

connect360

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

The Making of Authentic Faith

WISDOM THAT WORKS

A STUDY OF JAMES

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GC2
PRESS

Dallas, Texas

*The Making of Authentic Faith: Wisdom That Works—
Connect 360 Bible Study Guide*

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How to Make the Best Use of This Issue

Whether you're the teacher or a student—

1. Start early in the week before your class meets.
2. Overview the study. Review the table of contents and read the study introduction. Try to see how each lesson relates to the overall study.
3. Use your Bible to read and consider prayerfully the Scripture passages for the lesson. (You'll see that each writer has chosen a favorite translation for the lessons in this issue. You're free to use the Bible translation you prefer and compare it with the translation chosen for that unit, of course.)
4. After reading all the Scripture passages in your Bible, then read the writer's comments. The comments are intended to be an aid to your study of the Bible.
5. Read the small articles—"sidebars"—in each lesson. They are intended to provide additional, enrichment information and inspiration and to encourage thought and application.
6. Try to answer for yourself the questions included in each lesson. They're intended to encourage further thought and application, and they can also be used in the class session itself.

If you're the teacher—

Do all the things just mentioned, of course. As you begin the study with your class, be sure to find a way to help your class know the date on which each lesson will be studied. Here are some suggestions to guide your lesson preparation:

- A. In the first session of the study, briefly overview the study by identifying for your class the date on which each lesson will be studied. Lead your class to write the date in the table of contents on pages 8-9 and on the first page of each lesson.
- Make and post a chart that indicates the date each lesson will be studied.
 - If all your class has e-mail, send them an e-mail with the dates the lessons will be studied.
 - Provide a bookmark with the lesson dates. You may want to include information about your church and then use the bookmark as an outreach tool, too. A model for a bookmark can be downloaded from www.gc2press.org under the “Teacher Helps” menu.
 - Develop a sticker with the lesson dates and place it on the table of contents or on the back cover.
- B. Get a copy of the *Teaching Guide*, a companion piece to this *Study Guide*. The *Teaching Guide* contains additional Bible comments plus two teaching plans. The teaching plans in the *Teaching Guide* are intended to provide practical, easy-to-use teaching suggestions that will work in your class.
- C. After you’ve studied the Bible passage, the lesson comments, and other material, use the teaching suggestions in the *Teaching Guide* to help you develop your plan for leading your class in studying each lesson.
- D. Teaching resource items for use as handouts are available free at www.gc2press.org under the “Teacher Helps” tab.
- E. Additional Bible study comments on the lessons are available online. Call 1-866-249-1799 or e-mail gc2press@texasbaptists.org to order the *Premium Commentary*. It is available only in electronic format (PDF) from our website, www.gc2press.org. The price of these comments for the entire study is \$8 per person. A church or class that participates in our advance order program for free shipping can receive the *Premium Commentary* free. Call 1-866-249-1799 or see www.gc2press.org to

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- G. Enjoy leading your class in discovering the meaning of the Scripture passages and in applying these passages to their lives.
- H. You can receive the lesson preview each week by signing up for the Baptist Standard weekly newsletter at no cost.
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Do you use a Kindle?

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The Making of Authentic Faith

Wisdom That Works

A Study of James

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Introducing GC2 Press

BaptistWay Press **has now become GC2 Press.** The name change reflects the alignment with our state convention's (BGCT) recently updated mission statement. **GC2** is a movement of God's people to share Christ and show love. Our driving passion is to follow the Lord's call to fulfill the Great Commission "to share Christ" and the Great Commandment "to show love." The Great Commission and the Great Commandment form the two "GCs," or GC2.

GC2 Press will continue to publish the undated **CONNECT 360** quarterly Bible study curriculum. **Connect 360** has gained a reputation for solid biblical teaching and will continue to be published as an undated quarterly study available in book form and/or digital downloads. **Connect 360** is currently being distributed in 38 states and 16 countries and has been translated into seven different languages.

For more information, please go to our website at www.gc2press.org.

Introducing

The Making of Authentic Faith *Wisdom That Works*

A STUDY OF JAMES

Background

The letters of the New Testament broadly speaking fall into two major categories—Paul’s letters and the General Letters. In our Bibles, Paul’s letters are all named by the recipients (e.g., Romans was written to the church in Rome) whereas the General Letters are named by the authors (e.g., 1 Peter is Peter’s first letter). Put differently, Paul’s letters are addresses to specific churches or pastors (Timothy and Titus) while the General Letters are addressed to Christians in general and not to a particular group in a specific location.

The Letter of James, then, is written by an author by that name. The only information the letter itself gives us about him is that he was a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ (James 1:1). Furthermore, whereas Paul often scatters various shorter or longer autobiographical sketches in his letters, the letter from James does not offer similar help.

Ancient witnesses have consistently claimed Jesus’ brother James as the author of this letter. James was not an apostle. He was not a believer in Jesus during Jesus’ earthly ministry (John 7:50), but likely came to faith when Jesus showed himself to him after the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7). Acts

1:14 tells us that James joined the other disciples in prayer in the upper room and was there when the Spirit came with power and tongues of fire. James quickly became one of the trusted leaders in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:13, 18), one Paul considers a “pillar” of the faith alongside Peter and John (Galatians 1:19; 2:9, 12).

Dr. Preben Vang
Professor of Christian Scriptures (NT)
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The Book of James in Our Day

When difficulties come your way, how do you react? How do you respond?

When things are going well, is faith just an option for you? How about when things are falling apart? Is faith still just an option, or an absolute necessity?

People who are not Christians have a tough time understanding how God can give strength to navigate the difficult times and turn them into a period when faith grows. God gives us trials. And trials produce faith. And faith that cannot be tested, cannot be trusted.

James, the half-brother of Jesus, grew up in the same household as his older brother. He was the pastor of the church at Jerusalem, the head elder, when he wrote this book. And he writes absolute spiritual truth which is just as relevant today as it was when he wrote it 2000 years ago.

Are you praying for **wisdom that works** in the **making of your authentic faith**?

The Making of Authentic Faith
Wisdom That Works

A Study of James

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| Lesson 11: | God's Waiting Room | James 5:7-11 |
| Lesson 12: | Faith in Action | James 5:12-18 |
| Lesson 13: | Our Rescue Mission | James 5:19-20 |

Additional Resources for Studying the Book of James¹

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NOTES

¹ Listing a book does not imply full agreement by the writers or GC2 Press with all its comments.

lesson 1

Learning to Endure

MAIN IDEA

God will give Christians the strength to take difficult times and turn them into times when faith grows.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Can God use me even though I have been through some tough times?

STUDY AIM

To understand that trials increase your faith

QUICK READ

Knowledge is the ability to take something apart; wisdom is the ability to put things together.



Introduction

Benjamin Franklin once said that in life, only two things are certain: death and taxes. Added to that, or perhaps even expanding on that, it seems fair to say that difficult experiences are simply a part of life. Put differently, trials are a natural part of the human experience. No matter how happy or easy a person's life may appear, the fact is that everyone is promised to go through difficult times. Once sin entered into the world in Genesis 3, no human has eluded the pain and sorrow that it brought with it.

Until we all get to Heaven, pain and trials are a part of life. That is the bad news. The good news is that God, who is all-knowing and all-loving, is able to take even the worst of difficulties and trials and transform them into something meaningful, powerful, and even good. What merciful hope (Romans 5:1-5).

James 1 teaches that when Christians encounter difficult times, God will give strength not only to endure but also to take the difficulty and turn it into a season of growth and spiritual renewal. This means no Christian needs to question if God can use them if they have gone through tough times. For Christians, trials are opportunities to increase faith, which comes with eternal rewards that cannot waste away.

The experience of learning to live through trials and allowing it to mature and grow faith demonstrates wisdom given by God. Wisdom from God understands how to put things together. A smart person can understand the details of a circumstance. A wise person can take those details and understand what they mean in the context of God's plan.

James 1:1-12

¹James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.

²Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. ⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will

be given to you. ⁶ But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. ⁸ Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

⁹ Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. ¹⁰ But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower. ¹¹ For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.

¹² Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

A Servant Leader (1:1)

No one can accuse James of drawing out the introduction to his letter. While sometimes other books of the Bible have long and formal introductions, James began his letter quickly and clearly. He could have listed his credentials as a significant religious leader of the time but instead chose to identify as a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. This example of biblical leadership stands in stark contrast to the modern notion of a “strong leader.” The wisdom of the world perceives a strong leader as generally unfeeling, cold, and perhaps demeaning. Just a brief consideration of the dog-eat-dog culture of corporate leadership highlights how different biblical leadership operates. Servant leadership prioritizes people over self-ego. James was following the ultimate example of Jesus Christ, who came not to be served but to serve others (Matthew 20:28).

A servant leader, James’ heart was first and foremost to serve God and serve his brothers and sisters scattered all over. Some translations may use the term *diaspora* while others prefer scattered, but the point is the same—this is a message of encouragement and hope to fellow Jewish Christians of a vast geographical area. In other words, this is the beginning of a conversation between family. While James was in Jerusalem, his heart was burdened to encourage his brothers and sisters spread out across the entire known world. They were separated, but James felt connected and united to them.

While this letter was written for the Jews of a particular time and place, as part of Holy Scripture, it is also for all Christians who are members of God's family. Ephesians 2:19 teaches that all who are reconciled in Jesus Christ are no longer strangers but a part of the family of God. Thus, all Christians should take heart and courage with James' message that learning to endure trials and difficulties will have eternal reward and be transformed to give purpose and meaning to their pain. This is a message of hope for all who are a part of God's family.

Purpose in the Pain (1:2-8)

James moved directly from the introduction to laying out the key themes of his message to his brothers and sisters. First, he addressed the issue of trials. He exhorted believers to consider it pure joy when they encountered various trials. The same word used "to face" in James 1 is the same word Jesus used in Luke 10:33, when he described the good Samaritan who encountered the man who "fell among" robbers on the road. These were not trials that were voluntarily entered into for some faith-strengthening exercise. Rather, the language of James indicated that the very nature of these trials was unexpected and undesired. Still, we are exhorted to find joy even in the middle of genuinely difficult circumstances.

In context, this may seem odd. How can life's most difficult experiences be sources of undiluted joy? That is answered in the following verses: trials can be used as an opportunity for growth and transformation. The perseverance that culminates in enduring trials is the seed, and from it grows maturity and completeness in the life of the believer. This idea of perfection needs to be carefully understood. A mature and complete person does not mean they are faultless or achieved sinlessness on earth. Rather, it should be understood as a person whose character is wholly shaped by God's truth and reflects His righteous nature. A mature person is stable, not double-minded. Of singular focus and footing, they are able to rightly orient to withstand the difficulties of life.

What does it mean to be complete?

Various translations differ on how to translate the idea of being a “complete” believer. In Greek, the word used is *teleios*, which is sometimes rendered as “perfect.” This word is a major theme in the book of James and used 5 times throughout the letter. No other New Testament book uses this word as often as James. It is not describing a state of moral perfection but rather completeness of character. A complete character produces the fruit of God’s Holy Spirit and expresses the good works prescribed in God’s Word. It is the seamless coherence of the faith and works James described throughout the letter. God does not require perfection from us but rather wholeness.

This perspective does not come naturally to believers but is grown through wisdom that comes directly from God. The wisdom of God allows Christians to understand God’s plan and live accordingly. God’s wisdom is therefore not the same as human knowledge. This is not to say that knowledge is a bad thing, but it is important to understand the difference between the two. Knowledge is the ability to comprehend and understand something. Wisdom is the ability to apply insight to knowledge. Wisdom from God is not possessing facts; it is achieving the best possible end in light of the facts. Proverbs teaches that there is a way that seems right to a person (Proverbs 14:12), but God’s wisdom teaches us to order things differently than selfish human desires would. God gives wisdom generously to His children.

God grants His wisdom generously to all who ask in faith. A person who asks in doubt is unstable and double-minded. In one breath, they may pray for God’s wisdom, and the next denounce the very thing asked for. This is not a condescension of intellectual doubts, but more a reflection of spiritual stability. Throughout the book of Psalms, we read the Psalmist voice doubt and despair. Yet, there is a continuing theme of spiritual resolve to cling to the known character of God. God is faithful, and the believer must cling to God’s character with resolve and trust as they ask for wisdom. A person who prays in doubt will not be blessed by God.

When praying for wisdom during trials:

Pray with confidence that God hears and cares about your struggles.

Pray with humility, recognizing your dependency upon God for all things.

Pray for opportunities to learn wisdom.

Pray in faith and not doubt that God will grant wisdom to all who ask.

Pray that God keeps you firmly planted with His Word as your anchor.

The mature believer learns to count trials as pure joy because they are able to rightly understand and orient life's difficulties in light of who God is (using wisdom from God). They understand that joy and sorrow are not mutually exclusive concepts. James does not suggest that the trials will be transformed into enjoyable experiences, but rather, it is possible to experience pure joy in the midst of the trial because there is a purpose and greater good simultaneously occurring during the trial. This does not subsequently remove the difficulty but gives a much deeper and richer meaning that makes pure joy possible.

Eyes on the Prize (1:9-12)

Perspective is everything. Life situations and circumstances will range as far and wide as humanity itself. However, in Christ, we are united in vision and purpose with one another in a special way. The singular focus that God provides His children unites them in identity, understanding, and purpose. James was not suggesting there is anything innately wrong or sinful about being a poor or rich Christian. However, throughout both the Old and New Testaments, believers are reminded of riches' temporal nature. Riches fade, but God is eternal and the ultimate provider and sustainer of all. Thus, both rich and poor believers must rely on wisdom granted from God to reflect on what is ultimately important and what will one day fade away. Believers in all circumstances need to keep their eyes on the (eternal) prize. For the poor, do not despair but take pride in the spiritual wealth of the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him. For the wealthy, walk keenly aware

of the fragility and temporal nature of riches. Do not take pride in wealth but walk in humility, knowing how quickly riches fade.

In the wisdom of God, whatever your life situation may be, aim to persevere through the inevitable trials that will come.

The eternal treasures of God are of immeasurably more wealth and value than temporal riches. The one that perseveres through the trials of life will be rewarded with the crown of life. Persevering through momentary afflictions will gain eternal treasures. The wisdom of the world would tell the poor to lament in their poverty and the rich to celebrate in their comfort. It is a farse that leads to incorrect priorities and feigned joy. God's wisdom allows believers to see life in sharp focus: true joy comes as believers focus on God's priorities, which allows them to persevere through. Rich or poor, believers are to keep their eyes focused on the eternal reward.

Implications and Actions

Trials and difficulties are a natural part of life. However, with God's help through His wisdom, Christians are able to experience pure joy even in the middle of the most difficult circumstances. God generously gives His wisdom to all who ask in full confidence in His character and faithfulness. Christians who persevere through the struggles of this life will be rewarded with the eternal treasure of the crown of life. No situation or circumstance is beyond God's transformative power to be a cause of joy, even in the midst of pain. This promise is a source of joy and hope for all who call upon the name of the Lord.

Questions

1. Has there been a time in your own life where you were able to experience joy in the middle of a difficult trial? How did you see God provide during that time?

2. Considering these verses, how would you encourage a Christian who is currently experiencing a difficult situation?

3. What are key differences between human knowledge and heavenly wisdom?

4. What does James say is the reward for persevering through trials?

5. How should a Christian pray for wisdom according to James 1?