



BELIEVE IT.

James: A Bible Study

Over the next several weeks we're taking an in-depth look at the book of James.
James is one of the most unique books in the New Testament in that it's similar to other parts of the Bible yet not like any other part of the Bible.

■ DAY ONE

READ through the background info and context below.
REFER to this section throughout our study of James.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT: JAMES

- 1** *The author is James, the half-brother of Jesus, who writes in terms of living a blessed life and life of peace (shalom) which are central in Jewish culture (in Hebrew fashion). The Jewish audience easily identifies with the pursuit of answers to the life of peace and blessedness. James writes to the scattered Hebrew Christians whom he may or may not have met, so he speaks in very general terms. The book of James is considered to be a general epistle.*
- 2** *James' writing style is thematic rather than linear and logical. An overarching theme is consistently woven throughout the text. In thematic writing, the author doesn't weave the theme throughout the text, but does so from various angles or perspectives which allows the reader to identify with the theme in different ways. Another advantage of thematic writing is how the overarching theme integrates with other themes.*
- 3** *The book of James is best understood as wisdom literature (like Proverbs), so there's danger of misinterpreting the general wisdom and looking to apply it in specific situations without considering context and individual circumstances.*
- 4** *James was heavily influenced by Jesus' ethical teaching. James looks at every major theme in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). It could be said that the book of James is a commentary of Jesus' ethical teaching. We'll refer to these themes from the Sermon on the Mount as we interpret the book of James. Like Jesus' ethical teachings, it's important to interpret meaning through principle-based, rather than rule-based understanding.*

■ DAY TWO

READ James 1:2-8.

The central theme of James is about being perfect.

WRITE a few sentences describing what you think it means to be perfect.

INCLUDE a list of several synonyms/antonyms which relate to being perfect.

CONSIDER how the Hebrew audience would understand perfection:

Being in harmony - having your inner life and your outer behavior, words, and attitudes in sync.

SYNONYMS: harmony, consistency, synergy, peace, smoothness, wholeness, completeness, unity, not lacking, mature, steadfastness.

ANTONYMS: hypocrisy, inconsistent, out of tune, out of sync, double-minded or two-souled, conflicted.

COMPARE your definition of perfection to the Hebrew understanding of perfection. How do they compare? There's probably a big difference.

Our western culture most often looks at being perfect as a stagnate state of **arrival** in which the journey has been completed.

READ James 1:2-8 again, keeping in mind the Hebrew understanding of perfection. As you read these verses in this context, what changes?

■ DAY THREE AND DAY FOUR

READ the book of James without considering the details.

Ignore the chapter and verse divisions. (*Chapters and verses weren't in the original writing. They were added later for convenience.*)

The purpose of reading this way is to gain understanding of the flow or rhythm - to get a feel for the book as a whole.

READ through the book as many times as you can.

Each time, you'll notice new things as the overall picture becomes clearer.

As you read, **ASK** God to open your eyes and speak to your heart, that you may understand.

After the first or second time, **JOURNAL** some notes as you read.

■ DAY FIVE

READ James 1:22-25 and Matthew 5:48.

What does it mean to deceive yourself by merely listening to the Word?

REFER to the message outline section **A LOOK IN THE MIRROR**.

Pastor Paul shared things he saw in himself as he looked at his own life as well as the mirror of the book of James.

Do you identify with any of these statements? Which ones?

LOOK through your journal notes. Is there something to add?

PONDER these reflections and write a prayer for wisdom, strength and courage to continue the process of not merely identifying these conflicts in our lives, but making the changes needed to live **perfectly**.

MEMORIZE James 1:25.

June 2/3, 2012