

Living Faith

A Devotional Supplement for the Book of James

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Hummelstown PA**

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Introduction

How do you know that you are alive? If someone randomly walked up to you and asked you that question, it is certain you would look at them in a strange way. In all seriousness, how do you know that you are not dead? What about your health, how do you know that you are sick or healthy?

There is a one-word answer to these questions: symptoms. A beating heart is a great indication that you are alive. We all know when something is wrong with our bodies. Many can relate to the experience of a headache and know the symptoms of an oncoming flu. When something is wrong physically, we recognize that we need to do something to fix it. Often, if symptoms persist, medical advice is sought and a Doctor comes on the scene to help diagnose the true problem. In order to diagnose an illness, he begins with the vitals and checks our temperature, pulse, and throat, and then listens to our lungs and heart. Our body tells us when something is wrong and it is wise to listen and know the symptoms that pertain to our physical health.

Just as a Doctor performs a check-up to assess our physical health, it is important that you perform a check-up to ensure your spiritual health. How do you know that your faith is alive? There are symptoms that indicate your spiritual health. With this in mind, we will focus on the book of James and determine through it how healthy our faith is. Although we will not break down every verse in our study, we will pick out some nuggets in the doctrinal goldmine presented in James.

James abounds with doctrine and practical wisdom to grow us in our walk with the Lord. James contains simple commands that convict and lead to change.

Authors disagree on the theme of James. Admittedly, it is hard to choose one core, central theme for the book of James. However, the author's purpose is to encourage us to evaluate the legitimacy of our faith. For James, "faith" is central to the Christian life. The overall purpose developed in James allows the writer to encourage his readers to support with their lives, what

they said with their lips. As is evident from the first portion of the book, James desires that we not only have a professing faith, but a practical faith.

This study focuses on an examination of James with the goal of developing and strengthening an active and living faith in the lives of the readers. Throughout this book, you will be challenged to give yourself a spiritual checkup. Not only will you see signs of a living, vibrant & active faith; you will see warning symptoms of a weak, anemic and dying faith.

When you go to in for a physical check-up, the only way to have accurate results is to give your doctor honest answers. The same holds true in your spiritual life. If you lie to yourself regarding the status of your faith, you will not recognize the warning signs of areas in need of change. Determine as you read and study through James, that you will strive to have a living, healthy, and working faith.

James stresses the usefulness of our faith. A useful living faith is a functioning faith. This book's aim is to assist you as you read James. Please, DO NOT read this book without first reading the text from the book of James. The words of this writer are fallible; however, the Authority of scripture is without question.¹

You will notice that this is intended as a Bible study aid, assisting those who wish to study the Word of God and establish a consistent time in God's Word. This is not a work of theology, not is it a commentary.

¹ The Bible, comprised of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testament canon, is the Word of God. Every word of scripture is verbally (located in the words) inspired (I Cor. 2:13; 2 Samuel 23:2; 2 Peter 3:16; Mt. 5:18), as well as plenary (it extends to every part of the words) inspired (2 Tim. 3:16). Inspiration is the superintending work of the Holy Spirit over divinely appointed writers whereby God communicates His infallible written Word. The words of scripture were breathed out by God Himself (Mt. 4:4; 2 Tim. 3:16). The origin of these writings was not human but divine. The result is that God's Word is authoritative and without error (II Peter 1:20-21).

Overview

Author

James, the Lord's brother (Gal 1:19). Called "the Just," he was the oldest of the children born to Mary and Joseph (Mark 6:3), after the birth of Jesus. He was an Apostle (Gal 1:19). In the New Testament, James appears as a prominent and leading man in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 1:13-14, 12:17, 15:13, 21:17-19). Most commentators agree that James was the president of the church at Jerusalem (Matthew 13:55). Mention of James occurs with Peter and John as "pillars" in the church (Gal 2:9).

Arguments against other authorship

Several men named James appear in the Scriptures. Why are these men not the author of the text?

1. Dead men cannot write books. James, the son of Zebedee, suffered a martyr's death under Herod Agrippa I before the epistles writing (Acts 12:2).
2. James, the son of Alphaeus: Roman Catholics claim that James was Jesus' cousin through Mary of Alphaeus, the Virgin Mary's sister. This is an attempt to support the perpetual virginity of Mary. Children *were* born to Joseph and Mary after the virgin birth. However, Jesus was her "firstborn." Four of His brothers are names (Matthew 13:55).
3. James, the father of Judas did not figure as an important person in the early church. Moreover, since James was the president of the church at Jerusalem (Matthew 13:55), this rules him out.

Date and place of writing

First century historian Josephus, records the martyrdom of James by stoning in A.D. 62. Since dead men cannot write, James needs to have written the book before his death. No mention is made of the Jerusalem council in A.D. 49, of which James had an active role. Therefore, the

most common date of authorship is A.D. 45-48. Because of his position in Jerusalem, it is thought that this epistle was written in Jerusalem. His purpose was to expose hypocritical positions and to teach right Christian behavior.

Recipients

Written to Christian Jews scattered throughout the Roman Empire (*twelve tribes scattered abroad [Jms 1:1]*). They were Christian converts (2:1) of Jewish descent (1:1). This epistle does not focus on the unsaved, seen by the fact that James would have included arguments to prove that Jesus was the Messiah. The text itself contains internal evidence that addresses the contents to those regarded as Christians (2:1; 5:7, 11, 14). It is written from a Jewish standpoint putting Jewish law in its proper place.

Breakdown of this study

As you read this book, you will find the text of James included in this writing. Many of the verses in James fall into several categories. One can see the prominent theme of *faith* expressed throughout the book, however, *good works, little faith, and bad works* also dominate the make-up of the verses. Next to the text, you will see spaces so you can categorize the verses as you read them.

As you study, you will soon realize that the book of James contains many commands and gives an array of tests of our heart. It is these commands that make the book so convicting. The commands in these verses allow us to give ourselves tests that check-up on our spiritual health. Following the text you read, you will see areas allowing you to summarize each command, give the reference and then rate yourself on how you are doing in measuring up to the command. The back of the book contains a master sheet so you can transfer your answers to it. An example of this is in James 1:2: *I am to joyfully consider my trials as opportunities for God to perfect me further.*

Of course, following this personal study, one will find some commentary designed to direct you in a theological concept of even a practical application for you to consider. With each

week of study, you will find a verse that would be a benefit if memorized. The final pages in the chapter are reserved for your own comments and questions for group discussion.

A unique feature is the accountability chart that allows you to track your time in God's work and assist you in your growth. Fill it out honestly and find someone to whom you can remain accountable.

The commands that James gives are directed to YOU. They are to be read, studied, and understood, and they are to be lived.