

CLOSER LOOK



A LIFEGROUP STUDY ON THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

In the WORD: Walking through the Book of James
Week 3
Days 15-21 & Conclusion (James 4:11-5:20)
Summer 2022

INSTRUCTIONS TO SMALL GROUP LEADERS

Prior to this third lesson, please have your lifegroup complete days 15 through 21 plus the conclusion of *In the WORD: Walking through the Book of James*. This reading will take your group through James 4:11-5:20.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Where is your favorite place and/or time of day to read the Bible?

Sometimes people can use their Bible knowledge in a way that makes others feel inferior. How do we avoid using our knowledge of the Bible in a way that feels arrogant or condescending?

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says about a particular topic.

Have a volunteer read James 4:11-17 (or the Scripture from Days 15-16 of In the WORD)

Take a moment to review your answers from days 15-16 of the study. What ideas or verses stood out to you?

Was there anything that James said in these verses that was unfamiliar to you? Was there anything that was challenging to you?

Verse 15 reveals we ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." Do you truly believe that your life is in God's hands and that He, not you, is sovereign? How does this kind of thinking compare to the world's view of life?

Have a volunteer read James 5:1-12 (or the Scripture from Days 17-19 of In the WORD)

Take a moment to review your answers from days 17-19 of the study. What ideas or verses stood out to you?

Was there anything that James said in these verses that was unfamiliar to you? Was there anything that was challenging to you?

Three times in these verses, James speaks of being patient in our suffering. Are you generally patient as you suffer? Why or why not? What truths about God can help us be patient?

Have a volunteer read James 5:13-20 (or the Scripture from Days 20-21 of In the WORD)

Take a moment to review your answers from days 20-21 of the study. What ideas or verses stood out to you?

Was there anything that James said in these verses that was unfamiliar to you? Was there anything he wrote that is challenging to you?

Verses 14-15 are probably some of the most misunderstood Bible verses. Some use these verses to claim that if you pray in faith, then God will automatically answer your prayer. What is the flaw with this kind of thinking? What other places in the Bible show that kind of thinking isn't true?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scriptures apply directly to their lives.

After reading through James, what book of the Bible are you interested in reading next? Why?

In what ways was your life positively affected by reading through the Scriptures on your own?

PRAYER REQUESTS

Take a moment to ask your group if there are any prayer requests.

PRAY WITH YOUR GROUP

Pray over your group's prayer requests, along with the following prayer:

Father God, help us to be a praying people. Help us to turn to You both when we need help and also to thank You when things are going well. Help us to be patient as we suffer and know that one day You will return to make all things right. Thank You God for Your love and salvation. In Jesus' name we pray, AMEN!

LP REMINDERS

- Stay up to date with emails and/or social media for any changes on Lifepoint's meeting times.

MEMORIZE

“So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” (James 4:17)

COMMENTARY

James 4:11-5:20

4:11. Warnings in verses 11–12 grow out of the rebuke of pride and the call for humility in verses 7–10. Verse 11 prohibits slander and insulting language. Pride and the lack of humility are the chief causes of slanderous, insulting language. Slander is critical speech intended to inflame others against the person being criticized. It involves talking against people, perhaps attacking them behind their backs. In this instance Christians were slandering Christians. Christians are brothers and sisters in Christ. For Christians to malign other believers is a living contradiction of the close family ties which should bind them together.

A slanderous Christian must face two charges. First, one who practices slander speaks against the law. The law that a critical Christian misrepresents is the law of love (see Lev. 19:18). Christians are called to love our neighbors as ourselves. The slanderous Christian fails to do this.

Second, one who practices slander judges the law. With a fault-finding attitude I set myself up as a judge. I neglect God's law, thus declaring that it is a bad law and worthy of being removed. God calls Christians to keep the law, not to sit in judgment on it. When we slander our neighbors, we show our opposition to the law of love and imply that we are exempt from observing it.

4:12. God is the only Lawgiver and Judge, the one able both to save and destroy. Only God has the ability to enforce his laws and carry out his purposes. He allows no human being to share his role. A slanderous Christian attempts to play the role of God. God has no pleasure in those who practice slander.

Christians can easily come to the conclusion that we are free to show critical attitudes toward those who do wrong. The Bible warns us to leave this judgment with God. Only God has the competence to find and punish those who break his laws. Our calling is to respond in supportive love rather than biting criticism.

4:13-17. Do not yield yourselves in-blind confidence to your planning, to go from city to city with a view to traffic and gain, but realize your transitoriness and dependence on God! Otherwise all your knowledge of good will turn to sin and judgment (vv. 11–17).

5:1-6 Oppressive landowners and people who put their trust in riches were commonly addressed in prophetic and apocalyptic speech, including by Jesus Himself (e.g., Lk 6:24). People who use their wealth to oppress others may seem to go unpunished in this lifetime, but James warns that miseries are coming in the future judgment.

5:2-3 Wealth is often measured in terms of quality foods, clothes, and silver and gold. Besides referring to moth-eaten clothing, the phrase wealth is ruined could indicate that food is perishable and thus not a measure of lasting wealth. Technically speaking, silver and gold do not corrode; James's statement about them corroding is paradoxical, emphasizing that even “incorruptible” commodities are destined to perish. Last days emphasizes the eschatological nature of the pronouncement against greed. Stored up (or hoarded) wealth will become the undoing of greedy persons.

5:4 In ancient times payment for work performed was due at the end of the workday. Greed motivated some landowners to withhold these wages. Withheld could be translated “defrauded.” Lord of Hosts is an OT reference to God as a warrior (1Ch 11:4-9; Isa 2:12ff). The plight of the poor and oppressed worker is known to God.

5:6 Condemned is a legal term suggesting that the wealthy took land and wages through decisions rendered in dishonest courts. He does not resist you (see 4:6) indicates the helplessness of the poor.

5:7-8 In light of the certainty of God’s coming judgment on their oppressors, James encouraged his audience to be patient and to await the Lord’s coming. The phrase strengthen your hearts is an expansion on “be patient,” signifying firm resolve in light of the coming of the Lord and in spite of trying circumstances.

5:9 To complain about one another constitutes being judgmental, already prohibited in 4:11-12. The immediacy of the Lord’s return brings judgment to the person who judges, just as it does for the oppressors.

5:12 Do not swear is an exhortation to truthfulness, not a universal prohibition against oath-making (see Rm 1:9; 2Co 1:23; Gal 1:20; Php 1:8; 1Th 2:5,10, where Paul used oaths; cp. Mt 5:33-37).

5:13-14 James used a series of questions followed by commands as an effective way of exhorting the congregation to prayer and worship. Suffering in verse 13 is not a reference to physical illness; it is instead a spiritual burden caused by misfortune or poor choices. Elders, who functioned in various capacities in the early church, should anoint any sick person with olive oil and pray over him. Olive oil was considered a cure-all ointment in the ancient world, but for James the real healing power is in prayer.

5:15 The prayer of faith echoes 1:5-8. Save refers to physical healing (as in Mk 5:23,28,34; 10:52; Jn 11:12). The Lord will restore him to health does not indicate that death is at hand (v. 14), but that once healed by the power of God the sick person could get up and walk (Mt 9:5-7; Mk 1:31; 2:9-12; 9:27; Ac 3:7). He will be forgiven indicates that perhaps the illness was connected with sin, and the prayers of the elders could bring spiritual healing as well.

5:16 Pray for one another echoes the prayers of the elders, and these should lead to both physical and spiritual healing (i.e., forgiveness). Prayer is not a magical incantation or a guarantee of healing, but when offered fervently by a righteous person, God will respond in a way that best fits His good purposes.

5:17-18 James cited a biblical personality, Elijah, who prayed effectively. The illustration is intended to encourage his audience that their prayers could lead to similar results.

5:19-20 James turned to the priority of reclaiming those who had strayed from the faith. Someone turns and whoever turns both reflect an effort to bring a straying believer back to an authentic Christian faith and lifestyle.