

OneBook.

DAILY - WEEKLY

The Letter of James

Abson Prédessin Joseph



AN EIGHT-WEEK BIBLE STUDY

OneBook.

DAILY - WEEKLY

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Abson Prédèstin Joseph

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Printed in the United States of America

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*Cover design by Strange Last Name
Page design and layout by PerfectType, Nashville, Tennessee*

Joseph, Abson Prédestin.

The letter of James / Prédestin. – Franklin, Tennessee : Seedbed Publishing, ©2021.

pages : cm. + 1 videodisc – (OneBook. Daily-weekly)

An eight-week Bible study.
ISBN 9781628249026 (paperback)
ISBN 9781628249064 (DVD)
ISBN 9781628249033 (Mobi)
ISBN 9781628249040 (ePub)
ISBN 9781628249057 (uPDF)
OCLC 1276804143

1. Bible. James -- Textbooks. 2. Bible. James -- Study and teaching. 3. Bible. James -- Commentaries.
I. Title. II. Series.

BS2785.55.J67 2021

227/.91007

2021948873



SEEDBED PUBLISHING
Franklin, Tennessee

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WELCOME TO ONEBOOK DAILY-WEEKLY

John Wesley, in a letter to one of his leaders, penned the following:

O begin! Fix some part of every day for private exercises. You may acquire the taste which you have not: what is tedious at first, will afterwards be pleasant. Whether you like it or not, read and pray daily. It is for your life; there is no other way; else you will be a trifler all your days. . . . Do justice to your own soul; give it time and means to grow. Do not starve yourself any longer. Take up your cross and be a Christian altogether.

Rarely are our lives most shaped by our biggest ambitions and highest aspirations. Rather, our lives are most shaped, for better or for worse, by those small things we do every single day.

At Seedbed, our biggest ambition and highest aspiration is to resource the followers of Jesus to become lovers and doers of the Word of God every single day, to become people of One Book.

To that end, we have created the OneBook Daily-Weekly. First, it's important to understand what this is not: warm, fuzzy, sentimental devotions. If you engage the Daily-Weekly for any length of time, you will learn the Word of God, you will grow profoundly in your love for God, and you will become a passionate lover of people.

How Does the Daily-Weekly Work?

Daily. As the name implies, every day invites a short but substantive engagement with the Bible. Five days a week you will read a passage of Scripture followed by a short segment of teaching and closing with questions for reflection and self-examination. On the sixth day, you will review and reflect on the previous five days.

Weekly. Each week, on the seventh day, find a way to gather with at least one other person doing the study. Pursue the weekly guidance for gathering. Share learning, insight, encouragement, and most important, how the Holy Spirit is working in your lives.

Welcome to OneBook Daily-Weekly

That's it. Depending on the length of the study, when the eight or twelve weeks are done, we will be ready with the next study. On an ongoing basis, we will release new editions of the Daily-Weekly. Over time, those who pursue this course of learning will develop a rich library of Bible learning resources for the long haul.

OneBook Daily-Weekly will develop eight- and twelve-week studies that cover the entire Old and New Testaments. Seedbed will publish new studies regularly so that an ongoing supply of group lessons will be available. All titles will remain accessible, which means they can be used in any order that fits your needs or the needs of your group.

If you are looking for a substantive study to learn Scripture through a steadfast method, look no further.

WEEK ONE

James 1:1–18

A Call to a Life of Perseverance

ONE

Facing Trials in Diaspora

James 1:1–4 NRSV *James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion:*

Greetings.

²*My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, ³because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; ⁴and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.*

Key Observation. Trials have instructional value and can be a source of growth and transformation.

Understanding the Word. We can know a lot about people by the way they introduce themselves to us. James introduces himself as “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” The term “servant of God” combines the ideas of marginality and belonging. The word *servant* can also be translated as “slave.” To be a servant or a slave is to have low status in the world. Those who have chosen to follow Christ adopt this posture to signal that they share in Christ’s servant attitude. To adopt Christ’s posture and to live like him imply that one lives counterculturally. It means that one upholds standards that often go against what the dominant culture promotes. This may cause one to face the world’s hatred and social isolation (John 15:19). They often view and find themselves on margins—on the fringes of society and outcast.

However, to be a servant *of God* creates a sense of belonging to the family of God, which is an honorable position. Being on the margins and belonging to God reads like a paradox, but it determines the way James not only sees himself, but the way he wants others to view him. This also presupposes the way he lives and acts. Christians throughout the ages have wrestled with this dual reality.

We can also learn about others based on how people describe them. By addressing the audience as “brothers and sisters,” James invites them to view him and each other as equals and to acknowledge that the audience shares the same status and is living in the same reality that he is experiencing. Further, James describes his audience as “the twelve tribes in the Dispersion.” To be in diaspora is to be away from home. The word *diaspora* describes the reality of Jews scattered outside the land of Israel. James, like other New Testament writers, uses the term as a metaphor to describe the reality of Christians in the world. Some may be experiencing physical or literal displacement, others may be living in the land of their birth, but all feel uneasy about the social norms of the world around them. The discomfort about the status quo is such that they feel, and realize, that they no longer belong. Jesus refers to this reality when he prays for his disciples: “They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world” (John 17:16 NKJV; cf. James 4:4).

With this imagery, James speaks of his readers in words that evoke the realities and experiences of Israel in exile. Stories of life in diaspora paint a bleak picture of suffering, discomfort, hostility, and alienation. The stories of Daniel, Esther, and Jeremiah’s contemporaries in Babylon are all cases in point. Yet, these stories offer a vision of hope and deliverance. Whether James’s audience experienced physical displacement or whether the author is using this as a metaphor to convey his message, his readers would be able to identify as outsiders living in a world that is hostile to those who view themselves as servants of God. This hostility has created a situation in which facing trials is part of the reality of being a Christian. It is against this backdrop that he is writing to exhort and encourage them.

James is exhorting the audience to face trials or tests of all kinds with a joyous attitude. At face value, this is counterintuitive. It is very difficult to be joyful when the realities of exile and the pressures of the outside world are weighing heavily on one’s heart (cf. Psalm 137:4). It is difficult to be joyful when resources are scarce, life is not unfolding as planned, and one wrestles

with internal pressures to take matters in one's own hands. However, James invites the audience to view tests and trials from an instructional perspective. The testing of a person's faith leads to endurance/patience, which provides opportunity for growth toward maturity and perfection. This, according to James, is something worth being joyful about.

1. What challenges and trials do you face as a Christian? What hopes and expectations do you nourish? In what way(s) can you relate to James's audience?
2. Why does James use endurance/patience as the foundational element in the Christian maturation process?

TWO

God, the Generous Giver

James 1:5–8 ESV *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

Key Observation. God gives generously to those who ask in faith.

Understanding the Word. Have you ever experienced a situation in life where you are faced with choices of equal significance and implications? You may have all the information needed to make the choice but, without wisdom, you may be unable to make the right kind of decision. Life in diaspora needs not only endurance, but also wisdom. Whereas a person learns endurance from the testing of their faith, wisdom is a gift that one receives from asking God to provide for what one lacks.

Proverbs 8 gives us a glimpse of how important wisdom is: “For wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her” (v. 11). King Solomon understood the importance of wisdom. When God offered the king the opportunity to ask for anything he desired, he asked for wisdom (2 Chron. 1:7–10). For James, a Christian needs wisdom to understand

the role trials play in one's life, and to learn how to navigate these trials. It is the reason why praying to God for wisdom is crucial.

James describes God as a generous giver who will give wisdom to *all* who ask. He is a generous giver who does not shame or reproach those who come to him with requests. This knowledge should empower the audience to have the freedom to acknowledge their limitations. It is worthy to note that this follows the statement in which James encourages the audience to seek maturity and perfection, "lacking in nothing" in that domain: "Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God" (1:4–5a). Christian perfection does not lead to self-sufficiency, but to an awareness of our dependence on God, the Generous Giver. Yet, in order to receive from God, one must ask in faith.

Praying to God for wisdom requires the believer to have a singular focus. James contrasts faith with double-mindedness. He uses the imagery of a wave tossed by the wind to depict a person who does not hold a firm commitment to God, someone with divided loyalty. Further, James describes this person as being "unstable in *all his ways*." In a way, this passage offers the picture of two kinds of persons: the first is mature, single-minded, and lives with undivided loyalty to God; the second is inconsistent in their walk with God, holds a divided allegiance, and demonstrates a wavering commitment to God. The one will receive wisdom that will enable them to live rightly; the other has not positioned themselves to receive anything from God.

This passage is a reminder about the importance of prayer. Pray for wisdom in order to understand the trials one faces and to acquire the knowledge of how to tackle the challenges of life. Pray to God in faith because he is a generous God who gives to those who ask. As God answered Solomon's prayer and gave him wisdom to lead a nation, he will answer our prayers for wisdom to navigate the trials we face.

1. What circumstances in life prevent us from acknowledging our limitations in order to ask and receive (wisdom and other things) from God and from one another?
2. What kind of petitioner do you want to be? What will it take for you to demonstrate single-mindedness in your relationship with the Generous Giver?

THREE

Leveling the Playing Field

James 1:9–11 *Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. ¹⁰But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower. ¹¹For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.*

Key Observation. Life is fleeting. We need to learn to depend on God.

Understanding the Word. James continues to paint a contrasting picture of two kinds of people and the way they interact with and experience God and the world. In these verses, the focus turns to the lowly and the rich. While these two words are used together, “lowly” points primarily to a state, an attitude, a posture, and not financial means. A double entendre is evident in James’s use of the terms. Throughout the letter (2:5–6; 5:1), James uses poverty and riches to address not only financial status, but also a person’s posture toward God—namely, humility versus pride; dependency versus self-reliance.

When people joined the Christian family, they encountered a new reality. Those of lower status in society found themselves elevated, and those of higher status needed to humble themselves in order for all to interact and treat each other as brothers and sisters. In the ancient world, social boundaries were clearly defined. A person’s birth, gender, family of origin, ethnicity, and accomplishments (or lack thereof) determined one’s place in society. Therefore, there were established norms, for example, on who could sit together for a meal and where one should be seated at the table. These norms also guided people’s behaviors and their relationships.

Christianity undermined these norms of inequality and inequity. Believers experienced a leveled playing field within the family of God. Initially, this created uncertainty, discomfort, and confusion for all parties involved (Acts 10; 15; Gal. 2:11–14). The church quickly embraced the dismantling of these boundaries in order to live in harmony: “For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. . . . There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no

WEEK ONE

GATHERING DISCUSSION OUTLINE

- A. **Open session in prayer.** Ask that God would astonish us anew with fresh insight from God's Word and transform us into the disciples that Jesus desires us to become.
- B. **View video for this week's readings.**
- C. **Ask:** In what ways can I respond this week to God's call to a life of perseverance?
- D. **Discuss questions selected from the daily readings.**
 - 1. **KEY OBSERVATION:** Trials have instructional value and can be a source of growth and transformation.
DISCUSSION QUESTION: Why does James use endurance/patience as the foundational element in the Christian maturation process?
 - 2. **KEY OBSERVATION:** God gives generously to those who ask in faith.
DISCUSSION QUESTION: What kind of petitioner do you want to be? What will it take for you to demonstrate single-mindedness in your relationship with the Generous Giver?
 - 3. **KEY OBSERVATION:** Life is fleeting. We need to learn to depend on God.
DISCUSSION QUESTION: What are concrete ways for you to develop contentment and dependence on God in your relationships with believers that are not like you?

4. **KEY OBSERVATION:** God rewards those who remain steadfast in the face of trials.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: What habits and practices can we maintain and nurture to help us endure patiently in the face of trials?

5. **KEY OBSERVATION:** God is a generous Father who provides good things for his children.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: How does the reality of God's generosity and goodness affect the way we perceive and face our trials?

- E. **As the study concludes, consider specific ways that this week's Bible lessons invite you to grow and call you to change.** How do this week's scriptures call us to think differently? How do they challenge us to change in order to align ourselves with God's work in the world? What specific actions should we take to apply the insights of the lessons into our daily lives? What kind of person do our Bible lessons call us to become?
- F. **Close session with prayer.** Emphasize God's ongoing work of transformation in our lives in preparation for loving mission and service in the world. Pray for absent class members as well as for persons whom we need to invite to join our study.

WEEK TWO

James 1:19–2:13

A Call to a Life of Hospitality

ONE

On Anger Management

James 1:19–21 *My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,²⁰ because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.²¹ Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.*

Key Observation. Believers need to be hospitable in their conversations.

Understanding the Word. Speech plays a central role in James. The author situates speech, and one's ability to control it, at the core of a life of righteousness. Society places a great value on a person's ability to express oneself. Freedom of speech is often heralded as a marker of democracy and self-actualization. Here, James introduces his first exhortation to believers about the need to be mindful about one's speech. In classic fashion, James contrasts three key concepts to make his case: (1) be quick to listen and slow to speak, (2) human anger does not produce righteousness; the planted Word produces salvation, and (3) reject moral filth and evil; accept the implanted Word.

Life in diaspora and the challenges associated with it made it necessary for believers to voice their concerns. James is encouraging believers to adopt a hospitable posture in their conversations. Being quick to listen and slow to speak is a hospitable posture toward others. It conveys respect and care. This posture requires patience. Patience in speech equates to patience in becoming

angry. In other words, patience enables believers to control their anger through both careful listening and measured speech.

The next contrast sets in opposition two kinds of purposes or results; one is negative, the other is positive. Believers need to manage their anger because it leads to and brings about attitudes that run counter to what God desires to see in his children. In fact, a more subtle contrast is present in the original language. Verse 20 could read: "Human anger does not bring about God's righteousness." This can be understood either as the righteousness that is characteristic of God himself or of the righteousness that comes from God. Nevertheless, since believers, as God's children, need to embody God's character, either option fits. Human anger has a negative effect on the believer's spiritual formation. By contrast, accepting the implanted Word brings about salvation. The implanted Word is a farming image that conveys slow and perhaps even imperceptible growth. Growth into salvation and anger management are both processes!

The third and final contrast is embedded into a call to action. James urges believers to reject what is not compatible with the kind of life that mirrors God's righteousness and moral goodness. This exhortation is connected to the previous section focused on God's goodness. Now his children are asked to embody the same via a twofold action of rejecting filthiness and excess of evil, and accepting the implanted Word. If temptations arise from a person's inner being, the implanted Word has salvific power to heal and regenerate the soul.

It is worthy to note the contrast between an excess/abundance of evil and the implanted Word. Usually, a farmer would put one to three seeds in a hole, depending on the plant. Frugality is key when farming. This is perhaps another reason why humility is necessary to accept the implanted Word. The allure of excess (of evil) may be more appealing, but it is destructive. The implanted Word, though scarce, has the power to save. Humility is also at the core of the posture required to be hospitable in conversation.

1. In what ways have you allowed space in your conversations with others and God to listen in the last week?
2. How is God calling us to process our emotions instead of allowing anger to be at the forefront of all negative experiences?



In the *Letter of James*, the author urges and encourages his readers to persevere through the temptation and trials of daily life by example of his own learned wisdom. His letter exemplifies what it means to live consistently in Christ and serves as a guide that will resonate with anyone looking to pursue a godlier life.

This next installment in the OneBook Daily-Weekly series is a careful and perceptive study of James from Abson Joseph, an associate professor of New Testament. Joseph leads disciples through an eight-week course of understanding, self-reflection, and real-world application of the teachings of James. Each week carries themes of hospitality, humility, faith, intentionality in our speech and actions, community, and, most importantly, prayer.

Joseph's masterful juxtaposition of godliness versus worldliness woven throughout the text remind the reader they are a part of a community of other believers working toward a life of continual spiritual development. This book is for anyone who wants to actively be stronger in Christ no matter where they are on their journey.

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OneBook. | DAILY-WEEKLY

Designed to be engaged by small groups, Sunday school classes, one-on-one discipleship approaches, and individual learners, the OneBook Daily-Weekly is a Bible learning resource for the long haul. Each volume of the Daily-Weekly provides a passage of Scripture each week, broken into five daily readings, leaving a sixth day for reflection and one day for weekly gathering. This arrangement assists learners in the day-in and day-out obedience of becoming people and communities of One Book.

Groups are encouraged to use for each volume of the Daily-Weekly the accompanying DVD, which includes a weekly seven- to ten-minute video teaching session from the author.

For more information visit seedbed.com/onebook.



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ISBN 978-1-62824-902-6



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