

BOOK-A-MONTH CLUB

~ March ~

The Book of James with Laura Dodd “Genuine Faith Transforms Lives!” A Family Bible Study

James is such a practical “How To” guide for Christian living and lends itself well to a Family Bible Study format. Being that Children’s Ministry is my calling, I felt led to use this type of format to present the book of James. This is not a commentary-style study digging deep into theology, but a study of the basic principles found in James for parents and their children to share and discuss together. I do hope that whatever your family make-up, this study of the book of James will lead you and your family into a genuine faith that transforms your lives.

Looking for a translation of the Bible that will fit the developmental level of your child?
Here is a good, comprehensive list:

- The Beginners Bible (Birth-K)
- Day-By-Day Begin to Read Bible(K-2nd)
- NIV: New International Readers Version (2nd-4th grade reading level)
- ERV: Easy to Read Version (2nd to 4th grade)
- CEV: Contemporary English Version (5th Grade and up reading level)
- NLT: New Living Translation (5th grade and up reading level)
- NIV: New International Version (7th grade and up reading level)
- GNB: Good News Bible (Today’s English Version) (7th grade and up)

Who wrote the book of James?

Simply enough, James, Jesus’ brother wrote the book of James. There are four different James’ referred to in the New Testament, but it is universally agreed upon that the James who penned this letter was the brother of Jesus.

When was the Book of James Written?

Most scholars believe it was written a few years prior to the Jerusalem council which met in 50 A.D. The Bible does not show James to be a follower of Jesus until after Jesus’ resurrection, after which James became a leader in the Jerusalem church. He preached the teachings of Jesus and brought many to know God.

Whether daily or weekly, set aside 15-20 minutes when you and your family will gather, open your Bibles and dive into the practical applications of the Book of James through these 5 lessons. Each study has questions to suit the ages of your children to draw them into the day’s lesson.

Lesson 1: “Why me, God?”

Real Faith Shows Patience in Trials / James 1:1-27

Choose several of these questions to begin your study time:

- Preschoolers: “How big is God?” “Can God do anything?” “Does God give us the things we need?” “What kinds of things?”
- Elementary: “Does God listen when we talk to him?” “What kind of things do you ask God for?”
- Jr. High/High School: “When you are having a tough time in school, where is God?” “Do you face temptations each day?” “Who tempts you to sin?” “Why does God allow us to be tempted?”

Attention Grabber. Find a small mirror and ask one of your children to look at himself in the mirror. Have them to focus on remembering what they see. Then set the mirror aside and have them describe what they saw. Ask them if it would be strange for them to forget what they saw in the mirror. Let them know that you will be referring to this exercise in today’s study and to keep it in mind. (chapter 1: 23-25)

Read James 1:1-27 (summarize main points for young children)

Key talking points:

- Be joyful in our struggles
 - ü James does not say *if* you face trials, but *whenever* you face them
- Ask God for wisdom through prayer
 - ü We do not have to search blindly for answers; God will give us not only knowledge, but the ability to make wise decisions during hard times.
- When you ask, believe and do not doubt. God hears your cries and will answer.
- Riches and glory mean nothing to God, so they should not have high importance in our lives.
- God does not tempt us.
 - ü He allows Satan to tempt us so that we can grow in our dependence on God.
 - ü Temptations leads to sin and God cannot be around sin, so when we sin, we are separated from God.
- God gives us every good and perfect thing
- When we talk too much, we don’t leave room for any listening.
 - ü What does it mean to be “quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry”?
 - ü We need to listen to the Word of God and do what it says, if not, it’s like we are looking in a mirror, then looking away and not remembering what you saw. (refer back to Attention Grabber)
 - ü When we begin to listen more and keep control of what we say, we show genuine faith.
- Real faith that God desires is for us to look after orphans and widows, and keep ourselves from getting ruined by the bad in this world.

Summary Lesson 1: God loves us so much that whether we are facing trials, being tempted, or letting our tongue get out of hand, God is there waiting to give us wisdom and whatever we might need so that we can “receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.” Don’t you look forward to that crown?!

Lesson 2: "I love you, God and I WANT to serve you!"

Real Faith Yields a Response to God / James 2:1-26

Choose several of these questions to begin your study time:

- Preschoolers: "Does God love some people more than others?" "When you are playing with your friends, should you play with one and leave the other out?"
- Elementary: "How would you feel if you were left out of a game at recess because of the type of clothes you were wearing?" "As God's children, are we expected to behave in a certain way to show we love God?"
- Jr. High/High School: "A visitor comes into your Sunday morning class dirty, and wearing out of date clothes. Compare opposite reactions that person might get from your class members." "How do you react to people just like that you see daily at school?" "As a child of God, does your faith in God compel you to act in a certain way?" "If we say we have faith, but do not act like it in the things we do, would you say our faith is dead?"

Attention Grabber: Make up a chore chart indicating several chores for each child. Show the children which chores they would hypothetically be responsible for. Then ask them: "Do you think we would love you any less if you did not complete your chores? Would we love you more than your sister or brother if you did these chores and more? We love you regardless of what you do, but your completing your chores is one way you show a commitment to our family and to mom and me. This is a little like James' words about our faith in God and the things we do because of that faith. James tells us that our faith (our belief and devotion to God without seeing Him) is made complete when joined with good works. Just like mom and I, God loves you no matter what. Doing what God asks is the way that we can show that our love and commitment to God are real.

Read James 2:1-26. (Summarize main points for younger children)

Key Talking Points:

- God does not favor one over another, and neither should we based on social status, wealth, looks or anything else.
- If we believe in God and follow his teachings, we must love all people, regardless of whether they are rich or poor. When we show favoritism, we sin.
- If we say we believe in God and do not show it through our actions, our love is not real.
- Some people claim to have faith in God, but what they really have is an agreement with Christian teachings. True belief and faith in God will be transforming in the way that we act and what we think.
- James says that even demons believe that there is a god, but that does not mean that they have a life-changing faith in God.
- James gives a perfect example of faith and actions working together in the life of Abraham and his willingness to sacrifice his son for the sake of his faith.

Summary Lesson 2: God wants us to WANT to serve him because we love him. At the same time, we could do good things for God all of our lives and it would never come near to comparing to the sacrifice he made of his son on the cross for our sins. So does that mean that since we could never do enough for God that we just give up trying? Absolutely not! Our faith in, and love for God should compel us daily to do good things in his service out of a sincere heart for God.

Lesson 3: "Tame this tongue of mine, Lord"

Real Faith Supplies Wise Speech / James 3:1-18

Choose several of these questions to begin your study time:

- Preschoolers: "Does God hear you when you pray to him?" "Does God hear you when you argue with your sister or brother?" "When you talk back to your mom when she asks you to clean up your room, does God know?" "Say something that would make God happy."
- Elementary: "If we were to whisper something mean about someone to one of your friends, how does that make God feel?" "How can we use our tongue to make God happy?"
- Jr. High/High School: "Give an example of when you might use your tongue, your words with bad motives." "At school, do you see people's words being used more for bad than for good?" "If the tongue is such a volatile part of our body, why did God allow us to have one?"

Attention Grabber: Fill a clear picture with water. Discuss how clean and pure the water is, untainted by any bad source. Add just a couple of drops of red food coloring. Ask, "What has changed? Can you easily get the water back to it's original state? That's the way our words can effect things. There is no way to take back what we say. Once it's out there, it's out there! That is why God has some very strong words for us in the book of James about our tongue and how we use it."

Read James 3:1-18 (summarize main points for younger children)

Key Talking Points:

- Our tongues are very powerful instruments and can be used for good or evil.
- Just like the bit in the mouth of a horse, or a rudder on a ship, the tongue is a very small part of the body, yet can do great good, or terrible damage.
- What you say AND what you don't say are both very important to consider.
- Satan uses the tongue to cause trouble and to pit people against one another.
- Once a word is spoken, it cannot be taken back, you can neither control or reverse the damage.
- God has given us His Spirit to help us control our tongues, and His Spirit has conquered all!
- There are two kinds of wisdom, earthly wisdom and heavenly wisdom. God desires for us to have a "good life by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom"
- We can identify a tree by the fruit it produces, in the same way we can evaluate our wisdom by the way we act.
- This is what we should seek: the wisdom that comes from heaven. We know it is from heaven when we are pure, we love peace, we are considerate, we put others needs before our own, we show mercy, we bear fruit, we do not take sides, we are honest... when we are peacemakers who have a harvest of righteousness!

Summary Lesson 3: It is interesting that James talks about the tongue and godly wisdom in the same passage, they are so closely related! God has granted us full reign over the most powerful organ of the body. He has entrusted us with an instrument that can do harm, create discord, mercilessly gossip, and break hearts. Yet that same instrument has the capability of bringing the lost to their Father in heaven! Commit as a family to "spur one another on" to using God's instrument for good every day.

Lesson 4: “Help me give it all to you, God, and do what’s right”

Real Faith Produces a Submissive Heart / James 4:1-5:6

Choose several of these questions to begin your study time:

- Preschoolers: “Do you ever throw temper tantrums?” “What is it that makes you throw a tantrum or get very upset? Is it when you do not get your way?” “Did you know that the Bible says that if we tell Satan ‘NO!’ he will run from us?”
- Elementary: “How do you act when you do not get your way?” “Did you know that James says that if we ‘humble ourselves, God will lift us up? What does that mean?”
- Jr. High/High School: “What does this verse mean (4:7): ‘Anyone who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.’?” “We plan and plan for our Jr High and High School courses, and plan for college, we plan for our friends to come over for the weekend! Who is truly in charge of all of those plans? We should remember that God is in control and that we should plan everything acknowledging that it is all possible if it is within God’s will.”

Attention Grabber: Get two large magnets and place them with opposing ends facing each other. Have your children try to push the two opposing ends together. It is impossible. Refer to 4:7 “Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” Tell the kids that if we give ourselves to the powerful mercies of God and commit to resisting the devil and his schemes, it is as if the devil becomes unable to be near us! Just like the opposing ends of a magnet. He knows that we serve a powerful God and that his wily ways do not compete with God’s power. So when he sees us submitting to our all-powerful God, he runs!!!

Read James 4:1-5:6 (summarize main points for younger children)

Key Talking Points:

- Our fights and quarrels with others come from our selfish desires.
- We should submit to God and ask God to help us get rid of our selfish desires.
- If we are so in love with the things of this world, we cannot be a friend to God.
- Submitting to God, putting his desires above yours, shows Satan that our God is more powerful than he, and when you resist Satan, he will run!
- How can we come near to God?
 - Submit to God, 4:7
 - Resist the devil, 4:7
 - Purify your hearts, 4:8
 - Have sincere sorrow for your sins, 4:9
 - Humble yourself before the Lord, 4:10
- When we live humbly, we will be glorified by God, himself! Humility means to recognize that our worth comes from God alone.
- When we judge or slander one another, we fail to love which is breaking God’s law.
- Amidst all of the planning and business, in everything that we do, we must acknowledge that it is all possible only through our Lord. In everything we do we must pray that it is within God’s will and hold your plans loosely.
- We sin when we know the good we ought to do yet do not do it.
- Riches are worthless when we consider that it will all mean nothing when our Lord and Savior returns. Do not hoard and stockpile riches.

Summary Lesson 4: It is our goal to draw near to God, and James gives us practical ways to do just that! Our bickering, business, and the things of this world are obstacles in the way of our relationship with Him. The closer we draw to our Father, the faster Satan will flee!

Lesson 5: "I will wait for you Lord!"

Real Faith Gives Way to Prayer and Patience / James 5:7-20

Choose several of these questions to begin your study time:

- Preschoolers: "Has your mother ever told you to be patient?" "Is it hard to wait for something?" "How do we talk to God?"
- Elementary: "Is it hard for you to be patient when you have to wait for something?" "Can you think of a person in the Bible that showed great patience?"
- Jr. High/High School: "Do you have a friend that you can confess your sins to and pray with?" "What keeps you from being in prayer to God?" "Share a time when you prayed and patiently waited until God answered that prayer."

Attention Grabber: Create paper prayer journals with your children using folded construction paper, copy paper, stapler and markers or crayons. While making them, share ways that you have seen God answer your prayers in your life. Encourage kids that are already writing to daily write out their prayers to God. When the prayer is answered, write when and how it was answered. Ask them to look back through their prayers often to see how God is so faithful. Share this verse from James, "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." James 5:16

Read James 5:7-20 (summarize main points for younger children)

Key Talking Points:

- Just like a farmer patiently awaits spring rains and the harvest of his crops, God asks us to wait patiently for the Lord's coming. The farmer cannot hurry the process, and neither can we!
- God warns that we will be judged when we grumble against one another. Sometimes blaming others is easier than owning up to our share of the responsibility.
- Before you start to judge someone, remember that our Lord and Savior will return to judge us for our actions in this world.
- Just like Job and other prophets showed patience in the midst of suffering, we, too should show patience while in our trials. God is faithful to deliver us!
- Do you know someone with a reputation of lying or exaggerating? We should never have that reputation as a Christian. If we are always honest, then others will believe our "yes" and our "no" and have no reason to doubt our word. We are representatives of Christ here on this earth!
- James gives us practical ways to respond to everyday occurrences:
 - If in trouble, pray
 - If you are happy, sing praises to God
 - If you are sick, have the elders of the church pray over you in the name of the Lord.
 - Offering a prayer in faith? The Lord will raise the sick person up.
 - Need sins forgiven? They will be forgiven.
 - Confess your sins and pray for each other, so you can be healed.
- Elijah, James says, was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly and his prayers were answered. He assures us that the prayer of the righteous man is powerful and effective.

Summary Lesson 5: Patience and prayer work hand in hand. While we wait on our Lord to answer our prayer, patience is required. The examples of the saints who waited patiently upon the Lord are too numerous to name. It is these examples that give us strength to persevere in trying times. And who knows, it might be just that faith that can lead a sinner from the error of his ways.