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**Bible Month 2017: James**

**18th June- 16th July 2017**

This course supplements the materials provided by the Methodist Church in the Bible Month magazine on the Letter of James.

This can be downloaded from: *http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/2468931/bible-month-magazine-1216.pdf*

The Bible Month magazine also contains material for small groups, and suggests different methods of studying the text. This material can be used instead of or alongside the Bible Month magazine. For example, material in the magazine could be substituted for the Discuss and Reflection sections.

The suggested format for the group studies is

* Opening prayer
* Discussion based on the magazine and/or these additional notes
* Reflection
* Prayer

The passages for study (and therefore the group questions) are quite long, so feel free to either focus on a few of the questions that interest your group or to look at all of them for an overview of the whole of James. We’d recommend reading the whole book before the first meeting.

Groups will need individuals or a team to plan the sessions, act as enablers and ensure that appropriate resources are provided.



**Doers of the Word: James 1 Week One**

**You will need:**
Bibles, Post-it notes, pens or pencils.

**Starter**: (15 minutes)

Go round the group and ask everyone to introduce themselves by name and say a bit about who they are (where they are from, what they do, their favourite food or hobby).

Ask everyone to share: what is the best gift they have ever received?

**Read**: James chapter 1 (5 minutes)

**Discuss**: (45 minutes)

1. What strikes or interests you about this passage?
2. Why do you think this letter was written, and who to?
3. How do you respond to the instruction to look at trials with joy? (v.2) What does this suggest about how we should live?
4. What do verses 5-8 tell us about how we should pray?
5. If our trials don’t come from God, what does cause them? (v.13-15)
6. What does it mean for us to be people who ‘do’ the word rather than just listeners (v.22- 27)?

**Reflection**: (10 minutes)

Write on a post it note one thing you want to remember from today’s passage.  When you get home, stick it next to your mirror to remind you.

**Prayer**: (15 minutes)

* Pray for those who are undergoing trials, temptation or persecution.
* Pray for wisdom, especially for those in leadership in the church and society.
* Share any prayer needs and pray for each other.

**Faith and Works: James 2 Week Two**

**You will need:**

Bibles, *Belief and Action* sheet (printed), pens or pencils.

**Starter**: (15 minutes)

Print a copy of the belief and action sheet. For each belief, ask the group to come up with an action that demonstrates the belief. The first one has been done as an example.

**Read:** James chapter 2 (5 minutes)

**Discuss**: (45 minutes)

1. What strikes or interests you about this passage?
2. Do we discriminate against people based on wealth or social status today (v.2- 4)? What other factors might we discriminate against- age, family status (e.g. being a single mum)?
3. What does it mean to speak and act as people who are going to be judged by the law of freedom (v. 12)?
4. What does James mean when he says Abraham was justified by his works (v. 21)?
5. How does this fit with our understanding of Jesus’s death and resurrection?
6. Can you share an example of how your faith is demonstrated in your life, or how your church demonstrates its’ faith to those outside it?

**Reflection**: (10 minutes)

Look again at beliefs and actions sheet or write some additional ones. Pick one or two actions and think about how you can carry them out this week.

**Prayer**: (15 minutes)

* Pray about your chosen action(s).
* Pray about ways to demonstrate our faith by what we say and do.
* Share any prayer needs and pray for each other.

**Speech and Wisdom: James 3: 1-4: 12 Week Three**

**You will need:**Paper, pens, *Make me a channel of your peace* (music and/or lyrics)

**Starter**: (15 minutes)

Ask the group to think of examples of things that are little but can make a big difference (or find pictures to illustrate this in advance and show them to the group. E.g. a match, seeds, a small cog from a clock etc.)

**Read**: **James 3: 1-4: 12** (5 minutes)

**Discuss**: (45 minutes)

1. What strikes or interests you about this passage?
2. Read Matthew 12:33-37 and Luke 6:43-45.
How does James 3: 1-12 reinterpret the teaching in the gospel passages? Which images do you find most helpful?
3. James contrasts earthly wisdom and ‘wisdom from above’ (v.13-18). Working in pairs write in your own words what James say wisdom is/is not. Discuss how these characteristics match up with your actions recently. If you feel able, share with the group.
4. Explore together how/where earthly wisdom and the conflicts described in James 4: 1-3 can be seen today. How do our cravings and desires contribute to injustice in the wider world?
5. How might we practically live out ‘peaceable’, gentle wisdom (James 3:17) and grace (James 4:6)?
6. What might repentance mean for us: as individuals, for churches and for our wider society (v.8-10)

**Reflection**: (10 minutes)

Listen to/sing together the hymn *Make me a channel of your peace*(Singing the Faith 107).

**Prayer**: (15 minutes)

* Allow time for personal prayer, reflection and repentance.
* Together pray for the church and the world as it seeks to live out ‘wisdom from above’.
* Share any prayer needs and pray for each other.

**Living for the Lord: James 4: 13-5: 20 Week Four**

**You will need:** paper, pens

**Starter**: (15 minutes)
Ask the group to share together the ways in which they pray?
What do they find helpful or unhelpful? Have the ways in which they pray changed during different times of their life?

**Read**: **James 4: 13-5: 20**  (5 minutes)

**Discuss**: (45 minutes)

1. What strikes or interests you about this passage?
2. James encourages his readers to be dependent on God (4:13-15). Ask the group to share how they discern God’s will, and remain attentive to God when they are planning for the future.
3. What charges does James make against the rich (5:1-12)?
Wesley’s sermon entitled ‘The Use of Money’ says: *Having, first gained all you can, and, Secondly, saved all you can, Then ‘’give all you can.’’*
How as Christians should we approach our finances?
4. What can we learn about patience from James? Have you ever felt like giving up your Christian faith? What kept you going?
5. What motivates you to pray? Are there any aspects to the prayers listed in James 5:13-18 that you find difficult? How do you hold in tension trust that God will answer prayer with an awareness that we don’t always know how to pray?
6. How might we support those who are struggling with faith (v.19-20)?

**Reflection**: (10 minutes)
Share together what each person has discovered during Bible Month. Write down any insights or actions that you hope to consider further in the coming weeks.

**Prayer**: (15 minutes)

* Pray for the Circuit and your local church that we might trust in God.
* Pray for those who are struggling with the situation they are in, and those struggling to maintain their faith.
* Share any prayer needs and pray for each other.

**Bible Month Magazine Supplementary Prayers**

Bible Month magazine supplementary material can be found at

<http://www.methodist.org.uk/prayer-and-worship/bible-month/bible-month-magazine>

This includes an expanded selection of prayers from ROOTS: [www.rootsontheweb.com](http://www.rootsontheweb.com)

A shortened version of these prayers are included here as some that you might find helpful for opening and concluding your group study.

**Week One**

**Gathering prayer**

Gracious God, we gather,

grateful for your gifts of one another and your life-giving Word.
Bless us with your presence as we seek your will. Amen.

**A prayer of approach**

We come before you, Lord,
in gratitude for your goodness to us;
and as we thank you for all your gifts,
we hold out our hands and open our hearts for more;
for we want your Word to be implanted within us, Lord,
so that it may flourish, and direct us,
and produce a harvest of good in your world. Amen.

**A sending out prayer**

Lord, you have placed your Word in our hearts.

Help us to be doers of your Word, not merely hearers,

so that you may work through us to make the world a better place. Amen.

**Week Two**

**Gathering prayer**

With what shall we come before the Lord and bow before God on high?

What does the Lord require of us?

*To do justice, to love mercy, and walk humbly with him, our God.* Amen.

**A prayer of approach**

We gather before you, Lord, just as we are;

and we know that you will accept us.

Help us to accept one another in the same spirit of generosity and love;

for all are equal in your sight. Amen.

**A prayer of confession**

Lord, we confess that we are biased;

we are biased against those who are different from us.

Maybe we are wealthy, and look down on the poor;

maybe we are clever, and look down on those who are not.

Perhaps we have a big car, and despise those who do not;

perhaps we dress well, and despise those who do not.

Forgive us, Lord, for such meanness of spirit;

it is not the spirit in which you welcome us.

Thank you for your generosity to us, warts and all,

and help us to show the same acceptance to others. Amen.

**A sending out prayer**

Generous God, you offer us such loving grace.

May your cup of divine generosity overflow in our lives,

and be a wellspring of blessing to others. Amen.

**Week Three**

**Gathering prayer**

The Lord says,

‘The beginning of wisdom is the most sincere desire for instruction.

Therefore be instructed by my words, and you will profit.’

Be with us, Lord, as we meet in your name.

May your word speak to us. Amen.

**A prayer of approach**

We raise our voices in song and prayer to worship you, our Lord.
You who are the word of life, come and breathe into the words we speak
and bring alive the Scriptures for us, that we may hear your voice,

see your will for this world and everyone in it,

So may we also let you touch our hearts, our minds, our spirits,

by your grace, filling us with your love, and in your strength give us the desire to love one another as you have loved us.
This we ask in the name of Christ. Amen.

**A sending out prayer**

God of wisdom, give us wisdom so that we might honour you each day.

Make us merciful towards those who need help.

Make us peacemakers where there is trouble.

Make us gentle where there are harsh words.

Make us ready to listen for your gentle words. Amen.

**Week Four**

**Gathering prayer**

May your words be on our lips, Lord, and your praise in our hearts,

as we gather to seek your will. Amen.

**A prayer of thanksgiving**

Thank you, Lord, for giving us the gift of prayer.

Thank you for the comfort and joy it brings;

for the loneliness it fights,

and for the courage and determination it gives us.

Thank you, Lord, for answered prayer.

Thank you for the times we have been granted our heart’s desire,

and for the times we have not,

when we have had to learn that our ways are not yours.

Thank you, Lord, for giving us the gift of prayer. Amen.

**A sending out prayer**

Dear Lord,

we thank you for what we’ve shared together from James.

May our thankfulness lead to compassion.

May our compassion lead to kindness.

May our kindness lead to generosity.

And may our generosity lead us back to prayer,

all held within our thankful hearts. Amen.