Week One, Assignment One

James 1:1-11

**Before you begin:**

The book of James deals with the practical side of faith. You know, trusting God *even* in hard times. Think about the way you have responded to a trial or recent difficulty in your life. How would you describe your **attitude** during this time? What does your response to this situation reveal about your view of God?

**What you should know:**

Like many of the early church leaders, James served under a constant threat of persecution and violence. Both the Roman Empire and the Jewish religious leaders had reasons to persecute as many Christians as possible. To the Romans, Christians were troublemakers; to the Jewish leaders, they were blasphemers. James wrote to his brothers and sisters about the benefits that could result from hardship and the importance of living genuine lives of faith.

Read: James 1:1-11

Quickly jot down your observations.

* How does James encourage us to respond to trials? Why?
* How has God brought good into your life through trials?
* How can you gain wisdom through a trial?
* Why does God want you to ask for help without doubting?

**Going Deeper:**

In a personal journal, answer the following questions truthfully. Remember to **keep it real**! You can lie to yourself, but you cannot lie to God ☺

* How has your recent trials challenged you to seek God?
  + Did you pray more or less? Worry more or less? Read more or less?
* How has your relationship with God changed as you’ve gone through trials?
  + Are you bitter or better? Are you stronger or weaker? Who have you shared this with?
* In what ways does this passage relate to your current problems or frustrations?
* How can I grow closer through the trial I’m facing right now?
* How has God set me free from sin and temptation?

**Biblical Reminders:**

We don’t plan for the unexpected. But the truth is life is hard and pain and difficulties are part of our life plan. If we assume the Christian life is going to be one big campfire singing *Cumbaya* and eating s’mores, we’ve got a rude awakening coming soon!

However, if we know life is a cocktail of pain, purpose, and a dash of passion, we can adequately prepare for life’s mishaps. Trouble might not be here right now. But oh SisterFriend, it’s coming! James helps us see that God allows the trials even for our good.

So don’t worry about *why* troubles come. Just prepare for them and trust God will see you through.

*For more passages on growing through trials, see Romans 5:3-4; 2 Corinthians 4:17, 6: 4; 2 Thessalonians 1:4; 1 Peter 5:1-7; 4:12-14*

Week One, Assignment Two

James 1:12-18

**Before you begin:**

Mama used to sing a hymn to me as child which encouraged me to count my many blessings one-by-one to, as the song says, see what God has done ☺ We naturally will focus on the bad, but right now create a list of everything and everyone you see as a blessing in your life.

**What you should know:**

James flips the script and jumps from encouragement based on joy to encouragement based upon God’s gifts and blessings. We will face temptations, James said. Our own evil desires will tempt us to sin. But a follower of Jesus has many reasons for joyful living. God is consistently working for our good!

Read: James 1:12-18

Quickly jot down your observations.

* How can we remain strong to resist temptation?
* How will God reward faithful people?
* Why is it easy to for us to think God is the source of our temptation?
* What does James say is the source of our temptation?
* List the results of continually giving in to sin.

**Going Deeper:**

In a personal journal, answer the following questions truthfully. Remember to **keep it real**! You can lie to yourself, but you cannot lie to God ☺

* List new insights from this passage about temptation.
* How has the testimony of other believers helped you in your struggle against sin?
* What temptations are most difficult to resist? Based on this passage, how should you resist those temptations?
* Is temptation itself a sin? How are these two things related?

**Biblical Reminders:**

When temptation roars it’s ugly head at us, we can do two things: run from it or face it. **Both forms are acts of resistance.** The ones we must face with God’s wisdom are often the internal ones (we can’t run away from those). Temptations of fear or selfishness need to be resisted with the Truth of God’s word. Fleeing from or avoiding external temptations is an excellent tactic (EG: Joseph ran away from the Potipher’s skanky wife).

In every temptation we need God’s help. We need to ask God what we can learn from a temptation we face, rather than relying on human wisdom and questioning God’s motives.

*For more bible passages on temptation, see Matthew 6:13; 26:41; Luke 4:1-2; Romans 8:5-8; Hebrews 4:15-16.*

Week One, Assignment Three

James 1:19-27

**Before you begin:**

If you would to fill out a questionnaire or profile, would you list godliness as one of your attributes? The word summarizes spiritual maturity, yet is difficult to clearly define. We can usually point out someone in our life who we would consider godly. Think of one person in your personal world who exemplifies godliness. How has that person’s life been an example to you?

**What you should know:**

James continued his teaching by challenging his readers in the practical areas of listening and doing. Sometimes we need to be quiet and listen to other people. Sometimes we need to prove that we have heard God’s word and get busy doing it. We can tell that we are listening constructively when God’s word begins to change how we see ourselves and how we see other people. Then true godliness will be seen in our being and doing.

Read: James 1:19-27

Quickly jot down your observations.

* How does this passage describe living a good or godly life? Does anger fit it?
* List some of the ways people can deceive themselves.
* How does this passage describe people who do not obey God’s word?
* How does God bless those who study and obey his word’s/teaching?
* How can YOU practice “pure and undefiled religion”? Be practical about your response.

**Going Deeper:**

In a personal journal, answer the following questions truthfully. Remember to **keep it real**! You can lie to yourself, but you cannot lie to God ☺

* How can you have “ears to hear” God’s word this week, and then do it?
* What pressure does our culture put on us to disobey or disregard God’s word?
* List some personal and practical ways to protect yourself from the world’s influence. Don’t be cheesy. Give honest answers.
* Why do we sometimes find it difficult to listen to the word and do what we know is right?
* When was the last time you heard God’s voice and obeyed it.

**Biblical Reminders:**

The good news of the gospel of Christ affects the whole person. It’s not a set of rules to outwardly follow, but a change deep within that leads to a difference in our behavior. **The effect of the gospel in our lives can be seen by a continual process of inward transformation and then outward action that honors God.** God’s word frees us to live in truth, and his Spirit gives us the power to live it out.

*For more bible passages on obedience, see Leviticus 19:2; Acts 5:29; Romans 6; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 9:13; Titus 3:1; Hebrews 12:13-14; 1 Peter 1:14; 1 John 3:24; 2 John 1:6.*

Week Two, Assignment One

James 2:1-13

**Before you begin:**

Look around and you’ll see that it’s human nature to reveal the wealthy and look down on the poor. Part of being doers of the word is going against “nature” and not treating people with favoritism, especially in the church. Reflect on a time when you attended a church as a visitor, and think about the positive and negative parts of that experience. When people visit your church, how do you make them feel welcomed?

**What you should know:**

In the early church structure (and even today) there was classism and prejudice occurring in the church. As it is today, there is a temptation to treat any prestigious visitors with special deference. The wealthy were given special privileges not extended to other guests. James was determined to confront this partiality that threatened to undermine the gospel and socially fragment the church. The prescription to this ill? God’s royal law of love.

Read: James 2:1-13

Quickly jot down your observations.

* Why is it wrong to treat rich people better than poor people?
* How does God treat the poor and powerless?
* Explain how partiality makes us unjust judges.
* How does showing favoritism indicate a feeling of superiority?

**Going Deeper:**

In a personal journal, answer the following questions truthfully. Remember to **keep it real**! You can lie to yourself, but you cannot lie to God ☺

* List examples of favoritism or prejudice you see in the church today. How does this illustrate a lack of mercy?
* List some people you think might feel uncomfortable in your church.
* What would happen if Jesus brought some of those people to your church next week?
* If you have been a victim of favoritism or prejudice, how did it make you feel?
* How can the law of LOVE help change our attitudes toward the poor and vulnerable?
* Who are people you are prejudice against? Who are you showing favoritism towards?

**Biblical Reminders:**

James lays the smack down! There is no room for ambiguity—favoritism is a sin. It’s based on prejudice, judging others by false standards. Prejudice and favoritism flourish when we stop looking at people the way God looks at them.

This also means that we have stopped seeing ***ourselves*** as God sees us. We need to ask God to help us identify our prejudices and recognize situations in which we tend to show favoritism. Then we need to actively resist these tendencies, asking others to keep us accountable.

*For more bible passages on favoritism, see Exodus 23:2-3; Leviticus 19:15; Proverbs 19:6; 1 Timothy 5:21.*

Week Three, Assignment One

James 2:14-26

**Before you begin:**

Miracles take place when people pull together in a time of crisis. Sometimes the benefits of working together are almost as great as the benefits of helping someone. Think of a time when you saw a group of people rally around someone in need. What motivated that group to help that person? Were they Christian or not?

**What you should know:**

James was writing to believers all over the world due to the Diaspora (1:1). This being the case, James addressed broader issues of faith that were not culture-bound or place-bound.

James is straight up blunt! He doesn’t spare any words when it comes to faith and works. Using some heavy-duty Old Testament examples, he argued that a life of faith should be **active** and **proactive.**

Read: James 2:14-26

Quickly jot down your observations.

* Why is faith without works dead?
* How is living faith demonstrated?
* How do some people rationalize inactive faith?
* Explain why mere belief in God is not enough.

**Going Deeper:**

In a personal journal, answer the following questions truthfully. Remember to **keep it real**! You can lie to yourself, but you cannot lie to God ☺

* What are ways you can put your faith into action? When can it start?
* Why is it important to help others?
* List ways you can reach out to someone in need in your immediate circumstances?
* How does spiritual discipline help us practice true Christianity?
* How do faith and works go together in my life?

**Biblical Reminders:**

The bible describes faith as belief that results in a dynamic, active response to God’s grace. The belief and trust part focuses on God, and they active part focuses on gratitude and obedience. Faith is not “belief in works” or even “belief in faith,” but it is works coming out of a settled trust in God. Both workless faith and faithless work fall short. Authentic faith trusts and obeys.

*For more bible passages on faith and works, see John 14:12; Philippians 2:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:11; Hebrews 6:9-12; 2 Peter 1:5-7.*

Week Four, Assignment One

James 3:1-12

**Before you begin:**

Have you ever added one tablespoon of salt to a recipe when it should have been one teaspoon? It’s such a small error, but the entire recipe will be ruin. Think of other small things which can have big consequences. What are small things in your life which have big consequences?

**What you should know:**

For James, talk was cheap! Empty claims of faith that didn’t result in observable change and action didn’t impress him. And yet he appreciated this awesome power of the human speech apparatus.

Baseless claims of faith created one kind of danger, but James was also concerned about the destructiveness of our out-of-control speech. The tiny tongue could be fire, poison, and evil.

Read: James 3:1-12

Quickly jot down your observations.

* How does a horse’s bit and a ship’s rudder relate to our tongue?
* In what ways is our tongue like fire?
* Explain how the tongue can be used for good and evil.
* Why is the tongue so difficult to control?

**Going Deeper:**

In a personal journal, answer the following questions truthfully. Remember to **keep it real**! You can lie to yourself, but you cannot lie to God ☺

* How can controlling your tongue bring glory to God? How can our tongues hinder or detract from God’s glory?
* List some practical ways our words can encourage others.
* What other scriptures can you think of that will help you remember to speak encouraging words?
* To whom can you speak words of blessing today?

**Biblical Reminders:**

In the big picture of faith and words, James says our speech is the number one indicator of what we believe. How would others describe the color and content of our words? James doesn’t want us to convey mixed messages. If the way we speak turns people away, then our faith in action may never get a chance to touch their lives. Is that I’m saying true? Is it necessary? Will it honor God? We need to look at the big picture and not our immediate reactions.

*For more passages on controlling the tongue, see Psalms 34:13; Proverbs 13:3; 21-23; Titus 3:2; James 1:26; 1 Peter 3:10.*

Week Four, Assignment Two

James 3:13-18

**Before you begin:**

In the middle of conflict, some people use soothing words and low tones. Others wait patiently until all the verbal heat is spent before they respond. I, however, speak in decibels only dogs can hear and move my neck like a serpent. (Hey, we all have our shortcomings, right?). Think of a time when you saw someone bring peace to a volatile situation. How did that person accomplish it?

**What you should know:**

Throughout the letter of James there are allusions to the words and wisdom of Jesus. James was Jesus’ half brother. Though he did not believe in Jesus before the Resurrection, he did remember much of what Jesus said. This passage on peacemaking echoes the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus’ blessing for the peacemakers for “they shall be called the children of God” (Matthew 5:9).

Read: James 3:13-18

Quickly jot down your observations.

* How would you describe “worldly wisdom”?
* How does scripture describe God’s wisdom?
* Why do jealousy and selfishness cause confusion and evil things?

**Going Deeper:**

In a personal journal, answer the following questions truthfully. Remember to **keep it real**! You can lie to yourself, but you cannot lie to God ☺

* How does a wise person resolve conflict? How do you resolve conflict?
* What do you think it means to sow seeds of peace?
* How does this passage challenge you to deal with conflicts in your relationships?
* Why is it important for a Christian to sow seeds of peace?
* How can I bring peace to conflict at home, work, school, or church?

**Biblical Reminders:**

When we face conflict that is escalating, James encourages us to think it through. Calmly.

If envy, anger, or selfish ambition is present, wisdom is usually absent. Before we speak or engage in a conflict situation, it’s wise to plans past the eight traits of wisdom that James listed. Is what I’m about to propose pure, peaceable, gentle, submissive, merciful, fruitful, impartial, and sincere? If thoughts don’t pass these tests, it’s time to rethink.

*For more bible passages about wisdom and peace, see Psalms 29:11; 34:14; 119:165; Proverbs 2:6; 3:13; 4:7; Daniel 12:3; John 14:27; Romans 8:6; Colossians 2:2-3.*

Week Five, Assignment One

James 4:1-10

**Before you begin:**

According to James, we can live for God—giving up our rights and trusting him to provide; or we can live like the world—claiming our rights. Too often there is just as much selfish bickering going on in the church as in the world. When was the last time you humbled yourself and admitted you were wrong about something?

**What you should know:**

Despite his previous words about Godly wisdom and peacemaking, James seemed to sense that handling conflicts within the church needed more attention. He wanted his readers to understand that part of peacemaking involved a grasp on the underlying causes of conflicts. He laid bare the human tendency toward selfishness and insisted that the answer must be submission to God.

Read: James 4:1-10

Quickly jot down your observations.

* What causes the “wars” within us and around us in our relationships?
* What does it mean to be a “friend of the world”?
* List some ways we can stand against the devil (v. 7-9).
* What promise is given to those who draw near to God?

**Going Deeper:**

In a personal journal, answer the following questions truthfully. Remember to **keep it real**! You can lie to yourself, but you cannot lie to God ☺

* Why do we resist on and submitting to God?
* How can humbling ourselves before God affect our other relationships?
* When have you been convinced that you knew God’s will for you? What convinced you?
* List areas of your life that are difficult for you to turn over to God’s control?
* What truth in this lesson encourages you to trust God more fully?
* How are you living your life demonstrating your trust in God?

**Biblical Reminders:**

Who do you want to please? The choice is simple, yet hard. We can please God or someone else (including ourselves). We were created for God’s pleasure and glory, but we will sink into petty selfish behavior if we don’t humbly bow before God. We can choose friendship with God or friendship with the world (including ourselves). As James shows us in this passage, we can troubleshoot almost any problem we get into by asking, “Who am I trying to please?”

*For more bible passages on trusting God, see Psalms 62:8; 143:8; Proverbs 29:25; Isaiah 25:9; Nahum 1:7.*

Week Five, Assignment Two

James 4:11-17

**Before you begin:**

“No one plans to fail, but many fail to plan,” my momma always says. Planning is big in our culture. We set our goals, and we feel pretty good when we reach them. We are in control when we make our plans happen, right? What is one of your long-range goals? How would you feel if you could not accomplish it?

**What you should know:**

James discussed faith and works, the sins of the tongue, and peaceful wisdom from God. But there is still trouble in the church because of the P word: pride. Apparently there was some gossiping and lying and judging going on; James dealt with it straight-up! He also warned them to remember that our tomorrows, like everything else, come to us from God’s gracious hand.

Read: James 4:11-17

Quickly jot down your observations.

* According to James, why should we not speak against fellow Christians?
* In what ways do we judge others and end up judging “the law”?
* When does planning turn into boastful pride?
* What attitude does God want us to have about the future? Why?
* Why is God not satisfied that we simply *know* to do good?

**Going Deeper:**

In a personal journal, answer the following questions truthfully. Remember to **keep it real**! You can lie to yourself, but you cannot lie to God ☺

* Why is humility harder to practice than pride?
* What part does pride play in judging others?
* Who do you know who demonstrates a spirit of humility?
* What have you learned from that person?
* How have pride damaged you relationship with God or others?
* How can you begin to bring change and healing to those relationships?

**Biblical Reminders:**

When Jesus told us not to worry about tomorrow (Matt. 6:34), he was not rejecting the importance of planning. In fact, worrying about tomorrow is sometimes an indication that we haven’t planned enough. James’ counsel is to prepare for what we can, always acknowledging God’s ultimate control over tomorrow. Trusting him is the best way to keep from being consumed by worry or betrayed by arrogance in assuming that tomorrow will run as we’ve planned.

*For more bible passages on pride, see Proverbs 11:2; 13:10; 16:5; Romans 12:16; 1 Peter 5:5.*

Week Six, Assignment One

James 5:1-6

**Before you begin:**

Even if we are not wealthy, most of us know someone who is. “The love of money causes all kinds of evil,” the bible says (1 Tim. 6:10 NCV). But it can also beused for good. Think of a time when you were blessed by the financial generosity of a fellow believer. How has the generosity of others affected your life?

**What you should know:**

Up to this point in the letter, James wrote with all the believers in mind. Then he zeroed in on those who were wealthy, especially crooked employers. They were mentioned earlier as being favored over others by the rest of the church. James boldly targeted the rich with some shocking words about their future plight.

Read: James 5:1-6

Quickly jot down your observations.

* In what ways have you seen people oppress others for personal gain?
* List some ungodly attributes that cause oppression.
* How does God respond to the oppressed?
* What results from self-indulgence?

**Going Deeper:**

In a personal journal, answer the following questions truthfully. Remember to **keep it real**! You can lie to yourself, but you cannot lie to God ☺

* List some of the negative effects that increased wealth can have on people’s lives.
* How can you use your financial resources for God’s glory?
* How can money keep you from doing God’s work?
* In what ways do you need to change your attitudes about money?
* How can sharing your wealth improve the state of the world?
* Am I content in my current financial situation?

**Biblical Reminders:**

Whether or not we consider ourselves among the rich, these words of James can make us feel uncomfortable. They are meant to. Sizable wealth or not, we tend to base our security on it rather than on God. Anxiety over money—keeping it, growing it, protecting it—can drive us far from our only true security in Christ. And when a wealth-centered life affects the way we treat others, we are on our way to spiritual bankruptcy. James’ hard words are merciful warnings.

*For more bible passages on warnings to the rich, see Proverbs 11:28; 23:4; Matthew 19:23-24; Luke 6:24; 1 Timothy 6:9-10; 17-19.*

Week Six, Assignment Two

James 5:7-11

**Before you begin:**

The book of James is nothing if not practical. Our faith is to be lived out. So how are you doing? Consider whether you’ve been able to face a recent trial or temptation with joy. Have you persevered in spite of difficult circumstances? What have been the rewards for your perseverance?

**What you should know:**

James changed his tone toward the end of his letter and spoke again to his “brothers and sisters,” encouraging them tot have patience and hope. Jesus will return! James reminded them that other people of faith had endured and made it; so would they. No matter what their present circumstances, they could count on God’s compassion and mercy.

Read: James 5:7-11

Quickly jot down your observations.

* Why should believers be motivated to patiently endure?
* How does the illustration of a farmer show the importance of patience? Can you think of similar examples?
* Whose example should believers follow? Why?
* What did the prophets gain from their suffering?
* How was God’s compassion and mercy extended to Job?

**Going Deeper:**

In a personal journal, answer the following questions truthfully. Remember to **keep it real**! You can lie to yourself, but you cannot lie to God ☺

* When had it been difficult for you to persevere in your Christian walk?
* List some ways that Christian friends have encouraged you to persevere in tough times.
* How can you pass that along and encourage others to trust God and endure through suffering?
* How does knowing that Jesus will return give you hope?
* What new insight about God’s character have you gained from this lesson?

**Biblical Reminders:**

Perseverance is an interesting topic of conversation in a bible study. It takes on a bit more weight in a setting of pressure, crisis, or tragedy. And we will have troubles. James says. It’s not easy to persevere when we need to persevere. God offers us the assurance of his presence. He reminds us of saints in his Word who have endured far more than we probably face. And he tells us that no matter what our present circumstances may be, God will have the last word.

*For more bible passages on perseverance, see Romans 2:7; 5:3-4; 8:24-25; 1 Timothy 4:16; Hebrews 10:36; 12:1; James 1:2-4; 12:2.*

Week Six, Assignment Two

James 5:12-20

**Before you begin:**

From time to time, it’s helpful to consider our prayer habits. Are we prang with faith, expecting God to act, or just praying out of routine? One way to shake up the routine is to take time to remember what God has done. Think of a time when God answered a specific prayer for you. How did that answered prayer change your life?

**What you should know:**

James began his letter encouraging his readers to pray for wisdom when they needed it. He ended his letter with a call to pray about all the situations of their lives, knowing that their prayers would accomplish much as they rely on God. He urged them to be real and support one another in community and thus continue the adventure of living out their faith together as the body of Christ.

Read: James 5:12-20

Quickly jot down your observations.

* Summarize in your own words James’ final instruction about the tongue.
* What advice and comfort did James give to the troubled, the cheerful, and the sick?
* What steps should believers take to receive God’s healing?
* What kind of prayer makes great things happen? What do the words *effective* and *avails* mean in verse 6?
* What does Elijah’s experience teach believers about prayer?

**Going Deeper:**

In a personal journal, answer the following questions truthfully. Remember to **keep it real**! You can lie to yourself, but you cannot lie to God ☺

* What keeps you from turning to God in prayer?
* How can you develop more discipline and patience in your prayer life?
* What great things would you like to see God do in your life or the lives of others?
* What commitment are you willing to make to pray for those things?
* Who can keep you accountable to follow through on your commitment?

**Biblical Reminders:**

Prayer should be the default setting for a Christian’s life. “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17 NKJV), the apostle Paul said, and James would have concurred. What begins as a conscious and deliberate habit can become, over time, a way of living that maintains constant contact with God. The challenges of life and the needs of other people become opportunities to bring to the forefront the prayer life that is going on in the background of our minds continuously. That the effective prayer life that avails much!

*For more bible passages on prayer, see Psalm 6:9; Proverbs 15:8, 29; Matthew 21:22; Philippians 4:6-7; Colossians 4:2; 1 Peter 3:12*

Closing:

God is God and we are not. We trust Him to lead us through rough times, supply our needs, and love us unconditionally. Through the teaching of James, my hope is you have a deeper, wider, and greater picture of the love God has for us and the love we are to have towards each other.

*When you’re desiring to hear God in the pages of scripture, He is faithful to respond.*

This six-week journey has be a small test of your dedication. The homework has not been hard or overwhelming with the intention that you would see how simple it is to get into God’s word.

What you’ve learned during this series I hope it is multiplied through your actions, words, and thoughts towards God and others. Multiply what God has taught you!

Live in LOVE,

B