

The Implanted Word

James



**8 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR
SMALL GROUPS & INDIVIDUALS**

The Implanted Word

James

by Phillip D. Jensen

&

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matthiasmedia

The Implanted Word

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Matthias Media

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Zondervan Publishers.

ISBN 1 875245 36 7

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Cover design and typesetting by Lankshear Design Pty Ltd.

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How to make the most of these studies

1. What is an Interactive Bible Study?

These ‘interactive’ Bible studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city. The studies will take you through James’ letter, pointing out things along the way, filling in background details, and suggesting avenues for further exploration. But there is also time for you to do some sightseeing of your own—to wander off, have a good look for yourself, and form your own conclusions.

In other words, we have designed these studies to fall halfway between a sermon and a set of unadorned Bible study questions. We want to provide stimulation and input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do a lot of the exploration and discovery yourself.

We hope that these studies will stimulate lots of ‘interaction’—interaction with the Bible, with the things we’ve written, with your own current thoughts and attitudes, with other people as you discuss them, and with God as you talk to him about it all.

2. The format

Each study contains sections of text to introduce, summarize, suggest and provoke. We’ve left plenty of room in the margins for you to jot comments and questions as you read. Interspersed throughout the text are two types of ‘interaction’, each with their own symbol:



Investigate

Questions to help you investigate key parts of the Bible.



Think it through

Questions to help you think through the implications of your discoveries and write down your own thoughts and reactions.

When you come to one of these symbols, you'll know that it's time to do some work of your own.

3. Suggestions for individual study

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to what he is saying in James and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it. You may be spurred to pray again at the end of the study.
- Work through the study, following the directions as you go. Write in the spaces provided.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the *Think it through* sections. It is important to think about the sections of text (rather than just accepting them as true) and to ponder the implications for your life. Writing these things down is a very valuable way to get your thoughts working.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you've learnt.

4. Suggestions for group study

- Much of the above applies to group study as well. The studies are suitable for structured Bible study or cell groups, as well as for more informal pairs and threesomes. Get together with a friend/s and work through them at your own pace. You don't need the formal structure of a 'group' to gain maximum benefit.
- It is *vital* that group members work through the study themselves *before* the group meets. The group discussion can take place comfortably in an hour (depending on how side-tracked you get!), but only if all the members have done the work and are familiar with the material.
- Spend most of the group time discussing the 'interactive' sections—*Investigate* and *Think it through*. Reading all the text together will take too long and should be unnecessary if the group members have done their preparation. You may wish to underline and read aloud particular paragraphs or sections of text that you think are important.
- The role of the group leader is to direct the course of the discussion and to try to draw the threads together at the end. This will mean a little extra preparation—underlining important sections of text to emphasize, working out which questions are worth concentrating on, and being sure of the main thrust of the study. Leaders will also probably want to work out approximately how long they'd like to spend on each part.
- We haven't included an 'answer guide' to the questions in the studies. This is a deliberate move. We want to give you a guided tour of James, not a lecture. There is more than enough in the text we have written and the questions we have asked to point you in what we think is the right direction. The rest is up to you.

Important: We recommend that each group member make an effort to read the whole of James before meeting. Study 1 will take too long to do in a group if you read the whole letter as well as answer the questions.

1

A first look at James

Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.
(Jas 4:4)

Strong words from James! No complicated theoretical arguments here—James gets right to the point and tells us what to do. This is what most people love about James. The advice it gives on behaviour is easy to understand and speaks directly to everyday life. The practical issues could keep you discussing for hours. You want to live a Christian life? This is how you do it.

There is a lot more to James, however, than snippets of good advice. When you read James for the first time (or even the twentieth) it can seem very disjointed. Lots of sensible suggestions, you might think, but what holds them together? Does anything? Or is this just a general collection of wise sayings?

There is a basic theme that holds the whole of James together, and we hope that this will become clear as you work through these studies. James was not just writing a little handbook of sayings. He was applying God's wisdom to common difficulties in Christian living. James teaches that true knowledge of God is much more than knowing things about God, for if you do not put your knowledge into action, you do not really know God at all.

James is tremendously encouraging to study, for it challenges us to rethink our commitment to being Christian. We hope that James will spur on your Christian life, as God reveals his way to you.

What are the main themes?

First of all we need to get a feel for the *kind* of book we're studying. Having a better appreciation of the biblical background to the book, its original readership and its author, will help us understand the particular statements when we get to them.



Investigate

To begin, read through the whole of James.

1. Fill in this table:

CHAPTER	THEME	KEY WORDS
1	Joy in suffering	trials, persevere
2		
3		
4		
5		

2. Is there a main idea that you think dominates the letter?

Answer the following questions by skimming back through the whole book. (If you have a group of more than ten people, you could break into five groups of two and have each group read one chapter.)

3. What elements of the gospel can you find? For instance, what references are there to:

- Jesus?
- God's Election?
- Salvation by the Word?
- Responses to salvation – faith?
– humility?
- Preservation and endurance of Christians?
- Final consequences?

4. What was happening in the church to which James was writing? (For example, 4:1 indicates they were fighting.)

This letter has often been described as having a ‘Jewish’ flavour. Indeed, you may have noticed as you read through James that there is not much mention of Jesus, the gospel, the cross and other Christian ideas we may expect. The Christian theology, however, is definitely there. The letter concentrates mostly on the practical outworking of that theology; but as James reminds us, real theology *requires* practical outworking.

Who was James? There are probably five different men called James in the New Testament. Three were apostles (the son of Zebedee, the son of Alphaeus and the brother of Jesus); there is also the brother of Jude mentioned in Jude 1; and the father of the apostle Judas (not Iscariot). We do not know which one wrote the letter James. The good news is, we can still understand God’s word regardless of whether we have this outside knowledge. We know from the book in front of us that James is a Christian, a servant of God and Christ (1:1) and a teacher (3:1). That is all we need to know about him.

Some people have difficulties with James. Some common difficulties are:

- there seems to be no structure, no common thread holding the ideas together;
- what James says about faith and works seems to be different from what Paul says (for instance in Rom 1-3);
- what does it mean when it talks about healing by prayer?

We will be tackling these problems as we work through the letter, section by section.

We could probably sum up the book with James’ command in 1:21-22: “... humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the word ... do what it says”. We have here a letter written to people who were struggling under the pressures of living in a fallen world; and the answer is humbly accepting God’s wisdom found in God’s word. James reinforces this message with many practical examples which will hit us hard. When we we read it carefully, we will see it is not such a hotch-potch of wise sayings after all, but a firm challenge to live by the divinely implanted word in the trials and difficulties of the real world.