

MCC Small Group Study Guide

60 minutes

James 1:1-18 (1 of 8 Lessons)

Facing the Hard Times

5 Minutes –Introduction

10 Minutes – Action Step Follow-Up (Unless this is the first time you have met with your group)

What have you actually done since we met last in response to our study and the Action Step we invited you to take? What fruit did that “doing” bear in your life? If you did nothing in response to last week’s study, what do you think got in the way?

20 Minutes – Bible Study

[Leader’s Note: The book of James may be one of the earliest New Testament letters (48 B.C.). It was written by James, one of the biological brothers of Jesus, who eventually believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. James eventually became a one of the most prominent leaders in the Jerusalem church and wrote this as a letter to be circulated among all the churches which were still primarily Jewish believers. It is very practical, challenging, and to the point. James insists that the walk of the believer must match his/her talk.]

Discussion Point: When things get really hard for you at home or at work and when the hard things don’t seem to be changing, how do you normally respond to that kind of situation....especially at the emotional level?

Read James 1:1-18

- How does James challenge us to respond to trials and hardships in our lives? Do you think there is a difference between joy and happiness? What might that difference be?

[**Note:** In scripture, happiness usually refers to our response to positive circumstances. We are happy because life is good. Joy, however, is a sense of well being even in the worst of circumstances. It is a sense of well being based on the conviction that God is in control and that things ultimately will turn out for our good (Rom. 8:28)]

- What perspective does James offer that might help us view difficult circumstances with joy?
- James encourages us to ask for wisdom when we are facing trials. How might wisdom be of help in those circumstances? What is required of us to receive wisdom from God to

help navigate the hard times? When we react to trials without wisdom, what kind of consequences do we often experience?

- What differences would you find between God's wisdom and worldly wisdom? (See Gal. 6:7-8)
- In James 1:13, the writer clearly says that God tempts no man. But scripture also says that God tests us. What might be the difference between God's testing and Satan's tempting? What might God's purposes be for allowing us to experience trials and what might Satan's purposes be?
- How does James describe the process of sinning? Why is it important to know (especially when facing trials or temptation) that sinning is a step by step process for which we are responsible?
- When facing hardships, why is it important to know that good and perfect gifts come from God who is unchanging?

15 Minutes – Application

- When have you found the principles from this section of James to be true in your life?
- Are you facing any trials and hardships now for which you need wisdom?

James seems to summarize the process of sinning as: experiencing a desire of the flesh, then choosing to give in to the impulse, then choosing to pursue the impulse further, then finding that the impulse of sin has control over us which then leads to destruction.

- Since sin is progressive, what strategies might we establish in our lives to stop the process before it becomes destructive? What have you found effective in overcoming temptations, ongoing sin, and addictions in your own life?
- Is there something in your life now that is handling you rather than being handled by you that is moving you toward destructive consequences? Do you need some help from this group to stop the process?

Action Step: Between now and our next meeting, I want to challenge us to examine our lives to see if we are giving into temptation or if we are being overcome by a sin that we have not yet acknowledged. If so, please acknowledge the struggle and ask someone in this group to pray with you, hold you accountable and get help before destruction sets in. If you are in a time of hardship and need wisdom or encouragement, please get with someone in this group and pray for wisdom believing that God is eager to provide wisdom for his children. Perhaps that wisdom will come through the person with whom you are praying.

Prayer: Take prayer reports and requests as time permits. Pray for one another now and through the week.

MCC Small Group Study Guide

60 minutes

James 1:19-27 (2 of 8 Lessons)

Matching Our Talk with Our Walk

5 Minutes –Introduction

10 Minutes – Action Step Follow-Up

What have you actually done since we met last in response to our study and the Action Step we invited you to take? What fruit did that “doing” bear in your life? If you did nothing in response to last week’s study, what do you think got in the way?

20 Minutes – Bible Study

Discussion Point: Have you ever known a person who claimed to be a follower of Jesus, said all the right things but then lived like anyone else in the world? How do you feel about that?

Read James 1:19-27

- In this section of his letter, what directives does James give us about our speaking? How does a *willingness to listen* and a *thoughtful response* help with the destructive issue of anger? How does anger stand in the way of a righteous life that God desires?
- What do you think James means when he says that we are to *humbly accept the word that is planted in us*? How does that effect our ability to live for him, speak for him, and rid ourselves of moral filth and evil? Is it possible to not accept the word of God that has been planted in us?
- What does James suggest about thoughtful and controlled responses as evidence of God’s Spirit within us? What does the absence of thoughtful and controlled responses suggest?
- What does James say in this section about a believer who listens to the Word, stores up knowledge, but never actually conforms his actions and thoughts to the Word he has heard?
- According to James, when is the blessing of knowing God’s word actually experienced? What does this principle suggest about Christians who rarely experience God’s blessings in their lives?

- At the end of this chapter, James says that a true relationship with God will contain some things and will exclude some other things. In general, according to James what things (or the absence of things) are evidences of a genuine walk with God?

15 Minutes – Application

- How are you at being *quick to listen* and *slow to speak* and *slow to anger*? How is that affecting your relationships?
- If *listening* and *angry responses* are a struggle for you, what practical things might you do to train yourself to listen well, respond thoughtfully, and control your anger?
- How well do you do in putting the word of God that you have heard into practice in your life? If you find yourself listening a lot but actually rarely being obedient to the Word, what are some simple things you might do to begin to walk out the word you are hearing so that you might receive the blessings of God?
- What area of your life have you been convicted about changing but have yet to really change your attitudes or behaviors so that they conform to the word of God?

Action Step: Between now and the next time we meet, take some serious time to examine your self to see where your life is not conformed to the Word that you already know. Write down the behaviors or attitudes that are not aligned with the will of God in your life. Write down some scriptures that speak about those issues. Pray three times a day that God’s Spirit would remind you to surrender your thoughts and behaviors to the word of God. As you begin to act on the word of God, be open to the blessings that will come your way according to God’s promise (James 1:25). You may want to ask someone in the group to pray for you as well. Be ready to talk about the things you actually started doing since we met last and what the results of that *doing* have been when we meet next time.

Prayer: Take prayer requests and prayer reports. Pray for one another as time permits and commit to pray for each other daily until you meet again.

MCC Small Group Study Guide

60 minutes

James 2:1-13 (3 of 8 Lessons)

The Law of Love

5 Minutes –Introduction

10 Minutes – Action Step Follow-Up

What have you actually done since we met last in response to our study and the Action Step we invited you to take? What fruit did that “doing” bear in your life? If you did nothing in response to last week’s study, what do you think got in the way?

20 Minutes – Bible Study

In your experience, what does religion without love look like? What are it’s effects? Have you ever been personally abused by religion that was not governed by love?

Read James 2:1-13

- Although James talks about a number of applications in this part of his letter, the main theme is *loving your neighbor as yourself*. In his applications he picks out the example of showing favoritism to the rich over the poor. Why do you think God finds such favoritism so offensive?
- If you gauged the worth of a man based on formal education, money, power, influential parents or possessions...how would you have responded to Jesus or his disciples?
- How do you see favoritism expressed in the Lord’s body today?
- What do you see as the results of favoritism in the body of Christ? Does favoritism really differ from prejudice or racism?
- How can we combat favoritism, prejudice or racism in the church in our community?
- How does this discussion relate to the *mercy and judgment* that James speaks about in 2:12-13. See Matthew 7:1-2.

15 Minutes – Application

- How do you see yourself expressing favoritism in your life?
- What does the Holy Spirit tell you about that in your heart?
- How can you begin to overcome the natural man that desires to show favoritism or prejudice and be led by the Spirit who considers all men equal in the eyes of God?
- How can you begin to express mercy to those who are not like you so that you are not guilty of judging others based on appearance?
- What would a church look like where no favoritism or prejudice existed?
- How seriously do you think God feels about this issue in believers?

Action Step: Between now and our next meeting, let's pray and ask God to make us aware of the prejudice within and to say no to the judgmentalism that is found with us. Let's choose to act in ways between now and then that show no favor based on the externals of life...color, ethnicity, education, wealth and power. Be ready to talk about your prayers and your experience the next time we meet.

Prayer: Take prayer requests and prayer reports. Pray for one another as time permits. Commit to pray for one another and for merciful hearts until you meet again.

MCC Small Group Study Guide

60 minutes

James 2:14-26 (4 of 8 Lessons)

Faith That Doesn't Breathe

5 Minutes –Introduction

10 Minutes – Action Step Follow-Up

What have you actually done since we met last in response to our study and the Action Step we invited you to take? What fruit did that “doing” bear in your life? If you did nothing in response to last week’s study, what do you think got in the way?

20 Minutes – Bible Study

Discussion Point: When have you ever been around a person who claimed to be a Christian but gave no practical evidence of that in his/her life? How did that inconsistency impact you as a believer? How did it impact unbelievers?

Read James 2:14-26

- What is James’ major theme in this section of his letter? How does this section relate to James 1:22?
- In 2:24, James says that a person is *justified by what he does and not by faith alone*. But in Eph.2:8-9, Paul tells us that “it is by grace you have been saved through faith and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.- not by works so that no man can boast.” How do you reconcile these two statements?
[**Note:** We do not bear fruit in order to be saved, but because we are saved. If we understand the sacrifice of Jesus and love him, we will be obedient out of a sense of gratitude. Jesus said, If you love me you will keep my commandments. Obedience and fruitfulness is evidence of love, not an attempt to earn salvation.]
- From this text, how do you think James would define “faith?” From verse 14, would you say that James believes there is a quality that belongs *to saving faith* that makes it more than just mental agreement with biblical facts? What would that quality be?
- **Read Matthew 7:15-21.** How do the words of Jesus in these scriptures help clarify the point that James is making about faith?

Application – 15 Minutes

- When you are told that someone is a Christian, do you ever begin to look for evidence to see if that claim is true? Is that being *judgmental*?
- Read I Cor. 5:9-13. How does this relate to what James is telling us in Chapter 2 of his letter? Can we evaluate or “judge” another person’s obedience to Christ without being “judgmental?”

[**Note:** Scripture calls on us to examine ourselves and to judge ourselves (I Cor. 11:28; 31) with God’s word as the standard. Paul calls on us to hold each other accountable with God’s word as the standard. He also says that we are to deal with the sins of others when these sins are ongoing, when there is no evident repentance for these sins, and especially when there is a spirit of rebellion rather than weakness underlying the sin. We are to deal with the sins of others with a gentle spirit (Gal. 6:1), a spirit of concern and a desire to save a person whose standing with God is in danger. Being judgmental is pointing to the sins of others out of a sense of self-righteousness, pride, indifference and rejection. It is judging someone by our own standards rather than the word of God. We may judge without being judgmental when we do so with a spirit of love, concern and humility.]

- Is the faith that James speaks of a faith that just avoids doing “really bad” things or is it a faith that produces spiritual fruit in the kingdom of God?
- Is your discipleship right now more about avoiding the bad or is it also about producing fruit that stands as evidence of your faith?
- Can you identify the fruit you are bearing for Christ? If not, why not?
- Does that challenge you to be more active in serving the Lord rather than passive in your faith? If you find that you are being a passive Christian, what will you begin to do to change that so the evidence of your faith is clear.

Action Step: Between now and the next time we meet, take some time to examine yourself to see what the evidence of your faith is? Ask yourself if it is clear to others (including your family) that you are a committed follower of Jesus Christ? If the evidence of your commitment is lacking, make some decisions about that. Be ready to talk about that the next time we meet.

Prayer – Take prayer requests and prayer reports. Pray for those requests as time permits and pray for one another until you meet again.

MCC Small Group Study Guide

60 minutes

James 3:1-12

(5 of 8 Lessons)

Life-Giving Words

5 Minutes –Introduction

10 Minutes – Action Step Follow-Up

What have you actually done since we met last in response to our study and the Action Step we invited you to take? What fruit did that “doing” bear in your life? If you did nothing in response to last week’s study, what do you think got in the way?

20 Minutes – Bible Study

Discussion Point: Proverbs 18:21 says that “the tongue has the power of life and death.” Would you agree or disagree with that proverb?

Read James 3:1-12

- In your own words, how would you summarize what James says about the tongue in this section of scripture?
- We have an old saying that goes, “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me!” Have you found that to be true in your life? How have words spoken to you as a child by your parents or by a spouse shaped you....whether the words were positive or negative?
- What verses in this section let you know that James understood how hard it is to always say the right thing in the right way?
- What do you think James means in verse 6 when he says that the tongue corrupts the whole body and sets the whole course of a person’s life on fire? What power do you think the spoken word has that is greater than a thought that is never verbalized?

[Leader’s Note: A thought that is kept to oneself may eventually have destructive power within the person or as it is manifested in behaviors. But spoken words take on a life and power that goes beyond a thought only. First of all, it involves others as soon as it is spoken. My words begin to shape the thoughts and responses of others. A thought that is spoken is somehow written more deeply on my heart because I have said it. The Jews believed that a spoken word carries

actual spiritual power to create or destroy...blessings and curses. The words not only shape our beliefs or the beliefs of others but release power in the spiritual realm to begin to fulfill those things that are spoken. The word of God has incredible creative power. He spoke the world into existence and says that when his word goes out it always fulfills its purpose (Isa. 55:11). Since we are made in the image of God, our words also have creative power...although in a much lesser way than God's word. However, words spoken often enough can bless or curse even our own bodies or lives.]

- Why do you think James bring teachers into this discussion on 3:1?
- From looking at James 3:9-12, what kind of words should come out of a Christian's mouth? What does Paul add to this discussion in Eph. 4:29.

15 Minutes – Application

- If you were to record your words each day...at work or at home with your children and spouse... what percentage would be words that bless and what percentage would be words that curse?
- Why do we speak negatively to other people? What do we think critical, hurtful, or angry words accomplish for us?
- In the long run, what will the fruit of positive words be in our relationships and what will the fruit of negative words be? See Gal. 6:7-8
- If you tend to be harsh, critical or negative in your speech, what are some practical things you might do to change that behavior?

Action Step: Between now and the next time we meet, take stock of the words you speak. Notice whether they are words that build up or words that tear down. You might even ask those who know you best what spirit predominates your words. Make an effort to speak words that bless and build up, words that encourage or convey the value of the person you are speaking to or speaking about. Ask the Holy Spirit to make you very aware of your words. Be ready to talk about your experience the next time we meet.

Prayer: Take prayer requests and prayer reports. Pray for one another as time permits and commit to pray for needs in the group until you meet again.

MCC Small Group Study Guide

60 minutes

James 3:13-4:17

(6 of 8 Lessons)

Smart Enough to Surrender

5 Minutes –Introduction

10 Minutes – Action Step Follow-Up

What have you actually done since we met last in response to our study and the Action Step we invited you to take? What fruit did that “doing” bear in your life? If you did nothing in response to last week’s study, what do you think got in the way?

20 Minutes – Bible Study

Discussion Point: How would you define *wisdom* and how does a person become wise? Do you think wisdom is a good thing? Why?

Read James 3:13-28

- In chapter 2 of his letter, James says that when a person has saving faith, there is evidence of that faith that can be seen by others. In this section, he speaks of the evidence of wisdom. What evidence does he point out in this section that would suggest that a person possesses godly wisdom?
- If there is little or no evidence of the qualities James lists in this section in the life of a believer, what does that suggest about that man or woman’s wisdom?
- In 4:1-6, James continues to speak about believers whose lives are not governed by wisdom. What qualities of the “wisdomless” life does James describe in these verses?
- What actions or attitudes get in the way of answered prayer according to James in this section of his letter (4:1-6)? Why would he refer to these believers as “adulterous?”
- In 4:7, James calls on these believers who have been living without wisdom to begin to exercise wisdom by submitting or humbling themselves before God. According to James in these verses (4:7-17) what does this submission or humility look like in the life of a believer...especially in our attitude towards sin?

- We often define sin as doing things that violate God's will. What does James add to that definition in 5:17? What does that suggest about a passive Christianity that simply tries to avoid doing bad or feels justified before God because he/she "didn't hurt anybody?"

15 Minutes – Application

- What is the evidence of godly wisdom in your life? How submitted to God are you? What gets in the way of your submission?
- Are there areas of your life that you would have to say are *unsubmitted* to God if you were honest about those things? What are some of those areas?
- Are you resisting Satan in those unsubmitted areas? If not, why not? How might you resist him so that those areas of your life could also be pleasing to God?
- How is your prayer life? What hindrances exist to your prayers coming before God unhindered? Are you serious about removing those hindrances? What things might you do so that those hindrances can begin to be removed?

Action Step: Between now and the next time we meet, spend some serious time examining your prayer life. How effective is it? What is getting in the way? Are your motives amiss in any area or is sin hindering your prayers? Make some decisions to remove those things that hinder your submission to God and your prayer life. Take action on those things and be ready to talk about your discoveries when we meet next time.

Prayer: Take prayer requests and pray reports. Pray for your requests as time permits. Pray for one another until you meet again.

MCC Small Group Study Guide

60 minutes

James 5:1-7 (7 of 8 Lessons)

Risky Riches

5 Minutes –Introduction

10 Minutes – Action Step Follow-Up

What have you actually done since we met last in response to our study and the Action Step we invited you to take? What fruit did that “doing” bear in your life? If you did nothing in response to last week’s study, what do you think got in the way?

20 Minutes – Bible Study

Discussion Point: Have you ever wanted to win the lottery? What do you think you would do with the money if you won 25 million dollars?

So....some or all of us would like to be suddenly rich. From scriptures you already know, are there any spiritual risks associated with being rich? What are some of those risks?
See Luke 16:19-31

Read James 5:1-6

- In this section of scripture, what have the rich done or not done that is condemned by James?
- What is the *core* of the sin of these rich people to whom James is writing? Is it having money in itself or is it something else? See Matthew 6:19-21.
- James accuses these men and women of “hoarding wealth in these last days?” What does it mean to “hoard” something and why would that be especially foolish in the last days? Do you think believers in America “hoard” wealth today? How? What does that look like?
- Obviously, the possession of wealth is not the issue but the ways in which we use our wealth. What are some *godly* uses of money that the Lord will bless according to the following scriptures?

Deut. 12:4-7

Prov. 19:17

Gal. 6:6

Acts 4:32

Lev. 19:9-10

Luke 18:22

I Tim. 6:18-19

2 Cor. 9:6-11

Deut. 15:7-10

Acts 10:4

2 Cor. 9:10-11

Luke 6:38

Prov. 14:31

Rom. 12:13

Acts 2:45

Rom. 10:13-15

15 Minutes – Application

- How much thought have you given to the use of the wealth or possessions that God has entrusted to you?
- Are there any ways in which you are *hoarding* wealth in these last days?
- How are you laying up treasure in heaven with your wealth or possessions?
- Are there any ways in which you are being displeasing to God with the use of the wealth or possessions you have?
- How might you guard against the misuse of your wealth and the dangers of being wealthy?

Action Step: Between now and the next time we meet, take a look at your checkbook register for the last 6 months. Notice where your expenditures are going. Notice how well you have given to the Lord through tithes, helping the poor, supporting good works, or supporting the preaching of the gospel. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart about your giving and determine to make adjustments where the Spirit directs you. Be ready to talk about these things the next time we meet?

Prayer: Take prayer requests and prayer reports. Pray for one another as time permits. Commit to pray for one another until you meet again.

MCC Small Group Study Guide

60 minutes

James 5:13-20 (8 of 8 Lessons)

Powerful Prayers

5 Minutes –Introduction

10 Minutes – Action Step Follow-Up

What have you actually done since we met last in response to our study and the Action Step we invited you to take? What fruit did that “doing” bear in your life? If you did nothing in response to last week’s study, what do you think got in the way?

20 Minutes – Bible Study

Discussion Point: When you find yourself in a mess, what is usually your first reaction?

Read James 5:13-20

- According to James, what is our best first response to trouble? Why is that so often our last response?
- According to James, what is a great response to finding yourself in a good place in life? Why sing songs of *praise* rather than just singing songs when life is good?
- James promises healing when we are sick. What process does James lay out in order to receive healing from the Lord? [Note: This is not a formula for healing but a process by which we can come before God and anticipate healing from Him.]

Let’s explore parts of the process James teaches us in his letter.

- Why do you think James tells us to call the *elders* of the church rather than just calling other believers? Can any believer pray with faith for healing and expect God to respond?
- Why call for the elders when we are sick rather than just praying for ourselves as James instructs us to do when we are in trouble?
- In your opinion, what is the significance of “anointing the person with oil?”

- In this section of scripture, what is the connection suggested between *unconfessed* sin and illness? See I Cor. 11:29-32
- What is the connection between confession and healing? Is all illness a result of unconfessed sin? Does this suggest that some infirmities or illness will not be healed without confession to others and their prayers of faith?
- Do you think this refers only to physical illness or might it apply also to emotional or spiritual weaknesses and wounds as well?
- What kind of cloud does James attach to the prayer of a righteous man?

15 Minutes – Application

- What does this process suggest about our ministering to those who are sick and in need of prayer? Are there some things to be explored and considered before the prayer for healing? What things might get in the way of healing if they are not dealt with first on a spiritual level? (persistent sin, unforgiveness, bitterness, unrepentance, etc.)
- James places prayer at the center of the Christian life in this closing section of his letter....pray if you're in trouble, call for prayers if you are sick, the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. How is your prayer life right now on behalf of yourself and others?
- Do you think there is anything in your life or absent from your life that is hindering your prayers? What might that be? What changes might you choose to make in your life that would keep your prayers from being hindered or that might make your prayers more effective?

Action Step: Between now and the next time we meet, take time to evaluate your prayer life. Is it consistent, thoughtful, and aligned with God's will? Is there anything hindering God's response (sin, unforgiveness, lack of faith)? Ask God to show you any hindrances that are standing in the way of answered prayers in your life. Take steps to remove those hindrances and be ready to talk about your discoveries the next time we meet.

Prayer – Take prayer requests and reports. Pray for members of your group as time permits. Commit to pray for one another until you meet again.