7 percent verbal (words only), 38 percent non verbal (body language etc) and 55 percent paralinguistic (tone of voice, inflection, and other sounds). Less than one tenth of what we say to the other person is the words we use.

- If for James, the possibility of a person saying something damaging and hurtful face to face, with all the body language and tone of voice that accompanied it, was worthy of a warning, how should our actions be influenced by Mr Mehrabian's findings?
- If we accept this Mehrabian observation as correct then how we should read this chapter of James?

The slightest pull on the reins and a horse much more powerful than us can be turned easily.

- Can you think of an example (your own or someone you have heard of) where a life's direction has been turned by a simple careless word?

The ships passing up and down the Severn estuary each have on board a pilot, familiar with the channel, so that the ships can be guided to their port without encountering the many hazards of shallow

water or rocks that exist. The slightest wrong turn could easily result in absolute disaster. If our tongues are like the rudders of great ships, then with the slightest wrong use of it we too can end up on the rocks.

- In what ways does the tongue cause us to turn, set the course for our life or start “great forest fires”? i.e. is it only by hasty harsh words?

Read Matthew 12.34 and Matthew 15.10-19

- Jesus teaches that our mouths express what is inside us, but James teaches that the tongue corrupts the whole person. How are we to understand these seemingly contradictory teachings?
- How are we to tame the tongue?
- What have we said (or sent) that may have caused pain? And when something comes to mind, deal with it. Apologise for it, ask forgiveness, and seek the healing that kingdom living bringing.
- Bearing in mind how easy it is to misread another’s words and to interpret them through our own moods and circumstances, how should we treat the words of others which have hurt us? If they meant it to be hurtful and they are doing this study they will soon be asking your forgiveness anyway.
- If as we hear in the first words of John’s Gospel, Jesus is the very word of God, what should our words resemble?

Read James 3:9-12

Would you watch a dog eat the kinds of things they eat in the park and then let it lick your face? Would you passionately kiss someone who had just been violently sick? It’s a disgusting stomach churning proposition isn’t it? Yet we offer praises to God out of the same mouth which has said vile and unloving things and from the same heart which has caused pain and hurt. We have a choice to praise God or to curse one another. We cannot do both as the praise from a mouth that curses is unacceptable to God.

- How do these verses make you feel regarding your own

worship?

- What challenges does this understanding present to you in living out your Christian life?

Read James 3:13-18

James has often been compared with the book of Proverbs because it appears to be less of a letter and more a collection of good advice. Proverbs also spends a lot of time demonstrating the difference between wisdom and foolishness. However, James raises the stakes here by effectively contrasting Wisdom and Evil. The issue of example James taught about at the beginning of this chapter he also ends with, applying it to everyone who is wise, expecting them to demonstrate their wisdom.

- Is James' idea of wisdom what you have understood the word to mean? Why might this be?
- According to James, what is the difference between earthly wisdom and Godly wisdom?
- What does wisdom look like?
- How can we develop Godly wisdom?

James Chapter 4

Love in Action

Introduction

In James chapter 2, James uses committing murder as an illustration about the law. When it comes to murder there are some grizzly and surprising statistics. In the UK the most at risk group of death by homicide are children under the age of 1, nearly always at the hands of someone who knew them. This almost unbelievable statistic comes from two sources: “The Home Office Statistical Bulletin: Homicides, Firearms Offences & Intimate Violence” and from the Office for National Statistics. These documents have lots more facts and figures about violent crime.

Female victims were most likely to be killed by someone they knew (approximately 78%) with around 40% of female victims being killed by a partner or ex-partner. Male victims knew their assailant around 57% of the time and as a group, under-16's knew their assailant 70% of the time. There are a whole host of other facts and figures available but the main thrust is this: when people commit murder or violent crime they most commonly attack someone they already have a close relationship with.

Why do people who know each other well end up fighting and causing violence? Why do people who say they love each other the most, most often end up fighting the most? Why do we hurt the people closest to us, if not physically then verbally or emotionally? These are the main questions that James wants to address in chapter 4.

Tuning into God

Before we begin take a moment to think about your relationships with other people in your family and with people in the church. Have you got caught up in an argument or disagreement recently? If that conflict continues to concern you talk to God about it now. Ask God to clear your mind of anger and distrust so that you can focus on his healing word. Then, after this session, go and do something about it!

Read James 4:1-12

- ◆ Often we want to blame other people when a quarrel or fight breaks out, but where does James say that conflicts and quarrels start? Who is responsible? There was a saying that “It takes two to Tango—it takes two to fight!” However, if one person walks away from a conflict then there can be no argument. So, where should we look to for causes when an argument starts: the other person or our self? Even if we are completely right are we ever completely blame free?
- ◆ James says that one cause of conflict is when we don't get what we want. When we don't get our own way we can lash out either physically or emotionally. How realistic is James' solution to this problem? If the other person is clearly in the wrong how can our praying and asking God really help us? Surely the other person is the one who needs to change?
- ◆ What role does motivation play in our prayers? Do you have experience of prayers not being answered because of a wrong motivation? What about prayers that have been answered? Share your stories as a group!
- ◆ How does the second half of verse 3 tie in with the previous teaching in James on the poor, the widows and the orphans?
- ◆ In verses 1 & 2 James blames envious attitudes for causing conflict and arguments. Then in verse 5 he says that the spirit who lives within us is intensely envious. Why is envy within us a sin whilst envy within the spirit is a virtue? How do you feel about a God who can be envious?
- ◆ If you were to ask most people how God treats the proud they

would probably answer that he humbles them. In fact James says that God opposes them! What do you think this means? How do you feel about the fact that God could oppose you?

- ♦ Within these twelve verses there are many challenges and rebukes. They could each be a Bible study all of their own! Which ones particularly stand out for you? What verses do you find most challenging and which verses do you find most helpful?

Read James 4:13-17

- ♦ How would you describe the two attitudes towards the future found in verses 13-17?
- ♦ If our life is like a mist what should our attitude towards tomorrow be?

Putting it into practice

- ♦ If you knew you were going to die tomorrow how would your attitude towards life today be different? How would you treat other people differently?
- ♦ How do you know you're not actually going to die tomorrow? (Read Luke 12:16-21) Should this affect the way you are actually living?
- ♦ What future plans do you often dwell on?
- ♦ In what area of your life do you think you need to turn your plans over to God's will? Are there any plans you are harbouring which maybe need surrendering?

James Chapter 5

Honesty in Action!

As you will undoubtedly have discovered by now, the book of James is just full of challenges. Nonstop challenge to: our behaviour and attitudes; our suffering and wealth; our approach to work; how we speak to one another and how we relate to God. It is little surprise to find that James doesn't slow up as he approaches the end of his letter with still more challenge and instruction to how to be honest in our faith.

Read James 5:1-6

As we read in Study 1, by global standards we are rich beyond compare. Even those of us who claim to have no money to spare, still eat everyday, still have a roof over our heads, water in the tap, education and opportunities, not to mention health care. Think of some of the poorer areas of the world, the plight of the workers in the fields picking coffee beans for Nescafe, or the Malaysian natives who are having their land taken from them due to the cutting down of a football pitch sized area of rain forest every minute of every day to serve the global demand for palm oil.

- Do you believe that we are complicit in the unfair wages paid to these people?
- In what ways can we begin to change their situation?
- How comfortable are you to do nothing in light of these first 6 verses of chapter 5?
- Many people claim to be unable to make a difference, or to be able to afford fair trade products, but the change begins when we are honest about our own situation. We can all lobby MPs, we can all give to charities, we can all change our shopping habits, but do we want to? Discuss in what ways you might start to make a difference for those who have NOT lived in luxury and self indulgence.

Read James 5:7-11

When I was first a Christian, I can remember regular conversations about what we wanted to have done before Christ returned. These days we don't often hear talk of the second coming. It's almost as if it's one of the doctrines we are a bit embarrassed about.

- What do you feel about the second coming?
- Do you live in the expectation that it could be this evening?
- See if you can find any scriptural references that suggest anything other than the very real expectation by the writers of Christ's return.
- Are you totally honest and totally upright in all you do because the Judge (the Lord Jesus) is at the door?
- How did that particular verse make you feel?
- Can we honestly claim to have persevered in our faith, doing what is right and Godly despite the hardship that entail or have we started to slip into the luxury and self indulgence of the earlier verses?
- What will you do about this?

Read James 5:12

I understand that the judicial system has changed in recent years such that people are allowed to merely promise to tell the truth, but historically this verse was one of two that could be quoted by Christians when asked to swear an oath in court. I feel sadly certain that we could all, if asked, name people we know whose words lack the honesty and trustworthiness we would hope for and expect from a Christian.

- Instead of thinking negatively however, share with your group any stories you might have of people who have stood out because of their honesty and integrity.
- Have you ever been in a difficult situation where everything in you

suggested it was better to lie? What did you do? Be honest!

Read James 5:13-18

These verses are all about honesty. Honesty with God and honesty with one another. If you are anything like me, when there is trouble, you will often begin to dwell on the cause of the trouble, on the worst possible outcome, on what it might cost or how much it might hurt etc. However, James tells us to simply pray. Take it to God and be honest with God about you feel. It's a fact that when we are in trouble, our prayers tend to get shorter, often down to the one word: "Help!" The importance in this is that we remember God is the one who sees all, and can do anything, therefore we should remember God when we are in trouble rather than focussing on the trouble itself. Likewise, when we are happy and everything is going well, we all too often forget to include God in our celebrations, and often forget all about God until next time there's trouble. We must be honest with God about all our feelings, seeking to include Him in every element of our lives.

Being honest with God is much easier for most of us than being honest with each other. How many people when sick, muddle on through saying: "I didn't want to bother you" or "Well you're busy and I'm ok really!" Then there is that command that we all struggle with: "confess your sins to each other ..." yikes!

- Are there areas of prayer that you struggle with? i.e. do you find it easier to praise than to complain to God?
- How easy do you find it to focus on God instead of the situation?
- When you have managed to focus on God, what has been the difference in your experience?
- James makes an interesting link between the efficacy of prayers and the righteousness of the person praying. How does this make you feel?
- How easy do you find it to confess your sins to another person? What are the reasons for your answer? What would YOU have to do to be able to answer differently?
- Why do you think we are told to confess our sins to one another?

Read James 5:19-20 and Matthew 7:1-5

I believe that the entire book of James could well be a preparation for the reader so that they are ready to fulfil in the instruction in these last two verses. When we read the Matthew passage we are taught that we should be sure we are not guilty before seeking to correct others, and the entire teaching of James shows us how to live a righteous life. This is not salvation by works, but rather an outworking of the debt of gratitude we owe to Jesus. In being a follower of Jesus we are to be able to help others, to be able to stop them from ruining their lives, to be able to prevent them losing the wonderful life that is available in Jesus, but we can only do that by being a living example of the change that comes with giving our lives to Christ. The honest witness of a faithful Jesus follower will speak louder than any words we might seek to use.

- Do you believe that our witness or challenge to others can be effective if we have no demonstrable righteousness?
- How comfortable are you at the prospect of people dying never knowing Jesus?
- What are you going to do differently as a consequence of your answers to the questions in this study series?

© Tabernacle Baptist Church, Penarth, 2014

www.tabspenarth.org.uk