

# **Third Millennium Ministries**

## **Application Guide**

A practical guide for leaders  
of groups studying our curriculum

### **The Epistle of James**

#### **Lesson One**

#### **Introduction to James**

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### **ABOUT THIRD MILLENNIUM MINISTRIES**

Founded in 1997, Third Millennium Ministries is a nonprofit Christian organization dedicated to providing **Biblical Education. For the World. For Free.** In response to the growing global need for sound, biblically-based Christian leadership training, we are building a user-friendly, donor-supported, multimedia seminary curriculum in five major languages (English, Spanish, Russian, Mandarin Chinese, and Arabic) and distributing it freely to those who need it most, primarily Christian leaders who have no access to, or cannot afford, traditional education. All lessons are written, designed, and produced in-house, and are similar in style and quality to those on the History Channel<sup>®</sup>. This unparalleled, cost-effective method for training Christian leaders has proven to be very effective throughout the world. We have won Telly Awards for outstanding video production in Education and Use of Animation, and our curriculum is currently used in more than 150 countries. Third Millennium materials take the form of DVD, print, Internet streaming, satellite television transmission, and radio and television broadcasts.

For more information about our ministry and to learn how you can get involved, please visit <http://thirdmill.org>.

## **What does this Leader's Guide offer?**

Our leader's guides provide practical suggestions for helping your students integrate IIMM curriculum into their lives. They begin with an overview and then give attention to each of the 2-4 main parts of each lesson. They offer three areas of concentration: 1) *Concepts to Review*, 2) *Applications to Personal Life*, and 3) *Applications to Ministry*. These three areas of concentration give leaders opportunities to reflect on the kinds of concepts, personal applications and ministry applications that their students need.

### *Concepts to Review*

Our lessons often have concepts that are unfamiliar or difficult to grasp. We provide samples of concepts that may need to be reviewed with students.

### *Applications to Personal Life*

Our lessons have many implications for the personal actions and attitudes of students. We provide sample discussion questions for class, assignments to be done outside of class and case studies that help leaders focus on the spiritual growth of their students and their families.

### *Applications to Ministry*

Our lessons have many implications for the skills students should have as they serve others. We provide sample discussion questions for class, assignments to be done outside of class and case studies that help leaders focus on ministering to others.

## The Epistle of James

### Application Guide for Lesson One: Introduction to James

*Objective:* This lesson enables the learner to faithfully interpret the book of James by providing insight into the authorship, original audience, occasion of the letter, and its structure and content. James called his audience to pursue wisdom from God so they would have joy in their trials. This application guide applies the lesson to your life and ministry.

1. **REFLECT** What stood out to you in this lesson, and why? Discuss this in your learning community.
  
2. **REVIEW** **The Wrong Perspective on Trials:** If you look at hardships and suffering ("trials" as James calls them) from the point of view of the world, you will see them as attacking your sense of worth and importance, as detracting from your quality of life. From the point of view of the world, trials are things to be eliminated and avoided at all cost. As a result of experiencing these trials, some of the recipients of this letter were beginning to turn away from the Lord and become friends with the world. They had been forced to leave their homes in Jerusalem and the surrounding area because of persecution. No doubt this was the source of many of their trials. [*Section: Wisdom and Joy (1:2-18)*]
  - a. **REFLECT** Unfortunately, they were looking for comfort in what I have called a "societal point system." Every society assigns implied points for things like appearance, job, income, house, neighborhood, abilities, likability, and so on. The society says, "If you are suffering hardships, you are losing points, and therefore you are losing value in the eyes of society. So do whatever you can to preserve the points you have and get more. Then you will be loved and respected by society." Of course, this point system is not usually written down in an official way. But members of the society know what the society values and what it doesn't value, and could probably construct a fairly accurate "point system." Subcultures within a given society might have slight differences from the wider culture in what they value. This is part of what the apostle Paul means when he warns us not to be conformed to the pattern of this world/age (Romans 12:2) because as God's kingdom comes, the form of this world is passing away and shown to be unworthy (1 Corinthians 7:31). Discuss this idea in your learning community.
  
  - b. **CASE STUDY** Isaiah predicted that the Messiah would not fit into his society's point system. He said, "He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Isaiah 53:2b-3). Indeed, "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him" (John 1:11). When the multitude saw him miraculously multiply bread and fish they wanted to take him by force and make him their king (John 6:15). But Jesus didn't come to give societal points or support frustrated egos. He wasn't trying to fit into the point system of the day. So when they kept following him after he left he said to them, "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you" (John 6:27). In other words, "Don't come to me looking for societal points. I have something better to give you." They wanted him to top what happened to their

ancestors in Moses' day when God gave them bread from heaven. Jesus said he was the real bread from heaven--the fulfillment of the manna incident so many years before. But they didn't understand because they weren't seeing any willingness to accommodate their desire for societal points. Finally, Jesus put it to them this way: "If you want what I have to offer you have to eat my body (paraphrase of John 6:51). They murmured among themselves no doubt wondering whether he was talking about cannibalism. Not seeing any societal points forthcoming, they were unhappy with his response. Jesus, knowing what they were murmuring about, didn't try to soften his words. In fact, he heightened their tension by saying, "And not only that, but you have to drink my blood" (John 6:53-58). After that, many of the outer group of disciples stopped following him (John 6:60-66). They realized he wasn't going to give them any societal points. There is a sense in which Jesus was put to death because he didn't hand out societal points. He challenged the spiritual leaders of his day and didn't admire the "spiritual points" they had accumulated. He wasn't in awe of the many political points Pilate had gained within the Roman society. He refused to become the kind of king the people wanted. So they rejected him and put him to death.

- c. **Act** Describe the implicit point system of the culture/society in which you live. You could focus on your nation, on your region, or your city. What would you have to own, what kind of person would you have to be, and what would you have to be able to do in order to be considered somebody important and valuable? Make a list of qualities, possessions or abilities valued by your society in one degree or another. Even though point systems aren't usually explicit with actual points assigned to them, assign each one of these a number from 0 to 100. The number 100 should be assigned to the things your society values most, and 0 to the things it values least. Someone who has average value on any given cultural value would have half the points that are considered optimum in that culture. If you know foreigners who live among you, it might be a good idea to get input from them. They might give you insight into what they see your society valuing. Your list might look something like

this one, based on some of the values of a country in Latin America:

Cultural Value	Cultural Priority (scale of 100)	Cultural Average	My Points
Well connected	100	50	
High income	95	47.5	
College education	70	35	
Light colored Skin and hair	75	37.5	
Roots in Europe	100	50	
Good Negotiator	96	48	
Managerial position	90	45	
Elite school for children	80	40	
Expensive car	90	45	
Outgoing personality	100	50	
Quiet and respectful	30	15	
Goal Oriented	60	30	

- d. **REFLECT** It isn't wrong to be assigned points by your culture. What is wrong is to find your worth in them. The apostle Paul said he had lots of social points (Philippians 3:3-11). But he counted them as rubbish in comparison with knowing Christ. He also said he no longer viewed people "according to the flesh" but from God's point of view (2 Corinthians 5:16). How would your society evaluate you when it comes to social points?
- e. **REFLECT** Think of the people in your society/culture who typically have the most points. How does having a lot of points typically affect them?
- f. **REFLECT** Think of the people in your society/culture who typically have the least points. How does having few societal points typically affect them?
- g. **ACT** Assign yourself the "points" that you think your society would assign you in each of these areas. In each case give some reason or reasons. Have each member of your learning community do this and then compare notes. Give each other feedback on it.
- h. **REFLECT** Discuss in your learning community the ways in which you have felt the pull and influence of this point system.
  - i. **REFLECT** Has it made you feel inferior? Explain.
  - ii. **REFLECT** Has it tempted you to give in to its demands? Explain.
  - iii. **REFLECT** Has it made you feel confident? Explain.

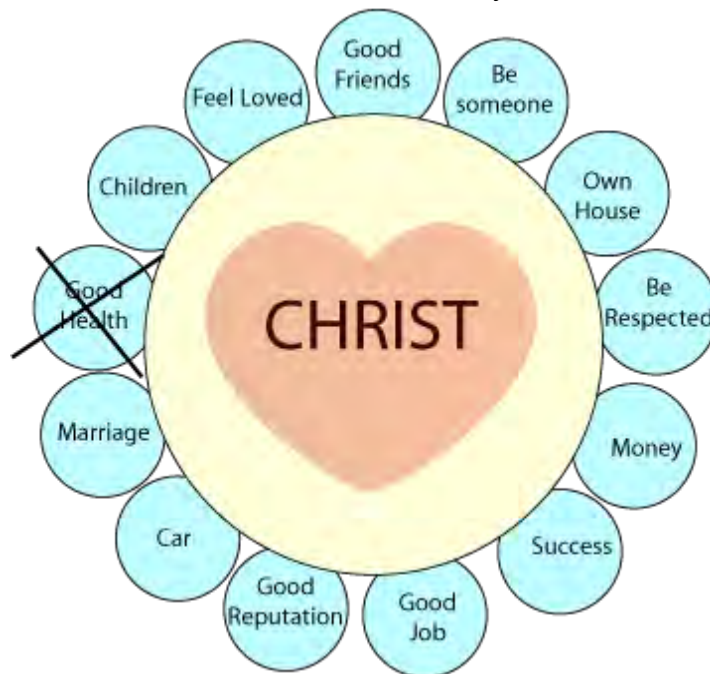
- i. **REFLECT** As you struggle against your societal point system, how do hardships, upsetting changes and suffering add to your struggle? Discuss this in your learning community. Give examples.
- j. **CASE STUDY** The apostle Paul used to evaluate others--even Jesus--according to the point system of his society. He says, "From now on, therefore, we regard no one *according to the flesh*. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:16-17). The phrase "according to the flesh" is very close to what I mean by a societal point system. When you evaluate the worth of people "according to the flesh," you take into account only who they are, what they have and what they can do apart from Christ who conquered sin, death and the evil one, and who united his people to himself to make them a new creation. Paul says that he himself used to be plugged into the spiritual point system of his day. He says, "For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:3-8). After listing all the things that his society would value about him--all his societal points--he says these mean nothing to him. What he values is being united to Christ.
- k. **CASE STUDY** Juanita considered herself a very good Christian. She had rightly rejected the idea that wealth, possessions, or social status could give someone value. She insisted that it was one's relationship with Christ that mattered. Without realizing it, however, she had come to find her worth and identity, not so much in Christ, but in her church membership and spiritual activity. She had been a member of the church longer than anyone else in the church. And whenever the congregation had to make an important decision, she reminded people just how important her perspective was, given that she had been a member so long. She had also memorized long portions of the Bible. And whenever she found herself in a theological discussion with other believers, she would quote long passages of Scripture to impress and intimidate people.
- l. **REFLECT** In the previous case study, discuss in your group whether Juanita's sense of worth was tied to Christ or to a point system.
- m. **REFLECT** To what extent does your church tie into the point system of your society? Give examples of how it does or doesn't.
- n. **REFLECT** Does your church have it's own "spiritual" or "religious" point system that may or may not overlap with the point system of your society? Elaborate.

- o. **REFLECT** What if the church successfully resisted the pull of the point system of its society and the temptation to have its own "spiritual" point system? What if the church had a counter-culture in which people were treated, not according to how many social or spiritual points they had but because they are a new creation in Christ? What would that look like?
3. **REVIEW** **The Right Perspective on Trials:** James asks the recipients of this letter (and us as well), to look at trials from a different perspective. Yes, they are painful, and yes they make us less acceptable and less important according to our society's point system. But on the other hand, they are "exercises" provided by God. I use this word "exercises" because Hebrews 12:11 ("those who have been *trained*" by it) refers to hardship and suffering as training from God--the kind of training an athlete would receive in order to excel at his sport. God is like an expert coach who trains us for excellence in his kingdom by giving us challenging opportunities to put our faith in him to work. We don't know what our faith can do until God gives us opportunities to put it to work. An athlete who gives up halfway through the sports event needs more training. God's training produces perseverance. It also makes us "mature and complete, not lacking anything." [Section: *Wisdom and Joy (1:2-18)*]
- a. **CASE STUDY** John Bunyan was a non-conformist pastor in England at a time when non-conformists were being persecuted by the government and the state church. He was in prison for 12 years as a result. He could have gone free had he agreed to go against his conscience, but he refused. In his own words, "If nothing will do unless I make of my conscience a continual butchery and slaughter-shop, unless, putting out my own eyes, I commit me to the blind to lead me, as I doubt not is desired by some, I have determined, the Almighty God being my help and shield, yet to suffer, if frail life might continue so long, even till the moss shall grow on mine eye-brows, rather than thus to violate my faith and principles" (Quoted by John Piper in *To Live Upon God that Is Invisible: Suffering and Service in the Life of John Bunyan*, 1999 Bethlehem Conference for Pastors, February 2, 1999). Even though Bunyan was not an educated man, and he was the pastor of a small church, the Lord has used him to influence many people, especially through his writings--including *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The suffering that Bunyan went through was used of the Lord to train him in such a way that he was able to have a ministry that was more influential for the kingdom that might be expected from a worldly point of view.
  - b. **REFLECT** What has been your typical view of "trials?"
    - i. **REFLECT** That God is somehow angry with you or not smiling on you?
    - ii. **REFLECT** That God is punishing you?
    - iii. **REFLECT** That you need this trial because you have somehow failed?
    - iv. **REFLECT** Something else?
    - v. **REFLECT** Remember that Job suffered just because he had been faithful (Job 2:3).



- c. **REFLECT** Have you ever participated in a sport? Can you identify with view of trials/discipline expressed in Hebrews that God is training you for greater effectiveness like a coach trains his team? Elaborate.
  - d. **REFLECT** When you look at your trials from James' perspective, how does it affect you?
    - i. **REFLECT** Does it change your thinking?
    - ii. **REFLECT** Does it make you feel any different?
    - iii. **REFLECT** Does it make you want to do something different?
    - iv. **REFLECT** Does it encourage you? Elaborate.
    - v. **REFLECT** Does it discourage you? Elaborate.
  - e. **REFLECT** Why do you think it is so difficult to maintain James' perspective on trials? Discuss this with your learning community.
  - f. **REFLECT** What do you think it would take for you to be able to maintain this perspective more consistently? Discuss this with your learning community.
  - g. **ACT** If you don't already keep a diary or journal, begin to do so. Every time you find yourself in a challenging opportunity from the Lord to exercise your faith, write down things like, (1) what is happening, (2) what feelings it has produced, (3) what it was that triggered those feelings, (4) how you see yourself responding, (5) the biblical truths that come to mind about who God is, what he has done, and what he promises to do, and (6) the implications for you if you were to act on the basis of these truths in the midst of this challenging exercise and not merely on the basis of how you feel or how your society says you should feel. This process can be a valuable part of making the most of the Lord's training.
4. **REVIEW** **The Joy of Accepting the True Purpose of Trials:** James says this training through trials is something to be joyful about because it makes us "mature and complete." [*Section: Wisdom and Joy (1:2-18)*]
- a. **CASE STUDY** My son works out regularly at a gym. He says the workouts are very challenging and tiring. But he keeps on going because he knows it is good for him and he wants the benefit of having a strong and fit body. He goes to the gym joyfully even though he knows it will be hard. I myself play racquetball, which can be very tiring. But I barely notice it because I'm enjoying myself so much. I'm sad when I have to miss this opportunity to run pretty much non-stop for an hour or more! Why? Because I know it is producing beneficial results, including a fit body, and a clear mind.
  - b. **REFLECT** Discuss the previous case study in light of the book of James.
  - c. **REFLECT** In your learning community discuss these questions among yourselves:
    - i. **REFLECT** "How important is it to me to be useful in God's kingdom?"

- ii. **REFLECT** Do I want it more than societal points?"
  - iii. **REFLECT** "Do I want it enough to undergo the necessary training?"
  - iv. **REFLECT** "Am I willing to give up what the world considers important in order to receive the training?" Another way to ask this is, "What/who do you really love?"
  - v. **REFLECT** "Am I joyful about what the challenges/trials in the Christian life are producing in me?" Give some examples of how you are or are not joyful.
- d. **REFLECT** There are many material and social blessings the Lord gives us that bring us joy. When any one of these is taken away for whatever reason (see the illustration below), our reaction shows the extent to which it had become more important than Christ. It is not wrong to struggle with such a situation. Even Jesus struggled and was extremely sad (but not fearful--he never sinned) in the Garden as he contemplated the horror that was before him. However, when anxiety, fear, defensiveness, anger, envy, self-pity or other sins control us--these kinds of reactions reveal the idolatry that is involved in making anything for all practical purposes more important than Christ. When we react as if Christ were not enough, or as if Christ were there to help us obtain what we really want (not him), we show that something other than Christ has become the most important thing in our heart. These reactions require repentance for having made something--maybe something that is legitimate in itself--practically more important than Christ. They require renewed faith in him. Discuss this as you look at the following illustrative diagram:



- e. **REFLECT** How do you typically react when any of these blessings (or others) is taken away for whatever reason?

- f. **REFLECT** What is the difference between being joyful when you get or have societal points and having joy in the Lord?
  - g. **REFLECT** What is the difference between being joyful about the material and social blessings the Lord gives us, and finding your sense of worth in them?
  - h. **REFLECT** Have you experienced this joy that is not the same as being joyful because you have societal points? Describe it as best you can. Discuss this with your learning community.
  - i. **REFLECT** When James says "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up" (James 4:8-10), what do you think "lift you up" means? Does it mean "give you societal points"? If not, then what does it mean?
  - j. **REFLECT** Reflect on the following statements with your learning community:
    - i. **REFLECT** Every time you worry, what you are saying in effect is something like this, "Lord, thank you for dying for me but it's not enough. Fix this situation that is making me worry, and then I'll be joyful and be able to serve you."
    - ii. **REFLECT** Every time you are consumed with anger what you are saying in effect is something like this, "Lord, thank you that you died for me, but it's not enough. Get that person to acknowledge he offended me and then I'll be joyful and able to love him."
    - iii. **REFLECT** Every time you are envious you are saying in effect, "Lord, thank you that you love me, but it's not enough. Give me what that other person has, and then I'll be content and joyful."
    - iv. **REFLECT** Insert any sin into this formula and you will see how from one perspective sin is in practice idolatry and a rejection of Christ.
  - k. **ACT** Ask 5 people who know you well if you are a joyful person. Ask them for their evidence. Write down the evidence they give you. If an impartial person were to read the evidence, would he or she conclude your joy is in having social points or in the Lord?
  - l. **ACT** Write up a one-page statement on how to distinguish the two (having joy that depends on societal points and having true joy, which may include material blessings from the Lord).
  - m. **ACT** Ask a willing unbeliever or two to read your one page statement and give you his or her feedback. Of course, they don't have the spiritual discernment to really understand what you are saying. But their feedback can still be instructive. Go through the same process with a few believers. Then modify your statement, if necessary, to make it clearer and more pointed.
5. **REVIEW** **Asking for Wisdom to Understand Trials Correctly:** James says that if you don't have enough wisdom to be able to see your trials from God's training perspective, you should ask him for that wisdom. He will gladly give it to you. James adds that if after asking you don't

receive it, it's not because God isn't willing to give it to you but because you don't really want it that badly. In terms of our discussion above, you are torn between wanting societal points and wanting to be trained for usefulness in God's kingdom. James says, "But 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" James 1:6. [Section: *Wisdom and Joy (1:2-18)*]

- a. **CASE STUDY** The life and ministry of David Brainerd (born in 1718) show us that God can equally bless through pleasant circumstances challenging circumstances. David Brainerd suffered greatly in his life, but the Lord also blessed him greatly in a way that might not be impressive to the world, but which the Lord has used to extend his kingdom. Here are some of his challenging circumstances:

(1) Brainerd struggled with health issues and died of tuberculosis at the age of 29. (2) He was expelled from Yale (he was in his third year preparing for the ministry) because he was overheard making negative remarks about one of the teachers who had a negative attitude toward those students who liked what was happening in the Great Awakening. (3) Because he was expelled, and because the local presbyteries would only ordain people who had graduated from Yale (or Harvard or a European university), he had to give up his dream of becoming an ordained minister. (4) He decided to become a missionary to the Indians, whom he struggled to love, and among whom he found it challenging to live because of the physical hardships. (5) He had a strong tendency toward depression and often saw his ministry and unfruitful and his spiritual condition as poor. (6) He struggled with loneliness. (7) After he had become a missionary he received opportunities to become a pastor in a more comfortable situation. But in spite of the hardships of his missionary life, he felt this was his call and kept on as a missionary to the Indians until his early death.

On the other hand, the Lord has used David Brainerd wonderfully to advance the cause of his kingdom and to exalt his own name: (1) Brainerd has provided an example to many of faithfulness in the midst of difficult and unpleasant circumstances. (2) Brainerd had an unswerving allegiance to the cause of Christ and his Kingdom, and to his own personal holiness. (3) Brainerd spent hours in prayer and fasting seeking for strength to press on. (4) Probably several hundred Indians came to faith as a result of his ministry, (5) Princeton was founded as a result of his expulsion from Yale. (6) Jonathan Edwards wrote a book about Brainerd, which has influenced many, many people for good.

His life is a good example of Paul's statement that God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. The Lord used him greatly in the spread of his kingdom, primarily through his suffering.

- b. **REFLECT** Is it necessarily wrong to ask for alleviation of the pain or hardship? Paul pleaded with God for alleviation in 2 Corinthians 12:1-10. But God said no, and it was more important for Paul to have Christ's power resting upon him than to have the hardship taken away. Discuss this in your learning community.

- c. **REFLECT** When *you* pray in the midst of trials, are you primarily asking for God to take away the hardship, or for wisdom to see things from God's perspective? Discuss this in your learning community.
- d. **ACT** While it's not wrong to ask for alleviation, you have to wonder what is going on when the vast majority of prayers that you hear in many churches are simply for alleviation of hardship. The next time you attend a prayer meeting in your church, take note of how many prayers ask for alleviation of some hardship, and how many ask for wisdom to see the hardship from God's perspective so as to benefit from it. That may give you some insight into how much wisdom your church has. Wisdom can't be measured simply by how much you *know* about the Bible and/or about life.
- e. **ACT** Prepare a sermon or a class on this subject to help your congregation or some group within it mature in this regard.
- i. **ACT** Preach or teach it.
  - ii. **ACT** Then visit about 10 of the people who heard it and get their feedback.
  - iii. **ACT** Did they understand? Is it going to affect their practice and emotions?
  - iv. **ACT** Did they experience the truth of the teaching through your attitude during your visit?
  - v. **ACT** Do you need to modify your teaching or attitude to make the point clearer?
- f. **ACT** Check the wisdom temperature of your church regularly by listening in on prayer meetings.
- g. **ACT** Counsel someone in your church who is undergoing hardship using this and other passages while demonstrating God's wisdom in your manner. Monitor their growth in wisdom.
- h. **CASE STUDY** Enrique was the pastor of a church of about 100 members in Latin America. For a number of months he was going through various trials that made him feel bad about himself. But didn't tell the leaders of his church--much less anyone else in his church--because he was afraid they would think the trials were an indication of his not being spiritual, of not being blessed by God. He prayed that the Lord would bless him, but his trials didn't go away. After many months of this he was getting discouraged. But to cover it up--to others and maybe even to himself--he preached all the more passionately about God's blessing to those who obey. The church actually grew in number as a result. Seeing the growth made him feel better about himself and he thought the Lord was blessing him in answer to his prayers. He continued to refine his preaching tactics--more passion, and more condemnation of sub-spiritual believers. And more people came to hear him. He increasingly lost touch with the message of James about the normal purpose of trials in our life. He began to find his sense of worth in the large numbers that were coming to the church instead of in Christ. After a few years his success went to his head. He fell into an

adulterous relationship but hid it from the church. He continued to have large numbers in his church.

- i. **REFLECT** In the previous case study, discuss the importance of understanding how the Lord blesses us *through* trials.
  - j. **REFLECT** How has the Lord blessed and equipped you *through* trials?
6. **REVIEW** If you are wise you will not only listen to God's Word, but you will also put it into action. [Section: *Action (1:19-27)*]
- a. **CASE STUDY** Alex was a very good student in seminary. In fact, he graduated at the top of his class and was asked to give a talk at his graduation ceremony. He also passed his presbytery exams with ease and impressed the presbytery with his knowledge. However, after three years of ministry as an associate pastor in a large church, people began to notice that Alex, while he knew a lot intellectually, didn't seem to be seeing and acting on the implications of that knowledge for daily life and ministry. Alex also began to realize this, and did his best to cover up his weakness in this area.
  - b. **REFLECT** Discuss the previous case study with your learning community.
    - i. **REFLECT** Do you know Christians who are good at the academic part--know a lot about the Bible--but whose character and actions are not guided so much by that knowledge as by the values and priorities of the culture and their personality strengths? Elaborate.
    - ii. **REFLECT** Why do you think people often struggle to put into practice what they know about the Bible?
    - iii. **REFLECT** Do you struggle with putting what you know about the Bible into practice? Elaborate.
    - iv. **ACT** Ask someone who knows you well and who will be honest with you to give his or her perspective on the areas in which you need some work in putting your knowledge of the Bible into practice.
    - v. **ACT** Ask the Lord to help you put your knowledge of the Bible into practice in an increasing measure.
    - vi. **ACT** Help the people of your church not be content with knowledge. If you preach and teach, include applications in your sermon. What do you want them to do on the basis of the truths you are teaching and preaching. Whenever you teach or preach, imagine someone sitting in the back with a raised hand asking, "What do you want me to do?"
7. **REVIEW** Neglecting the poor in favor of the rich is a failure to love your neighbor as yourself. [Section: *Favoritism (2:1-13)*]

- a. **CASE STUDY** Miriam liked to invite people from her church over for lunch after church. After hearing a sermon on James 2:1-13, she realized that she was mostly inviting people who had some kind of status in society. She invited people who were looked up to. Not people who were looked down upon. She determined to invite all kinds of people.
  - b. **CASE STUDY** Ernest, a missionary to Latin America decided to live in the same neighborhood as the people to whom he was ministering to plant a new church. It was a poor neighborhood, and he had never lived in such a poor area. But he thought it was important to identify with the people he was ministering to. Another missionary, from a different denomination, lived on the wealthy side of town but ministered in the same poor neighborhood as the other missionary. Many years later, someone from the area said to Ernest, "The main reason this church has grown is due to your decision to live with us."
  - c. **REFLECT** Discuss the previous case studies with your learning community.
    - i. **REFLECT** What is it that makes some people seem more important or more desirable as friends than others? Connect this with your "societal point system."
    - ii. **REFLECT** How do the "important" people (those with more societal points) and the "less important" (those with less societal points) people in your church get along with each other? Elaborate with evidence.
    - iii. **REFLECT** Do you invite and get to know both types of people in your church? Elaborate with examples.
    - iv. **ACT** Invite someone from your church who would be considered by society as "less important" to your home for a meal. Treat them with dignity and see what you can learn from them. Afterward, reflect on your experience. What have you learned about yourself, about God, and about the mission of the church?
8. **REVIEW** True faith produces deeds. [*Section: Faith (2:14-26)*]
- a. **CASE STUDY** Tom and Jane brought up their children teaching them the truth of God's Word. They had family devotions almost every day. They taught their children the catechism of their church. However, the actions of Tom and Jane in daily life--especially as the related to each other--were not consistent with what they taught their children. As a result, the children grew up assuming that being a Christian was about believing the right things, and that this had not implications for action. The children were taught how to act by their peers in school. Their actions were consistent with the values of the culture, but not with those of the Bible.
  - b. **REFLECT** Discuss the previous case study with your learning community.
    - i. **REFLECT** Do you know parents who say one thing but do another? Elaborate.

- ii. **REFLECT** Do you strive for consistency between what you say you believe and what you do? Elaborate with examples.
    - iii. **ACT** Ask someone who knows you well and who will be lovingly honest with you if they see areas in your life in which what you say you believe is not consistent with your actions. Pray about these things and ask the Lord to give you greater consistency.
9. **REVIEW** To live in peace and avoid conflict, we must control our tongues. [*Section: The Tongue (3:1-12 and 4:11-12)*]
- a. **CASE STUDY** When the women of First Church met together, they often ended up talking about and complaining about their husbands. They did this in subtle ways so as to give the appearance of godliness. Often the criticisms were hidden in prayer requests and displays of spiritual concern.
  - b. **REFLECT** Discuss the previous case study with your learning community.
    - i. **REFLECT** Do you talk negatively about other people when they are not present? Elaborate.
    - ii. **REFLECT** If you do, how do you justify it to yourself?
    - iii. **ACT** If you have something negative to say about someone, say it to their face, and not to other people. Talk to the Lord about it, and not to others.
10. **REVIEW** You can tell the difference between heavenly wisdom and earthly wisdom by the fruit that is produced by each. [*Section: Two Kinds of Wisdom (3:13-18)*]
- a. **CASE STUDY** Miriam was a Christian who found herself feeling sad when her friends prospered, and secretly happy when they failed. This made her feel better about herself. She wanted to be more important than they, and not the other way around. She wanted them to look up to her, and not the other way around.
  - b. **CASE STUDY** When pastor Manuel talked, people listened. He was tall, handsome and had a deep voice. In addition, he had a way with words that seemed to make people look up to him. He seemed to be wise. However, his family was a mess. His children were all rebellious and he and his wife were constantly fighting with each other. Some people, seeing this, concluded that he was not wise after all.
  - c. **REFLECT** Discuss the previous case study with your learning community.
    - i. **REFLECT** One definition of envy and selfish ambition is expressed clearly by Miriam's attitude. Do you know people who are sad when others prosper (get more societal points) and secretly happy when they fail (lose societal points)? Do you know people who need to be seen as more important (having more societal points) than others? Elaborate.
    - ii. **REFLECT** Do you find this tendency to envy and selfish ambition in yourself? Elaborate.



- iii. **REFLECT** The apostle Paul says to believers, "Everything is yours" (1 Corinthians 3:21-22). Read these verses and talk about what that means to you. Who can be worried about societal points when sooner or later, everything belongs to God's people? We will inherit the earth.
  - iv. **REFLECT** Think of some people you consider to be wise. What is the *fruit* of their life? Are they wise according to James?
  - v. **ACT** Make a list of the things the Lord has done for you and has promised you. Isn't this importance enough? Repent, if necessary, for having envy and selfish ambition when the Lord has given you everything.
11. **REVIEW** James traced strife among Christians to selfish desires, wrong motives, and discontent. When people are ruled by their wants and by a societal point system, they produce strife with others. [Section: *Inward Conflict (4:1-12)*]
- a. **CASE STUDY** Roy was a leader in his church. He was also the CEO of a large corporation. He was known as a man who got things done. He usually got what he wanted, but many people felt trampled and hurt as a result. He justified this in the name of the progress of the kingdom--getting things done.
  - b. **CASE STUDY** Adam was a Christian but was addicted to pornography. He was hiding this from everyone, including his wife. He said he had work to do. This consumed much of his time and his wife often complained that he didn't spend much time with her.
  - c. **REFLECT** Discuss the previous case studies with your learning community.
    - i. **REFLECT** Do you know people like Roy or Adam? Without naming names, elaborate on what they are like.
    - ii. **REFLECT** Are there any ways in which you are like Roy or Adam? In other words, do your wants dominate you in such a way that you are unable to be a blessing to others? Are you so concerned about societal points that you are wrapped up in yourself and find it difficult to reach out in blessing to others? Elaborate with examples.
    - iii. **REFLECT** Is there someone with whom you have strife? What have you done about it?
    - iv. **REFLECT** Again, the apostle Paul says to believers, "Everything is yours" (1 Corinthians 3:21-22). Read these verses and talk about what that means to you. James say if there is something you don't have it's because you haven't asked for it, or because you have asked selfishly. The heavenly Father is ready to bless you abundantly, both now and for eternity. Since that is true, what reason can there be for strife?
    - v. **ACT** Pray about and try to resolve any strife you have with anyone remembering who God is and what he has done.

- vi. **ACT** If you are in a position to do so, help those you know who are in strife with each other.
  - vii. **ACT** The next time you feel tempted by selfish desires, resist the devil. Do this by turning away from the temptation, and by asking the Lord to help you resist. If possible, ask out loud. The Lord will help you. Even if you just open the door a crack, he will come in.
12. **REVIEW** Only God controls the future and those who are wise will not try to create their own kingdom and glorious future in their own way or in their own strength. [*Section: Making Plans and Hoarding Wealth (4:13-17 and 5:1-6)*]
- a. **CASE STUDY** Continuing the previous case study, Roy was always implying how important he was, how much wisdom he had, how wealthy he was, and how much power he had. He saw a bright future before him. However, in 2008 his company lost a lot of money. He pretty much lost everything he had worked so hard for. Suddenly he wasn't the confident man he usually was. In fact, he was depressed, and some thought he might be suicidal.
  - b. **REFLECT** Discuss the previous case study with your learning community.
    - i. **REFLECT** When someone loses societal points and becomes depressed or angry or anxious as a result, what might that say about their hope of glory?
    - ii. **REFLECT** Have you reacted when you have lost something important to you (societal points)? Have you lost hope? Elaborate.
    - iii. **REFLECT** Are you working to build your kingdom or God's? Elaborate with evidence.
    - iv. **REFLECT** Does trusting the Lord for the future mean it's OK to be careless about your job or your life? Elaborate.
    - v. **REFLECT** What's the difference between being responsible about the future and trying to control it to secure your well-being? What would be the evidence of each?
    - vi. **REFLECT** Some personality types focus on getting things done and other personality types focus on adapting to things as they happen. When these are Christians, the former often say they are building God's kingdom. The latter often say they are waiting on the Lord and his wisdom.
      - 1. **REFLECT** How might these two personality types be useful in God's kingdom?
      - 2. **REFLECT** How might the strengths of these two types be distorted by sin?
  - c. **ACT** Examine yourself and ask the Lord to reveal to you if your energies are focused on building your own kingdom or God's. If you lost your job, or something else, for

example, how would you react? To what extent is your sense of worth tied up in your position, belongings, being liked by other people, being recognized by other people, your education, etc.?

- d. **ACT** Ask someone you trust to tell you the truth in a loving way what they see in this regard. Listen carefully and pray about it. Consider what changes you might need to make in your lifestyle and habits.

13. **REVIEW** Our glory is in the future. So be patient. Wait for it as a farmer waits for the fruit of what he has planted. The level of recognition, possessions, being liked, and other kinds of glory that you experience in this life (how many societal points you have) is all part of God's plan to train you and give you opportunities to serve. But your glory is not found in societal points. But your glory is coming. So be patient as you endure oppression, misunderstanding, and ridicule. [Section: *Be Patient (5:7-12)*]

- a. **CASE STUDY** For much of his life, Kevin was concerned about being recognized as a Christian for his gifts. He wanted to be a famous Christian so he could be more useful. One day he heard a sermon about having God's power in weakness and having the treasure of the gospel in jars of clay. He came to the conclusion that being a famous Christian or an unknown Christian is really irrelevant in God's kingdom. Some Christians are like undercover spies. On the one hand wherever they go, there goes the power of the kingdom and the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, those who aren't famous are working "under the radar" of the world's value system as it were. Isaiah said that the Messiah himself would be considered to be a nobody according to the standards of the world.
- b. **CASE STUDY** Jared and Peter were two pastors in the same denomination. Jared was a famous pastor/preacher and was often asked to speak at other churches and large conferences. His church was large and had a number of pastors on staff, which enabled him to accept these requests to speak. He had written several books that sold well on Amazon.com. Peter was the pastor of a small church. He had written a number of articles that he used to help the people of his church. Peter and Jared knew each other but not very well since they didn't walk in the same circles.
- c. **REFLECT** Discuss the previous case studies with your learning community.
- i. **REFLECT** Do you think that in the new world Jared will necessarily receive more rewards than Peter? Elaborate on your answer.
- ii. **REFLECT** Are you willing to go unrecognized or even ridiculed in this life if that is God's will for you, knowing that glory awaits you in the next? Do you struggle with being willing? Elaborate.
- iii. **REFLECT** There is a parallel between (1) spending nine months in your mother's womb and then emerging into a new and more glorious existence, and (2) living this life and then emerging into eternal life at the second coming of Christ. In fact, I suspect that the former is a shadowy pointer to the latter. Can you imagine a baby in the womb (if they could think this way) valuing his/her life in the womb more than the coming life in the world? In what ways

do you find yourself valuing life in this world more than life in the world to come?

- iv. **REFLECT** There is a sense in which we are now in the caterpillar stage of life. Who would want to stay as a caterpillar when there is a butterfly stage up ahead. There is a sense in which sin is living as if the caterpillar stage of life were more important.
  - v. **REFLECT** Are you willing to be patient for the coming glory or are you spending your energies now on getting and maintaining some kind of glory (recognition, wealth, power, relationships--that is, societal points)? Elaborate with examples.
  - vi. **REFLECT** Do you think we will be surprised at how the Lord hands out rewards in the new world? Elaborate.
  - vii. **ACT** Don't act as someone who is grasping after glory. Remember that glory is yours. Be patient and faithful with the work the Lord has given you to do.
- d. **CASE STUDY** Judy had the habit of finding someone to blame (usually not herself) whenever anything went wrong in her life. She was a grumbler because her happiness depended on things going the way she wanted.
- e. **REFLECT** Discuss the previous case study with your learning community.
- i. **REFLECT** Do you know people like Judy? Without naming names, elaborate on what that is like and how it makes you feel?
  - ii. **REFLECT** Do you find yourself blaming people for things that go wrong in your life? Elaborate.
  - iii. **REFLECT** Are you willing to give up the glory of having societal points knowing that your glory is coming? If you are, does that help you refrain from grumbling about other people? Elaborate.
  - iv. **ACT** The next time you feel like grumbling about someone who has made life difficult for you, remember that your glory is coming and stop grumbling.

14. **REVIEW** James expects you and me to draw near to God in prayer seeking wisdom for every situation, whether we are joyful or in trouble. [*Section: Wisdom and Prayer (5:13-18)*]

- a. **CASE STUDY** Mike was a missionary in a poor section of town. The medical care for the poor was very bad. Basically you got a pain shot unless you were about to die. As one of the few people who had a car, Mike found himself taking the people of his congregation to the emergency room for their "pain-shot" kind of care. As he saw what was happening, he got frustrated. "It isn't fair," he said to his wife. One day Mike was reading James' comments on the church leadership praying for the sick. He talked to the church leaders about it and they finally decided to tell the people they were going to follow these instructions in God's Word. Mike wasn't proud of the fact that he was actually surprised that people were being healed. The people

themselves weren't surprised. Their level of faith in this area seemed to be greater than that of Mike.

- b. **CASE STUDY** Almost any loss of societal points resulted in Amy doing one of the following: worrying, grumbling about what others had or had not done, getting angry. On one of these occasions, one of her close friends began singing to her an old chorus that includes the line, "Why worry when you can pray?"
  - c. **REFLECT** Discuss the previous case studies with your learning community.
    - i. **REFLECT** Does your church make a habit of praying for the sick? Why or why not?
    - ii. **REFLECT** How often do you seek God's wisdom in prayer as you face a problem in order to combat worry, grumbling and anger? Does it work? Elaborate with examples.
    - iii. **REFLECT** To the extent that Christians don't pray it probably means they are relying on their own wisdom. What do you think about that?
    - iv. **ACT** Repent, if necessary, of relying on your own wisdom instead of seeking the Lord's wisdom in prayer.
    - v. **ACT** Repent, if necessary, of allowing worry, grumbling and anger to dominate your life.
    - vi. **ACT** Get in the habit of praying every day. In addition to having a specific time of prayer daily, get in the habit of praying about everything as you go about your daily activities.
15. **REFLECT** List and discuss any other personal or ministerial applications that come to your mind. What can you do to put those into practice?