



BRACKEN RIDGE  
BAPTIST CHURCH

# JAMES

the *just*

living the word | James 1:22

# JAMES THE JUST SERIES

*Term 2, 2016*

Study 1 - April 17: Brent. *James 1:1-4,12 - Persevering and Being Present*

Study 2 - April 24: Dan. *James 1:5-11 - The Way of Wisdom*

Study 3 - May 1: Graham. *James 1:19-27 - Examine Your Life*

Study 4 - May 8: (Mothers Day). *James 2:14-26 - Easier Said than Done*

Study 5 - May 15: John Sweetman. *James 3:1-12 - The Tongue*

Study 6 - May 22: Dan. *James 3:13-4:3 - Makers and Breakers of Peace*

Study 7 - May 29: Dan. *James 4:4-10 - God Drawing Near*

Study 8 - June 5: Graham. *James 1:9-11, 5:1-6, 4:11-17 - The Dangers of Pursuing Wealth*

Study 9 - June 12: Duncan Brown / Graham. *James 5:7-12 - The Importance of Patience in Times of Suffering*

Study 10 - June 19: Dan. *James 5:13-20 - The Power of Prayer*

*\*Bible quotations from NIV throughout.*

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## OVERVIEW

The Epistle (fancy word for letter) of James is believed to be one of the oldest NT books written (45-50AD) and is written by James the Just, the brother of Jesus (Matthew 13:55). It's believed that James was the leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13) and possibly came to faith after a personal encounter with the resurrected Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:7)... which is a big turnaround for James, as Jesus' family were relatively unsupportive of His ministry (John 7:5). Yet when James became a disciple of Christ it was completely whole-hearted!

Early church history teaches that James was such a man of prayer that his knees had large and thick callouses, making them look like the knees of a camel! It also says that James was martyred in Jerusalem by being pushed from a high point of the temple. Yet the fall did not kill him! On the ground he was beaten to death even as he prayed for his attackers.

The letter of James was written to the church at large- particularly fellow recently-converted Jews who left Jerusalem because of the extreme persecution for following Christ. At this time Christians were being taken advantage of (5:4-6), hauled into court (2:6) by those who also attack their faith (2:7). Yet James encourages the believers to stay strong in Jesus, the Judge and Deliverer, who will return (5:7-11). Until then, when they suffer and endure these trials and temptations, the people are to remain positive and filled with joy as they know this time brings maturity in becoming more like Christ (1:2-4, 12).

And so the Christians were being encouraged to endure the hardships the world threw at them but James also warned the believers not to let the world disciple them. He warns that 'friendship with God means being at odds with the world' (4:4) and identifies that to be truly religious (in the purest sense) is to stay 'unstained' from the world (1:27). It seems that James desired to challenge those who let the worldly ways infiltrate the Body of Christ, evidenced by favorable treatment to the rich and neglect of the poor (2:1-4), critical and negative judgmental speech (3:1-12; 4:11-12; 5:9), worldly "wisdom" that reflects the enemy by producing envy and selfish ambition, producing fights and bickering (3:13-4:3), arrogance and ego (4:13-17) and finally believers who didn't *walk the walk* (1:22-27; 2:14-26).

His answer to this is to call the believers to turn from these behaviours and beliefs and to repent from worldliness, to humble themselves before the Lord so that God might come near (4:7-9).

## **WHY JAMES THE JUST?**

Why study James as a church? I can think of a couple of reasons but I guess it's mostly because James is a practical resource that provides grounded teaching on how to live the Christian life. As I've read James I can't help but picture an old, wise man of God, sitting on his chair and leaning forward and telling the church how to live as disciples of Jesus. I can see him instructing us that we can't be a people who talk about faith in Christ and yet not live it.

## **GET THE MOST OUT OF JAMES**

We're attempting to follow a simple plan to get the most out of James as a church:

- **Sunday AM/PM Church** has a time of teaching, where we unpack a passage from James.
- **Small Groups weekly** concentrate on the teaching and attempt to drill down into the details of the passage. The studies are separately contained, but do build towards an overall picture of a people sold out for Jesus.
- **Activating the Word** is critical. We cannot be like those who look at themselves in a mirror (reading the Word) and when we turn around forget what we look like (not live the Word personally).

And so my encouragement to you is to join a Small Group for the series... even if it's only for this term. There is potential to see the group continue after the *James* series, however we can tackle that when we get there. Please contact **Brad Suosaari** on **0403 187 078** or **brad@brbc.org.au** to find out more or to get you connected into a Small Group!

## **FINALLY**

My prayer is that the Holy Spirit in this series will:

- Inform and inspire you to boldly live for Jesus 24/7,
- Challenge you in weak areas, where sin and apathy may have crept in,
- Be a resource to engage in the Word and encounter Jesus personally, and
- Bring a large percentage of our Bracko church family together in Small Groups around the Word and experiencing fellowship.

Really looking forward to Term 2!

Dan (on behalf of the church leadership and staff team)

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## **Sunday April 17 AM/PM: Brent Sweeney**

### **Study 1 - Persevering and Being Present**

#### **READ JAMES 1:1-4 AND JAMES 1:12**

One of my all-time favourite sports stars was an NBA player from the Chicago Bulls, Number 23, Michael Jordan. I'm lucky enough to have been around to watch him play in the early 90's and used to agree with the commentators of the time that he was the most feared fourth quarter player in the history of the game. Michael never quit.

When the going got tough and the game was on the line, when other players caved in to mental and physical exhaustion, he raised his game to another level. When MJ had the ball in his hand in the final quarter, you could almost feel anxiety and inevitability sweep over the other team! When everyone else was exhausted, mentally fatigued and doubled-over to catch their breath, MJ was going for steals, diving for loose balls, driving the length of the court and giving 100%. MJ never gave up and serves as a great example of perseverance to us!

***Do you have any other examples of perseverance that come to mind?***

## **QUESTIONS**

In these verses, James identifies and names two concepts that every Christian will face. What are they? (*PS They start with "t"...*)

What is the difference between being \_\_\_\_\_ and experiencing \_\_\_\_\_ ?

Why does James stress to "*consider it pure joy*" when facing temptations and trials?

How can someone possibly experience joy in the midst of these times?

## **CONSIDER PERSEVERANCE**

*"I fear our generation has come dangerously near the 'I'm-getting-tired-so-let's-quit' mentality. And not just the in the spiritual realm. Dieting is a discipline, so we stay fat. Finishing school is a hassle, so we bail out. Cultivating a close relationship is painful, so we back off. Working through conflicts in marriage is a tiring struggle, so we walk away. Sticking with an occupation is tough, so we start looking elsewhere."*  
- Charles Swindoll, "*Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life*".

In a world where quitting has become chronic, God says persevere! Too many people take the easy way out. Yet God tells us through James that perseverance through the tough times is the pathway to spiritual maturity!

## **QUESTIONS**

- What do you consider James would say to a follower of Christ who was ready to bail out on their faith in the middle of a trial?
- What character qualities are forged in our lives when we persevere through the fires of trials and suffering?

## READ JOB 1:13-2:13

### QUESTIONS

- Discuss how Job dealt with his pain, loss and suffering.
- How can this be a model for you when times of trial come your way?
- How did Job express his trust in the character of God (Job 1:20; 2:10) through his suffering?
- Later in the story, Job's friends give some poor counsel. However, their first response is healthy and helpful. Discuss the positive examples you see in the response of Job's three mates. (Job 2:11-13)

### ACTIVATE THIS!

There's an old saying: "90% of caring is just showing up." Job's friends extend care by being there, weeping with Job, and sitting silently alongside him (seven days and seven nights!) The issue is when they started talking and trying to explain Job's situation!

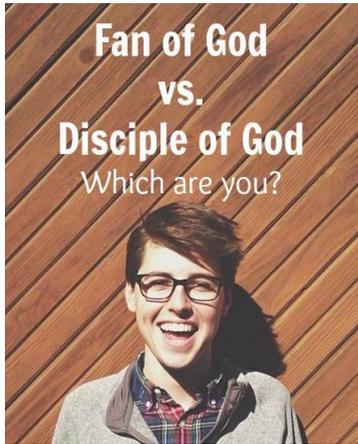
I didn't spend a long time as an Aged Care Chaplain, but what I picked up from my elderly friends is that my presence meant a lot to them. They couldn't communicate well and sometimes a few just nodded off and fell asleep (similar to when I preach!). But it wasn't what I said that mattered, it was that I was available to listen and ask questions and demonstrate my interest in their story. This meant the world to them!

Are there any among you who are persevering through trials and temptations? How can you as a small group *practice the ministry of presence*?

For those wanting to step up in this space, you might consider calling Brad Suosaari in the office to find out who within our church might like to be visited. The key is being willing to have a go and available to be present.

## PRAYER TIME

- Is there anyone in your group who is going through trials and temptations now? Pray over and bless the person using 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.
- Can you think of anyone at BRBC who is struggling with sickness, pain, infirmity? Pray that they may experience freedom and health.
- Who are the 'seasoned warriors' that you have been walking with and are speaking into your life? If you don't have that mature person around you, why not? Pray that God might provide someone to come alongside you.



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## Sunday April 24 AM/PM: Dan Lyons

Study 2 - The Way of Wisdom

### READ JAMES 1:5-11

Rare and scarce. Precious and priceless. Inestimable and invaluable. These are just a few words, which describe that desirable attribute called wisdom.

One commentator defines wisdom as "... *that virtue which enables men and women to make decisions as God would make them. Putting it another way, a wise man and woman is someone who solves problems in the same manner as God would solve them.*"

James connects this teaching on wisdom with v4: *Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.* <sup>5</sup> *If any of you lacks wisdom...* " It's almost like James is telling the persecuted and troubled Christians that they cannot quite see life the way he's portraying it - that their trying circumstances are entangling them so much they can't work out a way to move forward. The answer? God's wisdom... to see things as God sees them.

## QUESTIONS

There are many different types of wisdom found in the Bible.

What is the *wisdom* that Luke 2:52, Matthew 13:54, Acts 7:22 reveal?

How would you define Solomon's *wisdom* (1 Kings 3:16 and Matthew 12:42)?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-25. How does this wisdom differ to the other types above?

In relation to sharing wisdom with us, what does James teach us about God's character in 1:5?

- God's nature is to \_\_\_\_\_ wisdom. Hint: *The literal translation of verse 5 is, "let him ask from the GIVING God..."* God is generous and the giver of all good gifts!
- God's generosity is for e \_\_\_\_\_. *The Greek word is haplotes, which means 'single-mindedness and selflessness'.*

This is how the 'giving God' gives - with a selfless, total concern for us and with an exclusive preoccupation as if he had nothing else to do but to give again and again!

James continues this teaching on wisdom with a warning in 1:6-8.

Discuss the following:

- Under pressure, how does the faithful Christian (vv5-6) contrast with the person described in verses 6-8?
- Is doubt the enemy of faith? *The Greek word for double-minded is 'dipsychos' which means literally "two-souled" or "with divided soul."* James clearly wants us as believers to be faith-filled and not torn when it comes to prayer. Why? Because prayer that is divided is devoid of God's power!
- What could 'unstable in all his/her ways' mean?

Verses 9-11 contain an example of the wisdom in which James is instructing us.

- How is James' contrasting of rich and poor Christians an example of Godly wisdom?
- In what ways do you rely on your possessions?

### **ACTIVATE THIS!**

- Share with the group an example of a time when you thought you "lacked wisdom", asked for it, and your prayer was answered.
- How can the group DEMONSTRATE action from this study this week?
- Suggestion: How do you seek wisdom? Where CAN you find wisdom for big decision and issues? Why does God continually encourage us to seek His wisdom?

## PRAYER TIME

- Are there any in the group who are desperate for God's wisdom? If you want wisdom from God, you've got to ask! If you ask, He'll give it. How can you support them in this (without taking God's place)?
  - Can you think of anyone at BRBC who is struggling with sickness, pain, infirmity? Pray that they may experience freedom and health.
  - Who are those with Godly wisdom that are walking with and are speaking into your life? If you don't have that mature person around you, why not? Pray that God might provide someone to come alongside you.
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## Sunday May 1 AM/PM: Graham Wray

### Study 3 - Overcoming Anger

#### READ JAMES 1:19-27

Have you noticed that sometimes it can be difficult to spot the difference between someone genuinely following Jesus and those merely giving lip-service? By modifying behaviour to look like others and 'fit in' at church worship services and ministries, we can fool even ourselves into a false sense of security in our walk with Christ.

Surely we must allow God to do the judging of others because only He really knows the condition of the heart... ***what James desires is that his readers truly examine their lives and faith to really ensure that they are walking with Jesus deeply.*** What comes through this study is that *knowing about the Bible and Christian living is one thing, but knowing the Author personally and following Him is completely different!* This is what James 1:19-27 focuses on.

## QUESTIONS

In James 1:19-27, James describes three ways we can focus on our inward faith journey. Can you spot them?

1. Verses 19-21: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Verses 22-25: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Verses 26-27: \_\_\_\_\_

## VERSES 19-21: OVERCOMING ANGER

Our study today focuses us on the first part of this passage.

Discuss "*being quick to listen and slow to speak and slow to get angry*"... does this come easily to you?

How/when have you seen or experienced the truth that "*mans anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires*"?

James tells us that God's Word is planted in us; however weeds can creep in and attempt to choke the Word!

Anger is an emotion often characterised by feelings of great displeasure, indignation, hostility, wrath and vengeance. Many times, reacting in anger is how we express our dissatisfaction with life. It's defined in the Greek language as one of the strongest of all passions. Anger begins with a feeling that's often expressed in words or actions. We feel something and it causes a reaction.

What makes you angry? (eg injustice, jealousy, impatience, unfair criticism)

## ***How do we overcome ungodly anger God's way?***

*It starts with digging to the root of the problem.* It's not easy, however going on the journey and discovering the root is critical. Has anger taken root in your life? If so, when did this start happening? What triggered this? Perhaps anger was modelled to you by your parents / upbringing. Other roots could be: strife/conflict, abuse of any kind (sexual, physical, verbal, emotional, mental ), unmet needs.

### **ACTIVATE THIS!**

Are you someone who struggles with anger? Can you see any roots above? How can you process your anger? This is a really important opportunity to confess to one another in a safe environment.

### **PRAYER TIME**

- What are the strategies to overcome anger? How can we pray for each other with this in mind?
- Who could you talk to about finding healing in this space?
- Is there anyone that Holy Spirit is leading us to forgive?
- If there are people who have confessed their inclination towards anger, the act of verbalising this is a key! It's God's heart for His people to have anger lifted from them! Pray for these members of your group to continue to pursue healing. (Please note: Professional help may be required to address deep-seated emotional issues.)



# Sunday May 8 AM/PM (Mothers' Day): Dan Lyons

## Study 4 - Easier Said than Done

### READ JAMES 2:14-26

Making the transition from thinking to doing is essential to mature as disciples. We can talk about faith in Christ, about being forgiven, about serving God faithfully but until we live it out, in reality, we are purely aspiring to Christianity. Faith without action, according to James 2:14, cannot save anyone.

### REFLECT

Many of us feel uncertain about our faith at times, even anxious. Discuss: How do we know we are truly saved? Where does our certainty come from?

James teaches that we can have certainty about our faith when our *actions match our words*. Do you agree?

### QUESTIONS

What examples of faith in action does James use to drive his point home?

Can you describe a recent situation where you observed people doing what James is describing?

James clearly teaches that faith without works is dead (2:17). What might a person's life look like in each of these scenarios:

- A person who has faith but no works.
- A person who has works but no faith.
- A person who has faith in God and works that grow naturally out of this faith.
- A person who has no faith and no works.

- Why does James use demons (2:19) as an example of this kind of bogus ticket?
- What are some other bogus tickets people hold as a false sense of security?

## REFLECT

Imagine standing at the gate of an airport waiting to get on your plane. You have purchased your ticket a long time ago and you have it in your hand as you board the plane. The flight attendant asks for passengers to board the plane and to hand over the boarding pass. As you step up the flight attendant and hand him your ticket, he asks you to wait. You are puzzled, but stay right where you are. The flight attendant makes a quick phone call and you wait while others continue to hand him their boarding passes and walk down to the plane.

Finally a security officer approaches the flight attendant, talks quietly with him, and comes towards you, "I'm sorry, your ticket is counterfeit. You cannot board the plane." All this time you thought you had the real thing, but you had a false security. Your ticket was bogus!

***James is clear that there are many people who think they have a ticket to heaven, but they may be holding a bogus boarding pass. He is calling us to be absolutely sure that we have a genuine, saving faith.***

## QUESTIONS

- James is not teaching that anyone will be saved by good works. He is saying that when a person has true faith in Jesus Christ, s/he will experience transformation that will be seen by others. What are some of the changes that happen in a person's life when s/he becomes a fully devoted follower of Christ?

## REFLECT

It is the breath of life in our mortal bodies that gives us colour, motion, warmth, a pulse. When someone dies, that all vanishes instantly. There is no life; there is only a body. The *person* is gone.

James tells us that this is how it is with the Christian life. If someone claims to be a Christian and they exhibit signs of life, their claim is probably genuine. However, if they claim to be a follower of Christ and they exhibit no signs of life, that's trouble. This person might very well be living with false assurance. James makes a powerful connection in the final verse of this passage. He says, "*As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.*" (v26)

- Discuss some "signs of life" exhibited in the following Biblical leaders that gave witness to the fact that their faith was genuine: Abraham, Rahab, Samuel.
- AND in those examples, how did their actions give affirmation to their faith?

### **ACTIVATE THIS!**

Before praying with and for one another tonight, take a few minutes to complete the following survey. Score yourself honestly from 1-5. A score of 5 would reflect that this statement very much describes your heart and actions. A score of 1 would mean it does not reflect who you are and how you currently live your life.

What is the one area where you are presently experiencing growth, and what has helped enhance your growth in this area?

Similarly, what is the one area that you can target that you would like to develop? What is a personal growth goal to help you do this?

<b>"SIGNS OF LIFE" TEST</b>	
	1. You live with an overwhelming sense of gratitude for what Jesus Christ has done for you.
	2. You look for opportunities to tell others about the love of Christ.
	3. You have a strong desire to grow spiritually, a healthy spiritual appetite to engage God in His Word and participate in worshipping Him.
	4. You find yourself moving toward Christian community by developing more and deeper relationships with other followers of Christ.
	5. You see a noticeable difference in the development of your character.
	6. You have an increasing desire to orient your life around God's purposes in this world.
	7. You express generous giving regularly to the community of God.

**PRAYER TIME**

Pray for one another to more fully demonstrate "signs of life".

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**Sunday May 15 AM/PM: John Sweetman**

Study 5 - The Tongue

**READ JAMES 3:1-12**

Deadly weapons are everywhere. 70 years ago the most feared weapon was the nuclear bomb. We've all seen images of its destructive power. Today, nuclear bombs can be reduced to the size of a suitcase and detonated remotely - scary stuff! We also know of more

deadly and powerful forms of destruction, like biological weapons. A single dose of anthrax, the size of a sugar packet, could wipe out the population of Australia. These weapons, both large and small, have the capacity to reduce the Earth to rubble. Nuclear weapons and biological weapons have something in common - a very small thing can do breathtaking amounts of damage. These are extremely powerful yet small things. James says that our tongue is very much like these two examples... it is small but capable of making an enormous impact!

## QUESTION

- Can you describe a time when the words of another person had a lasting impact on you, in either a positive or negative way?

## REFLECT

The old saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me" isn't true at all! In "*The Weight of Your Words*", Joseph Stowell writes that most adults get over the *physical* pains of childhood, but not all adults overcome the hurtful words, names and labels that have been placed on them. God tells us in Matthew 12:36 that He will hold us accountable for "every careless word". Therefore, controlling the words that come out of our mouth should be a high priority for us!

## QUESTIONS

- What three images does James use to paint a picture of the power of our words? (James 3:3-6)
- What do these images have in common?
- What is it about hurtful words that makes it so hard to 'forgive and forget'?
- How does James portray the human tongue (James 3:6-8) and the potential power of the words we speak?

## CONSIDER

There are three major areas where we can get in trouble with our words. They are: devaluing others with our words, lying and slandering. Can you finish the following sentences in your own words?

1. "Jesus said, 'But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.' (Matthew 5:22). Jesus was so concerned about how we speak of others because..."
2. "I know lying is dangerous and damaging. The ninth commandment calls us to never lie. Lying is forbidden by God because..."
3. "Slander or gossip is the passing out of damaging information about one person to another. Slander is so damaging because..."

## QUESTIONS

- What contrasts from nature does James use to describe the spiritual dilemma of blessings and cursings coming out of the same mouth?
- What practical truth is James trying to communicate with these word pictures?

## ACTIVATE THIS!

Sometimes with our Aussie humour we may inadvertently be hurtful while trying to defuse a situation. Do you struggle with this? Is there a battle in your own heart and life concerning your use of words?

James summarises this passage with four words in 3:10, "**THIS SHOULD NOT BE!**" God's desire is that we never use our words to curse other people, but rather to encourage them and lift them up.

What sorts of words do you find the most encouraging and strengthening?

How can you use your words in the coming week to build up and bless another person? Include your answers in your group prayer time.

### **PRAYER TIME**

Take time as a small group lifting up prayers of praise for those people in your life who have been a source of encouragement to you because of their words.

- Will you commit yourself as a small group to create a slander-free environment?
  - Will you commit to God and each other that slander and gossip will never be part of your community life together?
  - How will you pray for one another as a result of this study in James 3:1-12?
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## **Sunday May 22 AM/PM: Dan Lyons**

### **Study 6 - Makers and Breakers of Peace**

#### **READ JAMES 3:13-18**

Why do people who love each other deeply often fight the most? Husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters - it's all too common! In this passage James helps us to understand the sources of quarrels and the sources of peace.

#### **QUESTIONS**

- Why do you think fights and arguments erupt, even in the best of families?

- What's the difference between earthly and heavenly wisdom? (See chart below.)
- How might earthly wisdom provoke fights and quarrels?
- Is there a difference between James 3:17 and 'being a doormat'? How?

## REFLECT

There are many Christian churches and homes that are marked by frequent conflict. Sometimes as Christians, we put a spiritual face on our side of things to make it look as if we're defending the truth or standing on principle. There is certainly a place for defending the truth, as you know. But there is a right and a wrong way to contend for the truth.

Paul, the great defender of the faith, wrote to Timothy (2 Tim 2:24-26), *"The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will."*

Note that he did not say, as many today would have us believe, "Don't get into disputes about the truth, because love is more important than doctrine." But he did say to correct those who are in opposition to the truth, but to do it with kindness, patience, and gentleness. This is why authentic Christian community is critical. When we're in community and our brothers and sisters see us struggling, motivated by love and armed with gentleness and respect, we approach someone, enter their world and see things from their perspective.

Following is a chart that maps out objectively the wisdom given by God (*from above*) as opposed to wisdom from the world (*from below*).

	<b>James 3:15-16</b>	<b>James 3:17-18</b>
<b>Origin</b>	Not from above Earthly Unspiritual Devilish	From above
<b>Characteristics</b>	Jealousy Selfish Ambition	Pure Peaceable Gentle Open to reason Full of mercy (etc) Without uncertainty Without insincerity
<b>Results</b>	Disorder Every vile practice	The harvest of righteousness

**READ JAMES 4:1-2**

James sees some relationships of Christians as dysfunctional. The words he uses are frighteningly strong: wars, fighting, at war, kill, fight, wage war.

We know that James doesn't mean actual killings - he's using the language of war metaphorically. Obviously we must have united and grace-filled relationships within the body!

**QUESTIONS**

- What is the source of quarrels (James 4:1-2)?
- In contrast James instructs us to deal with our desires by asking God for what we want (James 4:2-3). Why do we sometimes

resist or hesitate to ask God for what we want? And how do *wrong motives* come into play when we pray?

- What are some of the common quarrels of church-life over the years? Are any of these traditional types of quarrels (eg worship songs, position of communion table, choice of clothes by pastors) still present at Bracko today? How do we guard ourselves against moving back in this direction?

### **ACTIVATE THIS!**

It seems that James is directing the church towards exploring heavenly values vs earthly selfish values. Churches who spend time fighting and bickering over the earthly selfish values tend to become inward and ineffective. Why is this dangerous for our church?

What can you do to help your small group, and others within Bracko, experience wisdom “from above”?

### **PRAYER TIME**

The NT tells us repeatedly to pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:4) and bless them (Romans 12:14). Is there a lack of peace within your circles? How can you pray for them? How can you pray for Bracko as a faith family after studying this passage?

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## **Sunday May 29 AM/PM: Dan Lyons**

Study 7 - God Drawing Near

### **READ JAMES 4:4-10.**

Believe it or not, James has been following a consistent flow of thought. He’s already dealt with sins of the tongue. Then he turned to the worst of these sins - the kind breeding wars and fighting in the

church - and showed that they are rooted in selfish desires impossible to fulfill. Now he digs a little deeper (v. 4).

## QUESTIONS

- James mentions "friendship with the world" in verse 4. What does this mean? Try and drill down a little deeper than "getting along with the world." Have a think about where you'll be tomorrow at work/school/home and what "friendship with the world" looks like then.
- Why is it important to remember that "*friendship with the world means enmity against God?*" How will this practically change your day tomorrow?

## REFLECT

*"There is no limit to how far a person can go as long as he doesn't care who gets the credit for it."* - A plaque on President Reagan's desk

In your own words, define PRIDE. Why does God despise it?

The Bible has nothing good to say about pride. Pride in Scripture appears as an ugly and sinister trait and to be avoided. It is assumed in the Bible as arrogance, haughtiness, smugness, a feeling of superiority over others, insolence, overbearingness, condescension, narcissism, vain-glory, conceit, egotism, vanity, and self-importance. Pride is the opposite of humility, modesty, and meekness displayed by our Lord Jesus Christ. God hates pride. "Whoever has haughty eyes and a proud heart, him will I not endure." (Psalm 101:5).

## GROUP DISCUSSION

This week, break into smaller groups of 3-4 people. Each group take a passage (below) that demonstrates moments of humility in the Bible.

Discover the pathway to humility in the story and share this with the wider group:

- Group 1: 1 Kings 21:17-29
- Group 2: 2 Kings 5
- Group 3: Genesis 13:8-18
- Group 4: Matthew 20:20-28

## QUESTIONS

- In 4:4-10, what does James say is necessary in order to come to God in prayer?
- How does each of these contribute to a humble spirit?

*"When a soul sets out to seek God, God sets out to meet that soul; so that while we are drawing near to him, he is drawing near to us." - Clarke.*

In order to experience intimacy with God, James agrees with John, who wrote that *"all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world"* (1 John 2:16). Are there situations where humility could help you become a source of peace this week?

## ACTIVATE THIS!

"DOWN" is associated with a negative experience in our fast-paced, achievement-oriented world (downgrade, down and out; downfall; downhill; downhearted; downcast; downtrodden, down payment). Where "UP" is a word we love! It is a word to be admired, to be pursued after. And words associated with it are words that people like to hear: upscale, upmarket, upper class, up and coming, upbeat, upgrade, uptake, uptown. You have to climb the corporate ladder. Up, as far as this world is concerned, is the direction of greatness. You ascend to fame, to money, to power, to comfort, and to pleasure.

## READ PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8

How does Jesus' demonstration of humility challenge you personally?

Christ does not discourage the pursuit of greatness; he just radically realigns it. Paul's message in Philippians is simply this: If you want to be truly great, then the direction you must go is *down*. ***In other words, you must descend into greatness.*** How does this statement challenge you?

## PRAYER TIME

Consider the relationships in your life where there is tension, hostility or quarrels. What have you learnt from this passage that will help you to deal with them?

What does it mean to *humble yourselves before the Lord* in prayer? Is there a physical position of prayer that you use to humble yourself in God's presence?

Please continue to pray for the members of your group, to look for ways to serve each other and take the lower road!

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## Sunday June 5 AM/PM: Graham Wray

### Study 8 - The Dangers of Pursuing Wealth

## READ JAMES 1:9-11, 5:1-6, 4:13-17

How can you make God laugh? Tell Him your plans! These passages are wisdom from an elderly man-of-God passing down through the ages about how to live for Jesus 24/7. Each passage that James talks about riches, wealth and money, he compares the wisdom of the world vs the wisdom of God. Wisdom from below has the worldview that this life is about us individually - getting ahead, making money, fulfilling our dreams.

Wisdom from God is to pursue Him first with our wealth and dreams, and allow Him to add to it (or take away). *Do you find this difficult to do? Why/why not?*

### **QUESTIONS - JAMES 1:9-11**

James compares people living simply and humbly, redefining them as having "high position". While those who are rich will "fade away even while they go about their business."

- What do the 2 contrasting positions teach us? AND which is more prevalent in our world today?
- Where does your heart lie? This is a very, very difficult question but arguably the most challenging to us in middle-class Australia!

### **QUESTIONS - JAMES 5:1-6**

These passages suggest that people pursuing wealth are risking their lives as it's impossible to walk with God humbly and pursue wealth. What are the telltale signs that you/we may be pursuing wealth?

Verses 2-3:

Verse 4:

Verse 5:

Verse 6:

### **QUESTIONS - JAMES 4:13-17**

The last section in this study focuses on contrasting attitudes towards pursuing wealth. James paints a word-picture of an early morning mist that is here for a very short time before disappearing.

- How does a sudden death, especially the death of a famous person, help us to realise this?
- How do you feel about considering your life to be like a mist? AND how does this affect your planning for the future?

## **CONSIDER**

Essentially James' teaching on pursuing wealth comes down to the heart... where does your heart rest? A different way of asking this question is to ask: What is your vision for your life? Where do you want to go? What do you want to be?

What's clear is that nowhere does James teach that it's wrong to plan for the future! As believers, if we operate humbly before God and offer our lives to Him wholeheartedly, where we trust Him and His purposes for our lives, we experience the very peace and joy that James teaches about, the very joy that Jesus embodied. However, if we merely give verbal assent to following Jesus, and yet pursue our own dreams and interests, we deceive ourselves, and our walk with Jesus will never reach that enriching, deeply satisfying and intimate space.

## **ACTIVATE THIS!**

**WHAT DO YOU REALLY WANT?** One of the steps to true humility when walking with God is to honestly come before Him with sober judgment. John Steinbeck wrote a book called *The Pearl*. It's the story of a poor pearl diver who dreams of finding the perfect pearl. One day he actually finds it. The rest of the story unfolds how his once tranquil life turns into a growing nightmare as everyone else desperately tries to take his treasure from him.

Every Christian would benefit from reading this powerful story; even though John Steinbeck wasn't a believer, he reveals that pursuing wealth is a trap for humanity, not just Christians!

What rationale do you use to make your decisions? Take a few minutes to consider your finances and plans regarding wealth. Consider how much - be honest! - have you prayed and sought God's wisdom and leading on these plans? Then consider and discuss how often this pattern emerges in your life (making plans about wealth without seeking God).

## PRAYER TIME

Are there any with financial needs in your small group? How can you pray for them?

Please pray for the finances of the church to continue to develop and grow to resource the growth that God is bringing?

Are you willing to pray for the God-given ability to *seek first His Kingdom and righteousness, and these things will be given to you as well?* (Matthew 6:33)

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## Sunday June 12 - AM: Duncan Brown; PM: Graham Wray

Study 9 - The Importance of Patience in Times of Suffering

### READ JAMES 5:7-12

There are some people who are experiencing a significantly difficult time right now. When in the middle of these times, maybe you don't find the "Footprints" poem all that helpful. It seems too cliché, and honestly, I never found it to be comforting because it never felt like Jesus was carrying me at the time (even though it was undoubtedly true). ***The insight / revelation of Jesus 'carrying us' often comes in hindsight, when we look back at these times; not while we're enduring them.***



People in the midst of the trials and temptations often ask, "Why is God allowing this to happen to me?" It can trigger a couple of assumptions:

1. If God is all-powerful but doesn't choose to end my suffering, that makes Him not all-loving.
2. If God is all-loving and yet my suffering doesn't end, God is therefore not all-powerful.

Atheist Sam Harris writes, *"If God exists, either He can do nothing to stop the most egregious calamities, or He does not care to."* He says that this makes God *"either impotent or evil"* ... but neither is true.

It's important to establish RIGHT THINKING in these times - that just because we can't imagine a good reason why God might allow something to happen doesn't mean there can't be one.

*"There's an assumption at the outset that if God has good reasons for allowing the suffering that He does, we should know what those reasons are. But why think that? I mean, if parents for instance were choosing to move city ... to the young child that might be the very worst thing that could possibly happen. It might be completely unfathomable why the parents would choose to do that and yet from our adult perspective we might be able to look in and say actually they had good reasons."* - Vince Vitale

## QUESTIONS

- James identifies that we must develop patience to endure through these times. Why is this important for the church today?
- You have probably heard of the person who cried out, "LORD! I want patience and I WANT IT NOW!" Contrast some of the ways that our culture encourages *impatience*.

- Patience is a fruit of the spirit. (Galatians 5:22) How does it come to fruition in our lives?
- James gives three examples of patient people: a farmer, the prophets and Job. How is each of these people an example of patience?
- Before reading and finding the answers, try thinking about and naming what people need from brothers and sisters in Christ when going through times of suffering. What would you say?

### **ACTIVATE THIS!**

How can the group DEMONSTRATE action from this study this week? This could be a realigning of heart and mind to God's ways (Romans 12:1-2) or a practical challenge, maybe:

- Be available - practice the ministry of presence.
- Listen - don't preach.
- Encourage - comfort from the life of Christ.
- Pray - for grace and mercy and strength.

### **PRAYER TIME**

- Are there any in your group who are going through times of suffering now? Pray over and bless these people using 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.
- Can you think of anyone at BRBC who is struggling with sickness, pain and infirmity? Pray that they may experience freedom and health.
- Who are the 'seasoned warriors' that you have been walking with and are speaking into your life? If you don't have that mature person around you, why not?
- Pray that God might provide someone to come alongside of you.

# Sunday June 19 AM/PM: Dan Lyons

## Study 10 - The Power of Prayer

### READ JAMES 5:13-20

In his book on James, Bill Hybels describes his distaste towards televangelist 'faith healers'. He describes the experience as a guy in a white suit who sweats profusely and uses a handkerchief to wave around and occasionally wipe his forehead (consequently waving his sweat on everyone), runs around on a stage in front of a packed stadium, and dancing with them before they fall on the ground. While he says that he cannot watch them on TV for very long, he says he experiences an inner conflict of doubt vs faith.

The doubt is about the central person on stage engaging in dramatics and showmanship. His inner conflict concerns the people in the stadium who are *real people*, with serious afflictions. These are the people who have run out of every other option and they have come to that stadium on a wing and a prayer. They are desperately looking for supernatural intervention to touch their bodies - often after praying for years. These people love God deeply and have prayed for healing again and again. They arrive to this travelling faith healer and are led to believe that if they have enough faith in God, they will receive their healing. Unfortunately, if God doesn't heal them at this encounter, they therefore mustn't have enough faith.

***To start this study, discuss whether this is what the Bible teaches about healing and faith.*** See Ephesians 2:8 and Romans 12:3-4  
How does Jesus heal people? See Luke 5:12-15. Does this differ from the methods of those mentioned by travelling faith healers?

## CONSIDER

Jim Cymbala in "Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire" talks about prayer as the source of the Christian life, like our lifeline to God. An unborn baby requires the umbilical cord attached to mum, which serves as a lifeline. As believers in comfortable Western churches, we cannot allow complacency within our spiritual lives. Pastors and churches have to get uncomfortable enough to say, "We are not New Testament Christians if we don't have a prayer life." Prayer must be at the core of our Christian life and our community life. It is not a magic pill we take when we are sick or in desperate need. Rather, prayer is a core, foundational part of who we are as believers and followers of Christ living in community. Prayer is our heartbeat; our lifeline!

## QUESTIONS

- What does James identify as motives for prayer? See also Philippians 4:4-7
- Describe one trouble (v13) you are facing in your life right now and explain how your small group can pray for you and support you as you walk through this struggle.
- Describe one thing in your life right now that is making you happy (v13). Celebrate these things as a group.
- What is one song or hymn you like to sing that helps you express your praise to God? How does this song help you express the joy that is in your heart?

## CONFESSION TIME

**Read 1 John 1:5-2:2**

Did James say to CONFESS YOUR SINS TO OTHER PEOPLE?! That's incredibly difficult for us to do! But confession helps us to avoid sin. Proverbs 28:13 says, "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy..." ***Nothing supports right living more than open truth.***

- What is your first impression / reaction when you read James' words, "Confess your sins to each other" (v16)?
- How can confession of sins and mutual prayer lead to healing?
- Why do we become fearful and resistant to confess our sins to each other and open the door for this level of accountability?
- Would you consider spending time confessing your sins to others in the group? It can be tough, but are you willing to have a go!?

### ACTIVATE THIS!

Prayer in song has been a primary way that the people of God have expressed their heartfelt worship for centuries. The Book of Psalms is a collection of songs that are essentially prayers, expressing the heights of joy, the depths of sorrow, and everything in between! This week will you commit to reading through a number of Psalms to help you express worship to God?

Would you describe Bracko as "a church that prays" or "a praying church"? ***A church that prays*** tends to open and close meetings and services with prayer and talks about prayer. ***A praying church*** spends significant time in prayer every time God's people gather.

BRBC leadership is committed to praying. What are some ways our church can become *a praying church* as opposed to *a church that prays*?

### PRAYER TIME

- Is there anyone among you who are sick? Pray for them for full healing in Jesus name.
- Is anyone downcast and deflated? Pray for them to receive the fullness of Jesus' joy!
- Pray for the members of your group, especially if you have completed a time of confession together! 1 John 1:5-2:2
- How can you also pray for BRBC in this regard?