

# Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, March 30, 2016 – First Baptist Church Buda  
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

## GETTING PRACTICAL WITH YOUR FAITH A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JAMES

“Introduction”

*James 1:1-2, Psalm 15*

Every read about some person you wish you could sit down and talk to? Or, more often, haven't you come across the writing of a particular individual you'd love to spend an evening with? One of those people in my life is James. I am really drawn to this guy! He is practical. He is insightful. He is also gutsy, honest, and sincere to the core. He is a rare find especially in our day.

This study we are about to undertake will reveal just how true all these things are. You will find yourself thinking, “This man had been looking through my keyhole!” It is remarkable how penetrating and convicting the letter of James is... even though it was written about the middle of the first century.

Make me a promise, okay? Stay open and teachable. Don't resist the message of James, especially when he probes into the nerve center of your walk and your talk. He's right on target, pinpointing the very things that need our attention.

Someday we will be able to sit down and talk with James. When we do, it will be great to tell him how much we appreciated what he wrote, won't it?

---

### **A CASE FOR PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY – A *Survey of James***

The Bible dwells on two prominent themes all the way through the 66 books between its covers:

#### **2 Prominent Themes in the Bible:**

- 1. The way to God** – directed to the lost man who is dead in his sin
- 2. The walk with God** – aimed at the Christian, telling him or her how to walk with the God he or she has come to know

**(1) The Way to God, and (2) The Walk with God.** The first theme is directed to the lost man who is dead in his sin. The second theme is aimed at the Christian... telling him or her how to walk with the God he or she has come to know. The letters of the New Testament are especially filled with this emphasis. The book of James falls within this second theme. Some insightful individual has called the book of James the “Proverbs of the New Testament.” In fact, James's

and Solomon's writings are much alike... filled with pithy, short exhortations, maxims, and proverbs that all talk about how to live for God in a way that is unique and sincere. Generally speaking, the book of James is not a great doctrinal treatise. For example, the name of the Lord Jesus Christ only appears twice in the book of James, His cross is never mentioned, nor His resurrection, nor the Holy Spirit. This book was not written for establishing the doctrines of our Christian faith, but for encouraging its practice. It drive home the importance of living as if we know the truth. In this first study of the book of James, we will start by acquainting ourselves with a set of basic facts pertaining to the book. This will provide us with an essential framework for this study.

## I. THE WRITER (James 1:1a)

*"James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ..." –James 1:1a*

Immediately the author identifies himself as "James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ..." A look at biblical history reveals the existence of several men bearing the name of James in the Bible. Who was this particular man? It is believed that he was the half-brother of Jesus, born and raised in the same family.

*"<sup>53</sup> Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, that He departed from there. <sup>54</sup> When He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, 'Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? <sup>55</sup> Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? <sup>56</sup> And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?' <sup>57</sup> So they were offended at Him. But Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house.' –Matthew 13:53-57*

**The Author of James = James the half-brother of Jesus**

## II. HIS HISTORY

In looking at a brief sketch of James's life, we can begin to see why he wrote as he did. It's quite possible that the half-brother of Jesus cited in Matthew 13:55 are listed in chronological order. If so, James had as his only big brother the Lord Jesus, who never sinned. *What would that do to us, if our big brother was literally perfect, completely holy, never made any mistakes, no sin... perfect? How would that affect us growing up?*

Thus, there was already a built-in problem from his point of view. When Jesus returned to Nazareth, demonstrating His unusual powers and wisdom, it is not surprising that He received the kind of response from his own family as described in Scripture (Mark 3:21 & 31):

*"<sup>1</sup> And He (Jesus) entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand. <sup>2</sup> So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. <sup>3</sup> And He said to the man who had the withered hand, 'Step forward.' <sup>4</sup> Then He said to them, 'Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to*

save life or to kill?' But they kept silent. <sup>5</sup> And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other. <sup>6</sup> Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him. <sup>7</sup> But Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the sea. And a great multitude from Galilee followed Him, and from Judea <sup>8</sup> and Jerusalem and Idumea and beyond the Jordan; and those from Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they heard how many things He was doing, came to Him. <sup>9</sup> So He told His disciples that a small boat should be kept ready for Him because of the multitude, lest they should crush Him. <sup>10</sup> For He healed many, so that as many as had afflictions pressed about Him to touch Him. <sup>11</sup> And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried out, saying, 'You are the Son of God.' <sup>12</sup> But He sternly warned them that they should not make Him known. <sup>13</sup> And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him. <sup>14</sup> Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, <sup>15</sup> and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons: <sup>16</sup> Simon, to whom He gave the name Peter; <sup>17</sup> James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James, to whom He gave the name Boanerges, that is, 'Sons of Thunder'; <sup>18</sup> Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Cananite; <sup>19</sup> and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him. And they went into a house. <sup>20</sup> Then the multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. <sup>21</sup> **But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, 'He is out of His mind.'** <sup>22</sup> And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He has Beelzebub,' and, 'By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons.' <sup>23</sup> So He called them to Himself and said to them in parables: 'How can Satan cast out Satan? <sup>24</sup> If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. <sup>25</sup> And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. <sup>26</sup> And if Satan has risen up against himself, and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end. <sup>27</sup> No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house. <sup>28</sup> Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; <sup>29</sup> but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation'— <sup>30</sup> because they said, 'He has an unclean spirit.' <sup>31</sup> **Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him.** <sup>32</sup> And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, 'Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You.' <sup>33</sup> But He answered them, saying, 'Who is My mother, or My brothers?' <sup>34</sup> And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, 'Here are My mother and My brothers! <sup>35</sup> For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.'" —Matthew 3:1-35 (focus vv.21&31)

The phrase "But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, 'He is out of His mind,'" in verse 21 is a reference to his relatives... his family. The decided opinion of His family, including James, was that He was out of his mind... an opinion that James, the brother of Jesus, held right into young manhood.

However, James came to a point in his life where he had to make a decision... was his brother the Messiah? We are not sure when that point came in James, the half-brother of

Jesus, but some Biblical scholars and teachers have surmised that James didn't reach this important moment of decision and indeed didn't come until after Jesus' resurrection. Immediately following the Resurrection, Jesus paid a visit to His cynical and skeptical relative (brother), James, a visit according to the Apostle Paul who tell us in **1 Corinthians 15:3-8**, *“<sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. <sup>6</sup> After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup> After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. <sup>8</sup> Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.”*

It was at this point (this resurrection appearance by Jesus to his brother) that most believe that James received his brother as Lord and Savior, and that moment became “life-changing” for James. He became... in the time that followed... one of the most significant leaders in the early Church. He died by stoning in A.D. 62.

#### **A Historical Picture of James:**

- 1. Lived most of his life in the perfect shadow of just older brother, Jesus**
- 2. Was a skeptic most of his early life**
- 3. Thought to have been converted after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus**
- 4. Became a very significant leader in the early church.**
- 5. Died a martyr for Christ**

### **III. HIS SELF-PERSPECTIVE (James 1:1)**

*“James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.” –James 1:1*

Before any other had been written, James composed the first piece of biblical literature in the New Testament era. Having had no pattern to follow, it is interesting to see who he directs his readers' focus as he identifies himself. He didn't say, “I am Christ's brother.” AS we see in his subsequent writing, that would have been considered name dropping, which he regarded as phony and empty. Instead, he termed himself “a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” He recognized that his real relationship to Jesus was not physical, but spiritual... made possible by the grace of God alone.

**James's perspective of his relations with Jesus = not at brother but as “bondservant”**  
*\*this shows the life-transforming relationship he found himself in with his brother, Jesus, as his Messiah and Savior. Wow!*

### **IV. RELATING TOP HIS READERS (James 1:1ff)**

He referred to them as “the twelve tribes... scattered abroad” (v1). He also called them “brethren” (1.2, 2.1, 3.1). Obviously, James was writing to fellow Christians. But specifically, what does his first description of his readers mean? The Greek word for “scattered” or “dispersed” means “scattered throughout” and is used in the sense of

broadcasting seeds over an open field. Historically, at the time James wrote this, Rome had become the headquarters of the world. It's emperor was Claudius, who despised the Jews and persecuted them heavily. The result? They found themselves homeless and landless. They were launched into misery and suffering. Because of this pressure, many of James's fellow Jewish Christians had begun to defect and live a life. Concerned about this situation, he wrote to those about whom he cared.

**Recipients of the Book of James = Persecuted Christians \*particularly Jewish converts to Christianity**

## V. THE BOOK AS A WHOLE

Now that we have considered the author, his history, and his readers, we turn to the content of the book of James

1. **The Main Theme** – It may be summarized as follows... real faith produces genuine works. Put another way, we can say that the person who has genuinely found the way walks in it.
2. **The Main Section** – The main section of the book is considered James 2:14-26, *“<sup>14</sup> What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? <sup>17</sup> Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. <sup>18</sup> But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. <sup>19</sup> You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! <sup>20</sup> But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? <sup>21</sup> Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? <sup>22</sup> Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? <sup>23</sup> And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God. <sup>24</sup> You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. <sup>25</sup> Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? <sup>26</sup> For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”* A careful look at this text shows James not preaching salvation by works, but salvation that is accompanied by works. Faith is the root... works are the fruit.
3. **A Book Review** – The following chart will help us put the contents of James' writing in order in our own minds.

CHAPTER	FAITH →→→→→→→→	WORKS
1	When stretched, it doesn't break	... producing genuine stability.
	<u>Challenge:</u> Facing life's trials (vv.1-12) Standing against temptation (vv. 13-16) Being confronted by Scripture (vv.19-27)	
2	When pressed, it doesn't fall	... producing genuine love.
	<u>Challenge:</u> The temptation to be partial or prejudiced (vv.2-13) The temptation to be indifferent (vv.14-26)	

<b>3,4</b>	<i>When expressed, it doesn't explode</i>	<i>... producing control and humility.</i>
	<u>Challenge:</u> <i>Words (3:1-12)</i> <i>Wisdom (3:13-18)</i> <i>Watchfulness (4:1-17)</i>	
<b>5</b>	<i>When distressed, it does not sit</i>	<i>... it exercises!</i>

- 4. The Prevailing Tone** – In no way did James portray an easy and comfortable life for the one determined to walk in faith. He steps all over a variety of toes in the Christian family in order to pinpoint phoniness and insecurity. James desired to put genuine faith back into the Christian life; therefore, he couched his message in straight talk.

## VI. OUR RELATIONSHIP TO HIS MESSAGE

As you begin this study, perhaps it is in order to take a moment to make a commitment. Why not spend a few moments in silence and convey to God a thought similar to this one:

*Lord, As I embark on this potentially threatening path of study, help me to see my Christian life not as a bed of roses, but as an obstacle course intended to firm up my faith. Stretch my thinking about my responses to You and to others. I personally desire the result of this study to be real faith clothed in authentic works.      -Sincerely Yours*

### MARKS OF A PRACTICAL CHRISTAIN (Psalm 15)

Psalm 15 is not a psalm of theory, but of reality. Its message is a complement to the book of James and “Practical Christianity.” These words of David help us today to better understand what it means to be a practical Christian. Benjamin Franklin, who admired this passage, called it “the gentleman’s psalm,” viewing it as a model after which gentlemen and ladies should patter their lives. Admirable as his thought was, it did not say nearly enough. As we now consider this psalm’s relationship to the whole of Scripture, we can say that it summarized the more significant marks of a genuine Christian’s life. Keeping in mind that we’re dealing with truth that is to be practiced, let’s look at Psalm 15 a little deeper.

#### I. THE QUESTION

This psalm’s structure is obvious; it begins by asking something, “*Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?*” (v.1) The terms “tabernacle” and “holy hill” are not to be taken literally, but symbolically. This is the language of poetry. In this text these Hebrews idioms are references to the Lord’s presence, the place of intimate presence or meeting. Thus, David asks, “*Lord, what kind of person is qualified to meet with You intimately and carry on the kind of fellowship with which You are pleased?*”

#### II. THE ANSWER

The rest of the psalm answer the above question by naming eleven characteristics of the person who is really and practically walking with the Lord... who is in fellowship with

Him. Of course, this listing would presuppose that such a one would have already come to faith in God through Jesus Christ.

### **11 Characteristic Marks of Practical Christianity:**

1. **He is one who walks uprightly (v.2)** – The term “uprightly” means “complete, whole.” In certain instances it means “innocent.” It is sometimes translated as “integrity.” A person who enjoys intimate fellowship with God is a person who lives in the realm of no hidden secrets or shame. Proverbs 20:6-7 says, *“<sup>6</sup> Most men will proclaim each his own goodness, But who can find a faithful man? <sup>7</sup> The righteous man walks in his integrity; His children are blessed after him.”*
2. **He is one who works righteousness (v.2)** – The term used here is an all-embracing one meaning that such a person is honest and straight dealing... that he does what is ethically right and aboveboard. He lives this way as a habit of life, operating upon truth and honesty.
3. **He is one who speaks the truth in his heart (v.2)** – It appears that this phrase is not found anywhere else in the Bible. The thought here is that a fellowshipping Christian doesn’t live with deception. Even in his thinking there is not credibility gap. What does on inside matches what goes on outside. We might call this “character.”
4. **He is one who does not backbite (v.3)** – Backbiting another may also be called slander and it is not the act of telling a lie, but the act of misrepresenting someone and damaging his or her reputation. One who does not slander or backbite is one who carefully frames his words so that he is saying what is painstakingly correct.
5. **He is one who does no evil to his neighbor (v.3)** – The word “does” literally means “to endure.” Therefore, he does not endure evil against his neighbor. Following up the thought in the preceding point, he not only avoids slandering and backbiting others, but doesn’t endure slander and backbiting when he hears it taking place. Also, he doesn’t tolerate gossip.
6. **He is one who does not take up reproach against his friend (v.3)** – Observe the change in focus from neighbor to friend. “Reproach” has the idea of “cutting.” In other words, a Christian in fellowship does not set aside grace when responding to others. He does not become argumentative or cutting.
7. **He is one who despises ungodliness (v.4)** – David used the word which translates as “reprobate” to identify a worthless person. It is a strong term referring to an avowed unbeliever who despises the things of God. A person with a real and practical walk with God cannot find it within the realm of possibility to have an intimate friendship with that kind of individual.
8. **He is one who honors those who fear the Lord (v.4)** – When he sees a fellow God-fearer, regardless of his or her background, position, or influence; he shows respect, support and appreciation. He respects both the One who is worshiped and the one who worships him.
9. **He is one who swears to his own hurt and does not change (v.4)** – He gives his word and refuses to retract it when he finds himself uncomfortable because of his original decision. He does exactly as he said he would do! His word is his bond and he or she is very dependable and trustworthy.
10. **He is one who does not loan money at interest to a brother or a close friend (v.5)** – Somehow, this one characteristic seems different from the others and causes us to

bristle. But according to Jewish law, this guideline was concretely established (see Lev. 25:35-38, Deut. 23:19-20). Why? Because love should prompt one person to assist another, rather than make a profit from one in need. CLARIFICATION: (1) this characteristic was addressed to those close to one another, not to those in business relationship. (2) loans historically pertained to ones in need of assistance. (3) love and discernment must always operate together, even in money matters. OVERLOOKED FACT: Scripture never promises a blessing to those who loan... only to those who give.

**11. He is one who does not take a bribe against an innocent person (v.5)** – This is self-explanatory.

### III. THE PROMISE

David says at the end of **verse 5**, “... *He who does these things shall never be moved.*” Though briefly stated, this promise is substantial. **The person who walks in fellowship with God will have stability within his or her life.**