**James - Faith for Living
“Proverbs of the New Testament”**

**A Sure Sign of Life**
          The book of James, controversial because of its emphasis on “good works,” is perhaps best understood through the analogy of motion. In both the physical realm as well as the spiritual realm, where there is life there will be motion.
          When a person becomes a Christian, new life begins, and inevitably that life must express itself through “spiritual motion,” or good deeds. In James' words, “What good is it ... if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds?” (2:14)
          Movement does not cause life, but it does inevitably follow life. It is a sure sign that life is present. Similarly, genuine faith in Christ should always result in actions that demonstrate faith.

**Does James Contradict Paul?**
          James is not writing about how to become a Christian, but rather how to act like one. Having all the correct beliefs about God will hardly suffice: even demons believe in God. Real, life-giving faith should produce motion, and James minces no words in describing the specific spiritual actions expected of Christians.
          Christian thinkers, notably Martin Luther, have struggled to reconcile the message of James with that of Paul, who so firmly warned against slavish legalism. But Paul never belittled holy living. When he wrote to carousers, such as his letter to the Corinthians, he railed against immorality as strongly as James.
          Evidently, James' readers were not even flirting with legalism. They lived at the other extreme, ignoring the laws that God had clearly revealed. James had a simple remedy: "Do not merely listen to the word .... Do what it says." (1:22)

**Straight to the Point**
          Unlike the apostle Paul, James was no urbane man of letters. He was a simple, homespun preacher, perturbed at people who were not living right. His letter covers a wide range of topics, applying the Christian faith to specific problems, and commanding readers to live out their beliefs.
          Be humble! James orders. Submit to God! Stop sinning! James is as forthright as an Old Testament prophet; it is hard to miss his point.
          Modern readers of James face the same dilemma as the first recipients of this unsettling letter. His words are easy enough to understand, but are we doing as he says? What kind of motion characterizes our spiritual lives? As Luther himself said, "You are saved by faith alone, but if faith is alone, it is not faith."
          As leader of the headquarters church in Jerusalem, James knew how to speak with authority. You don't have to look for hidden meanings in this book. James tells you clearly how you should act in 54 direct commands. Note that many of these have parallels to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. As you study these verses, keep in mind the diverse audience he was addressing which included the rich and the poor. Note, too, his "asides" to specific groups.

**Leading a Bible Study of James**
          If you plan to lead a group in studying James, I recommend you look over the handout and scripture verses, and allow yourself some time to delve into the leader’s guide.
          I’ve found with my groups that each lesson or discussion takes about 45 minutes to go through. I’ve also found that people can get passionately involved in these lessons and they can easily run much longer if the leader doesn’t keep things moving along. For most of the lessons, there is a supplemental sheet of questions for discussion in small groups. (My main group is fairly large, about 25 men, and we break up after the main lesson into small groups of 3 to 5 men each.)
          You’ll find that many of the questions are designed to be a springboard to further discussion and there is often no truly right or wrong answer. If you have questions or comments, please use the “Send Mail” button on the menu below. I guarantee that I will read your comments, however, as this web site gets more than 3,000 visitors per day, I can’t possibly answer every one.
          In response to your requests, **these studies are in Adobe PDF format,** so they can easily be printed out. The first file is the handout for the group which also includes supplementary questions for small group discussion. The Leader’s Guides (3-4 pages) have answers to the questions and related scripture verses, generally NIV. If you cannot read PDF files, click to [download Adobe Reader.](http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html) Please note that the studies below are minor revisions to those the original studies on James that I posted in 2003.

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