

JAMES

WORD TO THE WISE

Message Study Guide



Let's All Be Hearers and Doers!

We are so glad that you have decided to join us in the study of James this summer! Know that we are committed to praying for you throughout the series. We'll pray that you'll be someone who hears God, trusts in who He is and what He is saying to you, and that it would naturally lead to being a disciple who responds freely and joyfully by doing what God has asked. In other words, we're praying that we will all be hearers and doers as James states. Our hope is that you'll find yourself falling deeper in love with Jesus as a result of engaging God through the book of James. Likewise, we truly hope that this study will cultivate a desire and motivate you to love others in all the ways that James challenges us to live. To God be the glory.

How to Use This Message Study Guide

This Message Study Guide contains two pages for each weekly passage. The first page is for taking notes on the corresponding Sunday sermon. To watch/rewatch visit firstfreelincoln.org/watch. The second page contains Bible study questions. It is up to you and your group to decide if you'd like to study the questions before or after the sermon. It may be useful to use a separate notebook/journal as you answer the questions and dig deeper into the book of James.

Practical Suggestions for This Series

PRAY for an open heart as you listen to the message and study God's Word.

READ the book of James with patience and humility, surrendering yourself to God.

EXPLORE what God is saying to us in His Word every time you open the Bible:

- Place the passage in the larger story of scripture asking, "How does it fit?"
- Identify the genre of the passage/book asking, "How does the writing style affect how I should read and understand the passage?"
- Create a simple outline of the passage asking, "How do the author's thoughts logically develop?"
- Identify the author and audience asking, "Who wrote this and what did they intend to communicate to those who originally heard it?"
- Identify the occasion and setting asking, "What was happening in the lives of those who originally heard this message – what necessitated instruction for the intended recipients?" Also consider what was taking place historically and culturally.
- Pay careful attention to the details by looking at grammar/sentence structure (how words/phrases are used and relate to each other), word meaning (define key and confusing terms), and cross-references to other passages in scripture. Follow the thread to see how passages relate to each other.

APPLY the text by drawing a legitimate parallel between what the text meant back then to what it might mean today. Let your application show how the passage applies to living as a disciple of Jesus.



Since our pastors typically use the ESV as the primary translation, you may find the ESV Study Bible very beneficial. The introduction and supplemental notes will be very helpful. Modify your answers as needed.

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PRAY READ EXPLORE: Introduction to James

Message Notes:



1 What is your prior exposure to the book of James? What assumptions have you made about the text and its application(s)?

2 As you begin this study, start with prayer, asking God to help you understand what you are reading/studying. Ask God to be generous in giving you wisdom. (Read **James 1:5**)

Write down your prayer. Consider praying this every time you read God's Word.

TIP Try to answer the questions below without reading the introduction in your study Bible. After you answer the questions, go back and read the introduction. Modify your answers as needed.

3 If possible, read the entire book of James in one sitting. What are the key themes presented throughout the book?

- Chapter 1
- Chapter 2
- Chapter 3
- Chapter 4
- Chapter 5

4 Based on what you wrote about the themes above, what did you learn about the spiritual condition and the practical needs of the people James is addressing?

5 Identify the writing style or literary genre of James. Consider how James reads like a letter and contains content that sounds like Proverbs. How do these help us identify the genre?

6 Who is James? In addition to **James 1:1**, read **Matthew 13:55; Acts 12:17; 15:12-21; Galatians 1:18-19; 2:7-10**. Drawing from these passages and Danny's sermon, what do we learn about the author and his reasons for writing? Create a rough sketch of this influential church leader.

7 As you think about the overall message of James, how is the Spirit of God beginning to draw your attention toward certain topics that have relevance to your own life? Where might you need to lean in and listen?

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PRAY READ EXPLORE: James 1:1-18

Message Notes:



1 Pray, then read and explore the passage. Any notable observations or questions?

2 According to **James 1:2-4, 12** what is the central theme of this passage and how does this theme weave its way through **James 1:2-18**?

Why should we be joyful about experiencing trials?

According to Paul David Tripp, sanctification is an ongoing, lifelong process of being made into what God declared us to be in Christ.¹ Discuss the process of sanctification in the life of a believer. How do trials contribute to your growth? Note the upside of walking wisely through trials (**James 1:2-4**) and the downside of walking unwisely through trials (**James 1:12-15**).

Share a story of how a trial resulted in helping you develop an enduring and maturing faith.

3 The phrase "let..." in **James 1:5, 9, 13** appears to introduce three unique ideas that are related to the main theme. What warnings and encouragements are offered for each section below? (See also **1 Peter 1:6-9**)

- **James 1:5-8**
- **James 1:9-11 (see also Matthew 5:19-24; 6:24; Luke 12:13-21; 1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19)**
- **James 1:12-15**

James 1:2 states that trials will come (when, not if) and then calls the church to consider suffering from the vantage point of confidence in God's sovereignty. How does James advise we approach God, who gives generously for the wisdom needed to mature in Christ while we walk through various trials?

How does God give us wisdom? In what ways has God been generous with you or others you know when providing wisdom during trials? When the timing is appropriate to speak to someone enduring hardship, what warnings and encouragement might we share from the verses above?

4 Is there a difference between trials, testing, and temptations? (**James 1:2, 12-15**) How do they relate to the purposes of God and human desire?

5 In what ways is God's goodness and blessing displayed in **James 1:2-18**, even in the midst of trials and struggles? When we experience trials, how might we be deceived about our beliefs about God and our standing before God (**James 1:16-18**)?

¹ Paul David Tripp. *Do you Believe: 12 Historic Doctrines to Change Your Everyday Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021), 344-345.

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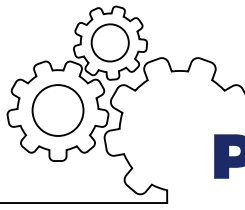
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PRAY READ EXPLORE: James 1:19-27

Message Notes:



PRAYREADEXPLORE

- 1 Pray, then read and explore the passage. Any notable observations or questions?
- 2 According to James, are we, as believers, to never become angry? If we do become angry, what can we expect from our anger vs. the anger of God ([James 1:19-20](#))? What practical advice is offered as an alternative to anger?

What is the result of the kind of anger that erupts quickly and doesn't allow others to speak? How does that impact our relationship with God and with others?

We tend to place high value on sharing whatever we feel in the moment and downplaying the role of listening. How would the cultural perspective of the church change if we were known to be a people quick to listen and slow to speak?

- 3 According to James, what must we "therefore" put away and receive to produce the righteousness that God requires ([James 1:21, 27b](#))?

Talk about how we might put things away and how we might receive the Word. Discuss the benefits of doing so. ([see also Colossians 3:1-17](#))

- 4 In [James 1:22-25](#), James begins with a command and compares two types of people. How does he describe someone who only hears the Word? How does he describe someone who is not only a hearer, but also a doer? Who/what does he say each is looking at? ([see also Matthew 7:24-27](#))

How do we know if our faith is really transforming our lives, leading to obedience to Christ? Do you have any specific examples of how you've seen this in your life or those around you?

How can we be assured that James isn't saying we are saved by our works in these verses ([Ephesians 2:8-10](#))? In your answer, consider the phrase "law of liberty" ([James 1:25; 2:12](#)).

- 5 What is evidence of true religion that corresponds with being a doer of the Word? ([James 2:26-27](#))

- 6 Think back on your week. Was there an instance when you failed to "bridle your tongue" that you may need to return to and give an apology for?

APPLY *Who are the orphans and widows today in Lincoln? How might we respond to this passage with practical and tangible next steps in the next several weeks. Commit to being a doer.*

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PRAY READ EXPLORE: James 2:1-13

Message Notes:



1 Pray, then read and explore the passage. Any notable observations or questions?

2 What practical action is James calling to the readers' attention in this section (**James 2:1-7, 9**)?

Why does it matter if the church makes distinctions among themselves, favoring one group over another in terms of wealth and status?

God has a history of advocating and choosing the poor and unexpected. What stories and people come to mind?

What does it mean to be rich in faith and what does that look like in someone's life? (**Matthew 5:3**)

In what ways have you seen partiality present in your life, relationships, organizations, or church?

What are some ways we can ensure we are not making any unnecessary distinctions?

3 Why does James remind the readers in **2:8-11** about the law? What law should we speak and act according to?

4 James uses the unique (used only here) term "royal law" in **2:8**. What is that law, and why do you think he refers to it as he does? How is favoritism the antithesis of the royal law? Read **Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:34-40; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:13-15**.

As believers, how does our understanding of the gospel change the way we view and love others?

How does **James 2:1-13**, shape the Mission of First Free Church as we strive to be a "diverse and authentic gospel-centered community of people in process, seeking to know and love God more deeply and display His love to our neighbors practically"?

- How does diversity and authenticity keep us from partiality and favoritism?
- How does viewing people in process and loving our neighbors work against our propensity to judge people and put them in various seats of honor or shame?
- Read **James 2:13**, what does it mean to be merciful in our ministry to others? (**See Micah 6:8; Zechariah 7:9-10, Matthew 5:7; 6:15; 18:32-35**)

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PRAY READ EXPLORE: James 2:14-26

Message Notes:



1 Pray, then read and explore the passage. Any notable observations or questions?

2 What big idea does James return to in this section?

3 **James 2:14-16** begins to examine the relationship between faith and works, ultimately asking, "What kind of faith is saving faith?" What does James say is a natural byproduct of saving faith?

Why is it so important to James that his readers' faith is producing fruit?

What fruit is your faith producing, not just for yourself but for the good of those around you?

4 In **James 2:17**, James says that faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. Does this verse contradict **Romans 4:1-5**? What about **Titus 3:5**? Or **Ephesians 2:8**? What is James ultimately trying to say about faith, works, and our salvation?

How do we, as believers, hold that we are saved or justified by faith alone and at the same time not diminish the importance of walking in obedience to Christ?

How do we keep faith and works together (**James 2:18-20**), without suggesting that our works save us, which is something that only Christ can do?

What happens if someone says they have faith but don't have works? Should we hold their faith suspect? Are we supposed to demand evidence or make a judgement in such matters?

5 In **James 2:21-26**, James uses two people from the Old Testament to illustrate his ideas about faith and works: Abraham (referred to as Abraham our father), and Rahab the prostitute. Why do you think James chose those two people?

How did Abraham respond when God told him to sacrifice his only son? Why did he obey? (**Genesis 22:9-10**)

According to **Joshua 2:8-11**, why did Rahab hide the spies?

How do these two stories support **James 2:26** which says, "for as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead."

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PRAY READ EXPLORE: James 3:1-12

Message Notes:

- 1 Pray, then read and explore the passage. Any notable observations or questions?
- 2 What emphasis does James seem to be making in this section?
- 3 Who does he address first? Why do you think he starts with this audience?
- 4 James illustrates the impact of the tongue through the use of several metaphors. What do these metaphors teach us about the power of the tongue?
(See **Psalm 58:4 & 140:3, Proverbs 16:27, and Romans 3:13-14**)

- Horses and bridles (3:3):

- Ships and rudders (3:4):

*James 3:3-4 uses two metaphors to make a point.

- Forest fires (3:5b-6):

- Taming of animals and the tongue (3:7-9):

- Springs of water (3:11):

- Fruit tree (3:12):

*James 3:10-12 uses two metaphors to support verse 10.

What does **James 3:2,8** tell us about being people in process? Relate your answer to the doctrine of sanctification.

- 5 James lists both the good and the bad things we can do with our tongue (blessing and cursing). Obviously, we all struggle to control our words. Why is it so hard? And what difference does it make if blessing and cursing come from the same mouth?
- 6 Read **Luke 6:27-31**. Think about how you talk. Are you content with how you talk to others? What about your social media posts, emails, etc.? Do you owe anyone an apology or a follow-up conversation?

APPLY *Think of someone who needs words of blessing. It can be someone you know well or someone you would like to get to know more. Make a plan to reach out to that person in the next 24 hours.*

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PRAY READ EXPLORE: James 3:13-18

Message Notes:



1 Pray, then read and explore the passage. Any notable observations or questions?

2 According to James, what is the difference between "heavenly" wisdom and earthly wisdom?

Where do you normally turn to gain wisdom?

What are the sources of earthly wisdom that are shaping our lives every day? How do these sources lead us toward jealousy, selfishness, etc.?

How do we access wisdom from above? where do we go?

What does society seem to honor more: wisdom or knowledge? Explain.

How do wisdom and common sense differ? Is wisdom attainable for everyone?

3 **James 3:16** says "for where there is envy and selfish ambition, there is disorder and every evil practice." How have we seen James address this idea so far in his letter? (**James 2:1-12**) Why are envy and selfish ambition so destructive among God's people? (**Galatians 5:20; Philippians 1:27; 2:3**)

4 Look at the list of words describing wisdom in **James 3:17**. Discuss how each descriptor impacts/works together for wisdom?

5 What do you believe it looks like to be full of mercy and good fruits (**James 3:17**)? Is there any connection between this verse and **Galatians 5:22-23**? What is the role of the Spirit in providing us wisdom?

6 In what ways are peacemaking and righteousness connected (**James 3:18**)?

APPLY *Think through a decision you are facing right now. Regardless of the size of the decision, think of a way to apply wisdom (rather than only knowledge) to that decision.*

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PRAY READ EXPLORE: James 4:1-12

Message Notes:



- 1 Pray, then read and explore the passage. Any notable observations or questions?
- 2 James has some strong words in this section! What phrases could be used to sum up this whole section?

- 3 James lists some of the root causes of divisions in the early church and then calls the church to choose being a friend of God over a friend of the world. Life is a battle. What is the result of this battle according to James (James 4:1-6)?

What passions/motives are at war within you and in the body of Christ?
What is the cause and the effect?

Why is friendship with God contrasted with friendship with the world?
Do you feel the tension between relational loyalties with God and the world?
What does it feel like, where do you see it, and what can you do about it?

How is God's grace extended to those who humble themselves?

- 4 What is all this talk about asking things in James 4:3b-4? Who is asking and who is being asked? How does asking things wrongly, with wrong motives, relate to the verses that come before and after?

- 5 What is James 4:7-10 ultimately calling the church to do? Note all the commands offered. Discuss how these commands relate to humility.

In what ways are you hesitant to submit to God?

How is turning to God in repentance and remorse a demonstration of humility?
Where are you treating your sin casually?

- 6 James 4:11-12 reintroduces the theme of speech. What command and warning does he give to those who practice such things?

APPLY *Think of an area where you need to resist the devil. What steps can you take to do that? Spend some time in prayer asking for wisdom and strength to take those steps. (see Matthew 6:9-13)*

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PRAY READ EXPLORE: James 4:13-17

Message Notes:



1 Pray, then read and explore the passage. Any notable observations or questions?

2 Who does James have in mind when offering perspective to those who are making business plans ([James 1:9-11](#))?

What does this passage reveal about the intentions of the business planner?
What are they boasting in or what arrogance is revealed in their planning?

How is this passage a helpful corrective in the society we live in?

Should a follower of Jesus plan their lives differently than a nonbeliever?
Why or why not?

3 Why do you think James emphasizes the temporary nature of life in relation to making plans to make a profit? Read [Luke 12:13-34](#). How does this passage seem to relate to what James is reminding his readers of?

Are James and Jesus saying it's wrong to make money? What are they saying?

What perspective are Christians to have when thinking about the future, especially as it relates to accumulating wealth? What is our responsibility and what is God's responsibility?

4 [James 4:17](#) brings up what some define as the "sin of omission" which is knowing the right thing to do and not doing it. How is this theme related to what you have read in the book of James?

Is failing to do good wrong? If so, what does that reveal about what God thinks about our actions and also or intentions?

Is there any good you should be doing that you are not doing? Talk to God about it. Create a personal response and action plan.

APPLY *Is there any good you should be doing that you are not doing?
Talk to God about it. Create a personal response and action plan.
If you can't think of an example, ask God to show you.*

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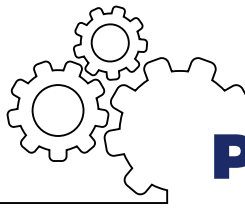
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PRAY READ EXPLORE: James 5:1-6

Message Notes:



PRAYREADEXPLORE

- 1 Pray, then read and explore the passage. Any notable observations or questions?
- 2 Again, James provides a warning to the rich. What is the main point of the strong words offered in **James 5:1-6**? What type of rich person and general occupation is being highlighted here?
- 3 James gives a warning to the rich that echoes the warning Jesus gave in **Matthew 6:19-21**. What is going on in the early church that they would have needed this warning?

In what ways does earthly treasure keep us from being doers of the Word?

How is wealth an obstacle for followers of Jesus? How has it been an obstacle for you, regardless of whether you have much or little?

- 4 **James 5:4** speaks to unpaid wages. What does **Leviticus 19:13** and **Deuteronomy 24:14-15** reveal about the just nature of God toward those who defraud their employees?

What encouragement or warning can be drawn from knowing who God is and how he feels about those who have been taken advantage of in work environments?

- 5 What kind of judgement is coming for those who have misused their riches and wealth? Look at the language being borrowed from Jesus (**Matthew 6:19-20**; **Luke 12:21**) and from the Old Testament (**Isaiah 13:6**; **15:3**; **Hosea 7:14**; **Amos 8:3**).

How does pending judgement help us reset as followers of Jesus?

- 6 Read **James 5:5-6**. What indictment is made against the people? Interact with the following questions: What is the day of slaughter (**Isaiah 30:25**; **Jeremiah 12:3**; **Revelation 19:17-21**)? Who is the "righteous person? What does "the righteous person does not resist you" mean (**Matthew 5:38-42**)? How are all of these questions related to the warnings aimed at the wealthy?

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PRAY READ EXPLORE: James 5:7-12

Message Notes:



1 Pray, then read and explore the passage. Any notable observations or questions?

2 What is the “coming of the Lord” ([1 Thessalonians 4:15](#)) and how does it relate to suffering? How long is James asking us to be patient in suffering?

In what ways have you seen God work while you practiced patience?

3 How are the images of a farmer waiting for rain and the persevering prophets wonderful illustrations for Christians who are waiting for the coming of the Lord in the midst of suffering? What are the Christian virtues and values associated with waiting on the Lord and long-suffering? Look at [Job 42:1-6](#).

As a follower of Christ, how does the coming of the Lord bring forth hopeful anticipation and motivation to live a godly life while we patiently wait for Christ’s return?

What do these passages reveal about God’s character and how does remembering that God is a judge full of compassion and mercy comfort you in your times of trial?

4 How does not swearing by heaven and earth ([James 5:12](#)) relate to what was just said in [James 5:7-11](#)? See Jesus’ teaching on oaths in [Matthew 5:33-37; 23:16-22](#). What is James trying to say?

How is integrity and trust related to oaths?

What danger is James trying to make us aware of when making an oath to someone?

APPLY *As you examine your life, is there a perceivable gap between what you say and what you do in terms of making and keeping promises? What would those closest to you say? How can your saying and doing line up?*

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PRAY READ EXPLORE: James 5:13-20

Message Notes:



1 Pray, then read and explore the passage. Any notable observations or questions?

2 How would James answer the question, "When should we pray and how should we pray" (James 5:13-18)? Under what circumstances might we be praying for others?

What does "there is power in prayer" mean? How does James 5:16-18 confirm this statement?

3 What would it look like if the people of First Free Church prayed in the way that James is encouraging us to pray? What kind of ministry culture would be created? Take a next step by getting involved in the prayer ministry of First Free Church.

4 What does James 5:19-20 teach us about our ministry to those who wander spiritually – walking away from the truth? What is the "truth" in 5:19? How do Christians serve as agents and advocates of God's forgiveness?

How might we lovingly engage with those who "wander from the truth"? What are some of the biggest challenges we face in walking with wanderers and sinners as we try leading them back to God?

APPLY *Have you ever considered asking the leaders of the church to pray for you or a loved one? Consider stepping out in faith to have others pray for you. Also consider confessing sin so that you might experience healing from your hiding as you turn to God and others in transparent acknowledgment of your need of forgiveness and God's grace.*

POST JAMES SERIES QUESTIONS

1 How did you grow as a follower of Jesus as a result of this sermon series and study? In what ways has God helped you become a better hearer and doer?

2 In what ways was the gospel of Jesus Christ displayed through your exploration of James? How does applying the gospel to your life change the way you think about spiritual growth and moving forward in your faith?

3 What practical next steps will you take in your relationship with God, your church family, and your "neighbors" as you seek to apply God's teaching from the book of James?