



steadfast

Term 3 Bible Study Book

BIBLE STUDY PROGRAM – TERM 3 2023

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Steadfast

The Epistle of James

A letter from whom?

Our author introduces himself simply as *James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ* (James 1:1). This leaves us with a couple of likely candidates for the writer of this letter. One is, James the brother of Jesus, also known as James the Just. James the Just grew in prominence as a leader of the church as the apostles were martyred (Galatians 1:19, Acts 12:17, Acts 15:13).

However, I believe the more likely candidate for the author is James the Apostle, brother of John, son of Zebedee and one of the “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17). James the Apostle was recognised as one of the pillars of the early church (Galatians 2:9) and because of this was targeted by those seeking to stamp out the early Christian movement (Acts 12:1-2). As one of the 12 Apostles, James was commissioned by Jesus to establish his Gospel at the heart of the church (John 16:13). James, along with the other apostles, devoted themselves to this great work (Acts 6:3-4) and were recognised as “servants of the word” (Luke 1:2). As James writes this letter, he does so as a servant of the word, of God and of his Lord Jesus Christ.

A letter to who?

The audience of the letter is introduced as “*the twelve tribes scattered among the nations*”. It is a circular letter, intended to be heard by many churches who have found themselves scattered (or ‘in the dispersion’) among the nations. This language of ‘scattering’ or ‘dispersion’ helps us to further understand the context of the letter. The early church is, at first, centred in Jerusalem. However, with the murder of Stephen and the great persecution that follows, the church is ‘scattered’ to Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1, 11:19). James is written to those who are part of this great scattering we witness in Acts.

However, regarding the primary audience of the letter, we can be even more specific than that. James repeatedly addresses this letter to his “brothers” (James 1:2, 2:1, 2:14, 3:1, 3:10, 3:12, 5:12, 5:19). While this may be a general way to refer to all believers (as per the NIV translation), there is reason to believe it is a more technical way to address the leaders of churches scattered through Judea and Samaria. This is the way the term “brothers” is often used in the New Testament (Acts 15:23; Romans 16:14; 2 Corinthians 8:18; Colossians 4:7; 1 Peter 5:12; 3 John 3, 5, 10; Revelation 22:9). Note this is especially evident in the more literal translations like the NASB or ESV). You see evidence for this within the letter as these “brothers” have a significant level of authority not available to all believers. They are the teachers of the church (3:1). For good or ill, their voice steers the entire body of believers (3:6). They are the ones with the authority to

decide who sits where (2:1-4). They are the ones in charge of the church resources (2:14-15). While the Epistle has much to say to all believers, its message was first of all to the leaders of these scattered churches and the message of the letter comes into sharper focus as we keep this in mind.

Why was the letter written?

Consider for a moment James 4:1-2, *“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ² You desire and do not have, so you murder”*.

Wait, What? They murder? Is James actually suggesting these Christians are committing murder or are genuinely tempted to kill? In our relatively peaceful suburban church we are inclined to treat this verse as metaphorical exaggeration. And yet, when you consider the suffering endured by the early church, perhaps we should take it at face value. These were, after all, violent times. At the arrest of Jesus, his followers first instinct was to draw their swords and attack (Luke 22:49-50). It was the murder of Stephen and the subsequent great persecution that led to their scattering from Jerusalem. Even far from Jerusalem, inquisitors like Saul continue to hunt and arrest followers of Jesus “to their death” (Acts 22:4). These Christian leaders long to see the day of righteousness promised by God (James 1:20, 3:18). It seems those addressed in the Epistle of James are being tempted to usher in this new day of righteousness with the sword. They are cursed and so they curse in return (James 3:9). Violent men make oaths to kill them (Acts 23:12) and they return fire, making oaths of their own (James 5:12). Quarrel for quarrel, fight for fight (James 4:2), an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

Yet this is not how God will bring about his great day of righteousness (James 1:19-20). As their Lord said on the mountain, it will be the peacemakers who will know the blessing of God (Matthew 5:9 and James 3:18). And so James the Apostle writes with the authority of Jesus to these persecuted dissident leaders, urging them not just to hear the words Jesus spoke on the mountain, but to put them into practice. To not just speak of their faith, but to do the works of faith. To turn back from the path that leads to violence and destruction and instead to endure suffering patiently, trusting Jesus’ promises (James 1:12). The rich persecutors will come, bearing all the authority of the temple (James 2:2). They are not to appease them (James 2:3) or attack them (James 3:9) but to submit their hearts to the wisdom of Jesus and await the vindication he promises (James 5:1).

The letter is written to urge persecuted believers to remain steadfast. This is the word that bookends the letter (James 1:3-4 and 5:11). It is what we aspire to as well. In times of conflict, persecution, challenge and outright attack, that we would be a steadfast church.

Study One: The Epistle of James

For our first study we're going to read the whole of the Epistle of James together. Before we do so, it's worth getting the backstory on a few of the characters that will turn up in the book.

- **My Brothers:** This is how James addresses his primary audience (James 1:2, 2:1, 2:14, 3:1, 3:10, 3:12, 5:12, 5:19). As I've argued in the introduction, these 'brothers' are the leaders of the various churches that have come into existence as persecution scatters the early church (Acts 8:1). Some bible translations, such as the NIV 2011, translate this phrase "my brothers and sisters" or "my fellow believers". This is a reasonable translation if "my brothers" is a generic way of referring to all believers, but I think in James it more narrowly references church leaders. So keep this in mind as you read the letter, or read together from a more literal translation like the ESV or Holman.
- **The Rich:** We first meet "the rich man" in chapter 1 where we find them condemned in a pretty severe way (1:10-11). However, by chapter two we find there is more to this character than just having a healthy bank balance. He has a ring and a robe that identifies him as carrying significant authority (2:2). He is a representative of the group that is oppressing the church, putting them on trial (2:6) and blaspheming Jesus' name. In James, "the rich" are the religiously powerful envoys of the Jerusalem temple. Men like Saul who pursue the poor believers, scattered from their homes.

With those characters in place, have a read of the Epistle of James.

- 1) What words or topics do you find repeated throughout the letter?
- 2) Do you think there is an overarching message in this letter?
- 3) What sections did you find confusing or difficult to understand?
- 4) What sections or verses particularly stood out to you?

- 5) If you've read through the letter of James and still have some time, read through the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. In what ways have Jesus' words shaped James' letter? What themes occur in both the sermon and the letter?

Let's Pray

Give thanks for Rob and Jo Copland and their work with AFES at Wollongong Uni Bible Group.

Give thanks for David & Kathryn Luis, with Reuben and Felix, and their work with AFES at Geelong Christian Union at Deakin University.

Pray for Brett and Mardi, Evie, Harriet, Olivia, and Willow Middleton. Please pray for Brett as he seeks to encourage, serve and build up the wider staff team. Pray for wisdom that he and the team develop ministry plans that will help St Luke's stay faithful and grow into the future.

Please pray that the way we welcome people would encourage them to seek Jesus and make St Lukes their home. Pray that we would continue to connect with hospitality and warmth.

Study Two: James 1:1-18

Pure Joy

Talk

- 1) What does the word wisdom mean to you? Who do you know that is wise? What has made them wise?

Hear: James 1:1-18

- 2) I've argued in the introduction that James writes to the leaders of Christian communities scattered by early Pharisaic persecution of Christians (like we see in Acts 8:1). What sort of trials might they be enduring?
- 3) How does James say the believers should feel about the trials they are going through? Why?
- 4) When we are suffering, what do we usually ask for? What does James call believers to ask for?
- 5) For many, verse 6 can be very difficult to hear. Is this the case for you? How does verse 8 help us understand better what James means by "doubt"?
- 6) When you are suffering are you ever jealous of others? It seems from James 1:9-12 that this is the case for the readers of James' letter. What words does James offer to the person who desires to escape the trial they are facing?

- 7) When you face trials and temptations, do you ever find yourself blaming God? What does James have to say about this?

Give Thanks

- 8) What have you heard about God or the life of faith today that you could give thanks for right now.

Live

- 9) What trials do you face at the moment? What trials do communities of Christians face? Why might these things be considered 'pure joy'? How might they actually be a good and perfect(ing) gift from above?

Let's Pray

Give thanks for Brenton and Melissa Kilby, with Evie and Micah who are currently at St Andrews Hall in Melbourne with CMS, in preparation and training for overseas mission work.

Pray for Jennie and Don Everist. Pray for Jennie as she ministers and cares for the people who attend the Thursday Service. Pray for her as she continues to pray and care for those who are unable to attend due to health.

Pray for God's sustaining hand over those who are physically or mentally ill, grieving or experiencing financial hardships. Give thanks that there is hope, even in the frustration and suffering of our lives, because of Jesus.

Study Three: James 1:19–27

To make a better world

Talk

- 1) What social change would you most desire to see in the world? What would you be willing to do to see it happen?

- 2) How does it make you feel to see fellow Christians persecuted, to see schools push anti-christian agendas or governments curb religious freedoms? What would you be willing to do to see this stop?

Hear: James 1:19–27

- 3) A key verse for us in this section is 1:20, "*for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God*" (ESV). It seems what these early church leaders desire most is "*the righteousness of God*". But what does this phrase mean? Have a read of Psalm 31:1 and Psalm 71:20. What did the phrase mean in the Old Testament?

- 4) From what James says in the passage, it seems the early church leaders are walking a particularly dangerous path to try to create the righteous future promised to them. What does this path involve? What path should they actually take?

The wrong path to a righteous age	Jesus' path to a righteous age

- 5) In verses 21-25 James speaks of “the word” (21, 22, 23) and “the perfect law” (25). What is he talking about?

Give Thanks

- 6) What have you heard about God or the life of faith today that you could give thanks for right now.

Live

- 7) James calls his readers not to just hear the word but to obey and to look intently into the perfect law and continue in it. It is where the path to righteousness is found.

a) Do you allow God’s word to rebuke you and change you as you read it?

b) Do you sit in judgement over God’s word, picking and choosing what you like, or do you allow it to sit in authority over your life?

c) Do you make the most of the moments in your week where you can hear the word to look intently at the perfect law, or do you treat them as trivial?

- 8) As you respond to persecution or as you seek to make the world a better place, do you find yourself behaving in any way like the early church leaders taking the wrong path above? Do you ever observe other Christians doing so?

- 9) Consider each of the instructions James gives for Jesus' path to righteousness. Which do you find most difficult? In what situations in your life might you need to employ each?

Let's Pray

Give thanks for Peter and Katharine Yock, with Noah and Atticus, as they serve with AFES at Griffith University in Brisbane.

Give thanks for Rachel and Michael Burgess, with Harry, as Rachel serves with AFES at the Australian Catholic University in North Sydney.

Pray for Colin as Office and Site Manager. We pray for energy and enthusiasm as he looks after staff and the Church site. Pray for Theyn our Finance Officer that she would bring Glory to God in their work. Pray for Lisa as Admin Assistant, as she looks after the administration of the Church.

Pray for our Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and his government. Pray also for our State and Local governments.

Study Four: James 2:1-13

Favour or Faithfulness

Talk

- 1) Has there ever been a time you have been desperate for a particular person's approval?

Hear: James 2:1-13

- 2) "Believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favouritism". How would you define favouritism or partiality? Why is such behaviour inconsistent with being a "believer in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ"?
- 3) James offers a parable to illustrate, but it is likely a very real life situation that these believers face. A rich man and a poor man turn up to church. Let's fill out a picture of each of these characters. What do we learn from the verses below?

Rich Man	Poor Man

- 4) Considering the identity of the "rich man", what reasons might the church leaders, and the christian community in general, have to show favouritism?
- 5) Why does James warn against such favouritism in the church?

2:4	
2:5	
2:6-7	
2:8-9	
2:12	

- 6) "Because judgement without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful." What teaching by Jesus may stand behind this statement? Why should Christians be known for their willingness to show mercy?

Give Thanks

- 7) What have you heard about God or the life of faith today that you could give thanks for right now.

Live

- 8) When we are being persecuted it can be very tempting to try to win the approval of the powerful to protect us. When have you seen this happen? Are you ever tempted to do this?

- 9) Are there any patterns of unhealthy favouritism in the way you interact at Church, at work or in your social groups?

- 10) Is there anyone you need to show mercy to at the moment, knowing we will be judged according to the same standard we judge others?

Let's Pray

Give thanks for Kylie Zietsch as she serves with CMS at Johannesburg Bible College in South Africa.

Give thanks for Nonhlanhla Tshabalala, who is a student at George Whitefield College in Capetown, South Africa.

Give thanks for Natasha Norman, who is a first year student tutor at Johannesburg Bible College in South Africa.

Pray for Jess, Luke, Cooper, Ace and Penny Moran. Pray for Jess she heads up Children's Ministry at St Lukes, including KOS (Kids on Sunday), Primary Scripture, Children's Thursday arvo programs.

Pray for those in our local area who don't know Jesus. Ask for opportunities to reach out and invite them to consider Jesus.

Study Five: James 2:14–26

Living faith

Talk

- 1) If someone asked if you have to be a good person to be saved, what would you say?

Hear James 2:14–26

- 2) What is James' overall point in this section of the letter? What is the issue he is addressing?
- 3) From the letter so far, what are some of the 'deeds' James expects we will find in the life of someone with true and living faith? What is added to this list in the verses we just read?
- 4) Considering the context of James that we have discussed previously, why might these early Christian leaders be asserting that their faith is what counts, not their lives?
- 5) What examples does James give from the Old Testament? Why are these particularly appropriate for these embattled early church leaders and churches to remember?

- 6) Have a read of Romans 3:27–4:3. Does this contradict what James writes to these early Christian communities? How does the context of each letter help us understand the differences we see in each passage?

- 7) How would you articulate the relationship between our faith in Jesus, the lives we lead and our salvation?

Give Thanks

- 8) What have you heard about God or the life of faith today that you could give thanks for right now?

Live

- 9) What opportunities will you have this week to make your faith complete by what you do?

- 10) As you look at your life following Jesus, were there times you have been able to express your faith through love of others? How might you hear the warnings of this passage and return to a life of faith expressed in practical love of others?

Let's Pray

Give thanks for Brendon and Amy Garlett, and their family, as they serve at Shoalhaven Aboriginal Community Church in Nowra.

We pray for Nicole & Luke Murray. Give Nicole creativity and enthusiasm as she pastors our Youth and Young Adults. We pray for Luke, as he seeks to bring community to our church.

Pray for our craft group that meets on Wednesday. Praise God for the amazing opportunity they have to share the gospel while crafting.

Study Six: James 3:1–18

Weighing our Words

Talk

- 1) Can you think of a time your words have gotten you in serious trouble?

Hear James 3:1–18

- 2) *“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.”* This passage will have much to say to all of us, but who is the primary audience of 3:1?
- 3) Why should these early Christian leaders be careful to put themselves forward as the recognised Teacher within their community?
- 4) How does James illustrate the power of a Teacher in a Christian community? Do you think these leaders might be using their words to steer the church in a negative direction?
- 5) What are the marks of wise leadership (James 3:1–18)?

Give Thanks

- 6) What have you heard about God or the life of faith today that you could give thanks for right now.

Live

- 7) Beyond St Luke's, who do you look to as your teachers in the faith? How careful are you to make sure they are steering you in a healthy and God-honouring direction?
- 8) Have you ever seen a church community grow disfunctional or dangerous because of the words of a church leader?
- 9) In what spheres do your words carry the power to steer people one way or another? How careful are you to use this power to be a peacemaker?

Let's Pray

Give thanks for Matt and Lauren, Ezra, Joanna and Samuel and their mission work to an unreached people group in South East Asia.

Pray for our Church Wardens: Helen Webster, Phil Moss and Tim Clipsham. Pray for our Parish Councillors: Brendan Carpenter, Amanda Garlato, Wes Hill, Eli Lindeback, Alex Kiefer, Kathleen Price and Simon Veltmeyer (also our treasurer). Pray for our Parish Nominators: Timothy Clipsham, Michael Easton, Amanda Garlato, Elise Hankin and Vicky Sawatt. Pray for our Synod Reps: Michael Easton and Amanda Garlato.

Praise God for our Bible Study leaders and for their faithful work in teaching and ministering to us throughout the term.

Study Seven: James 4:1-12

The source of strife

Talk

- 1) This section of James opens with a question, "*what causes fights and quarrels among you?*" Think of some of the relationship networks you are part of, such as family, friends, church or work. How would you answer James' question?

Hear James 4:1-17

- 2) Consider James 4:1-2 and 4:11-12. What is the atmosphere in the churches that James writes to?
- 3) In 4:1-5 James will give the reason for the quarrels and fights that are breaking out. What is it (4:1-3)?
- 4) What sort of desires do you imagine are in the hearts of the early christian leaders and this persecuted church? What do you imagine they were coveting?
- 5) What powerful phrases does Paul use in 4:4 to describe the fighting, quarrelling and violence employed by the church to get what it covets (4:4-5)?

- 6) What exactly do you think James means by “friendship with the world”?
- 7) The actions of these church leaders and church communities have been likened to apostasy and adultery. But God is full of grace and longs to restore the sinner. What is the pathway to restoration (James 4:6-10)?
- 8) This submission to God must result in transformed lives, the likes of which are described in 4:11-12. In what area of life does James insist his readers reform?

Give Thanks

- 9) What have you heard about God or the life of faith today that you could give thanks for right now.

Live

- 10) In what ways does the modern christian church risk “friendship with the world” and “enmity with God” as it tries to navigate persecution?
- 11) What role does the sort of repentance outlined in James 4:6-10 play in your life?

Let's Pray

Give thanks for John Francis Wallace as he serves as the pastor of a local church in Indore, India.

Pray for Sam and Jess, Percy, Lois, Finn and Cleo Morton. Pray for Sam as he heads up Youth Ministry and high school Scripture.

We pray for Ministry Trainee Matt Peck, working alongside Sam.

Pray for our ESL team who teach and share the love of Jesus with those in our community who are seeking to improve their language and connect with others. We pray those who attend will come to know true grace and freedom in Christ.

Thank God for the outreach that occurs in Anglican Christian schools and retirement villages in our community who share the good news of Jesus with families who don't know Jesus. Pray for the chaplains in those places that they would be bold for the Gospel.

Study Eight: James 4:13–5:20

Talk

- 1) When you are feeling attacked for following Jesus, what helps you stand firm and not give up?

Hear James 4:13–5:20

- 2) James will conclude his letter as he began, calling the leaders of the Christians churches to model patience and steadfast faith in the face of suffering. Have a read of James 4:13–5:6. Why should these leaders remain patient and peaceful rather than returning fire on their persecutors?
- 3) With the firm assurance of the coming judgement, what sort of lives ought followers of Jesus now live?
 - James 5:7–8
 - James 5:9
 - James 5:12
 - James 5:13–18

- James 5:19

Give Thanks

- 4) What have you heard about God or the life of faith today that you could give thanks for right now.

Live

- 5) In this final chapter urging the church to steadfast endurance in the face of suffering, we see the importance of remembering the coming judgement (5:7, 5:8, 5:9, 5:12, 5:20). Is your life lived in light of the coming judgement?

- 6) This chapter also speaks to the powerful ministries we can have with each other as we patiently endure to the end (singing together, praying with the sick, hearing each other confess sin, praying with each other for forgiveness, restoring each other to faith). Do you feel the spirit leading you to minister to people in any of these ways at the moment?

Let's Pray

Give thanks for Sarah and Tim, with Elizabeth, as Sarah serves with the Biblical Counseling Trust of India in Dehli.

Give thanks for Shane & Ruth and their mission work making disciples in Spain.

Pray for Russell Denten as he seeks to help us worship faithfully during our weekend and midweek gatherings.

Pray for our ongoing and various Children's, Youth, and Young Adults Ministries; that God would be using the leaders and volunteers to sow seeds and help people grow into mature and loving relationships with Jesus. Pray that this would be a great witness to the wider community.