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**Bible Month 2017: James**

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.

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**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.

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| **Belief**Churches should be safe places for all who visit them | **Action**Have in place Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults policies and training |
| **Belief**All people are made in God’s image and have value | **Action** |
| **Belief**We should worship God with our whole lives | **Action** |
| **Belief**The Bible is God’s word to us | **Action** |
| **Belief**We are stewards of creation | **Action** |
| **Belief**Our church should be welcoming to everyone, whatever their age, gender, race or family status | **Action** |

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

**You will need:**Paper, pens, copy of *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’ (vv. 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 (vv.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 (vv. 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 (vv. 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 (vv. 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.