



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Real Life. Real Faith.

Part 1: An Introduction

James 1:1 | Tim Badal | January 15, 2017

As I shared last week, James has a special place in your pastor's heart. When I was a young man growing up here, I never thought that God was going to call me to be a preacher—not only to a local church, but to the very church I grew up in. That was just not even in the cards. I was enjoying my first years of marriage with Amanda. We were looking forward to the birth of our first son. I remember the pastor at the time pulled me aside, and he did the thing I know all of you are scared to death I'll do to you. He pulled me aside on a Sunday and said, "Hey, I'd like to talk with you, Tim." I said, "Okay, pastor. What can I do for you?" He said, "We want to start a young marrieds Sunday school class and we think you're the guy to teach it."

I said, "Okay. Okay. No." I said, "Listen, pastor. I've never taught from the Bible before. You're going to create a cult or something if you get me teaching the Bible." He said, "No. The elders have been talking and are really encouraged about your zeal for the Lord. We would really like you to teach from a book of the Bible in a couple weeks." I asked, "What book would you want me to use? I've never done this before." He said, "We want you to teach on the book of James."

I remember I got in the car and told Amanda, "Can you believe these crazy people want me to teach them the Bible?" "Well, what are you going to teach, Tim?" "They told me the book of James." I remember that day. I was a follower of Jesus Christ, and I was enjoying my walk with Him. But I want to tell you—something special happened. I remember when I sat down the very first time to study this passage, a fire was lit inside me. I remember seeing the Scriptures in a way I'd never seen before. God's Spirit and the patience of those wonderful young people—some of you who have stuck with me all these years—created a gifting and a calling of teaching God's Word and being someone who is changed by it each and every week as I teach it.

The book of James has a special place in my heart because of that. I pray that the blessing that studying the book of James was in my life would impact and encourage you over the next couple months as we study this five-chapter book together. I believe it can change your life.

In your bulletin you'll find an [insert](#) that explains why we preach through books of the Bible, reasons the elders and I have agreed on here at Village Bible Church.

As my family is heading to church, I'll usually tune the radio to a particular preacher for a few minutes. This preacher is always railing about something political. This morning he was railing about President Obama. My son Luke spoke up from the back seat, "Dad, doesn't this guy know that President Obama's done?"

We laughed—yet, some will say, "Why aren't we talking about current events? Why aren't we talking about the political landscape? Why aren't we talking about all the different social ills? Why don't you preach from the headlines, Tim?" Well, we were told in Scripture not to preach the headlines, not to preach what I saw on TV yesterday, but to preach and teach the Word of God.

We call this expositional preaching, which is preaching that is focused on explaining the meaning of Scripture in its historical and grammatical context. What I want to achieve with the book of James is to help you understand that you're reading someone else's



mail. We're picking up a letter that wasn't written to us at first, but we can certainly apply it to our lives today. If we want to get all we need to out of this book, we need to understand the person who wrote it, why he wrote it, to whom he wrote it, the context in which it was written—and we have to be careful that we don't put our 21st-century spin on a 1st-century letter.

So we're going to draw out the meaning from the text. Why do we do this? Because it's biblical. As we've done with dozens of other Bible books, we're going to start our study of James with chapter one, verse one, and we won't finish until we get to the end of this letter. We want to preach the Bible as it is: the Word of God written by the hands of men. That's our goal. Some of you who are new here may be wondering why we don't preach on topics or various issues. We believe God has given us His great love letter, and we want to preach it as He gave it to us.

Today I'll be giving you a lot of introductory information about the book of James. We won't have a lot of applications from it, but I believe we'll see some truths that will encourage our hearts and some truths that will challenge us in our thinking. But more than anything else, I want us to have a foundation for what God is going to teach us starting next week and in the weeks to come about what James has to offer us, the people of God.

We're just going to address the first verse today, but there's a lot to draw out from this. In James 1:1, we're told the following: *"James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings."*

I want to address the first phrase in this verse through three points that I think are important. My first point will be really, really long. You're going to wonder when I'm going to land this plane. I want you to know we're going to hit 30,000 feet and stay there—and then the bottom will drop out from under us. We'll land this thing hard and fast, so don't worry about when that will occur.

1. This letter was written by a humble servant.

First we want to look at the phrase, "James, a servant of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ..." Our first question is: who's writing this letter? It doesn't come out of thin air. There's an author behind it. And in first-century letters, the author would always put his name at the beginning of the letter, not at the end like we do today. He wanted the reader to know who it was from right at the start. So we know it is James who wrote this.

Once we understand that, our question becomes: which James? The Bible speaks of four or five different men named James. Some were very well known, while with others only their name is mentioned and we know nothing more about them. So we ask, "Who is this James and what do we know about him?" There is some debate about which James wrote this book.

Some think the James is the brother of John. James and John were disciples of Jesus Christ and were called "The Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17). They were always grouped with Peter as the "three-legged stool" of the disciples' leadership. James and John always seemed to have a quarreling attitude between them. They wanted to know who was going to be the greatest in the Kingdom (Matthew 18:1–6).

They were "Mama's boys," in that they sent their mother to Jesus to ask Him, "When You get into Your Kingdom, will you save the place at Your right hand and left hand for my two sons? Can they have those places of honor?" Jesus tells them, "If you want to be great in the Kingdom of God, you can't have your mother ask for that place. You need to be a servant of all" (Matthew 20:20–28).

Some say that this James wrote the letter, but the problem with that is that he would probably have identified himself as "an apostle of Jesus Christ." Peter did that (1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1) and John his brother did that. It wasn't a matter of pride, but simply a designation that allowed the reader to recognize that he had been part of the inner circle, that he had seen the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and as a result this was an accurate title.

The other problem with identifying James as Jesus' disciple is that James died very early in the life of the church. He was one of the first martyrs who lost his life for his faith. There are some things we'll study that will indicate this book was written after that James—the brother of John and the disciple of Jesus—was killed. So we'll cross him off our list as probably not being that James.

The second James that we might consider was another disciple and apostle who was known as "the son of Alphaeus" (Matthew 10:3; Luke 16:5, etc.). But we don't know much else about this James. There's actually nothing said about him other than he is one of the listed disciples. So it doesn't seem likely that this James was the author, because he wasn't spoken of in Scripture. Of course, he could have written a book of the Bible, but most of the New Testament writers were key men within the church who had recognized leadership roles. We just don't see any of that with James the son of Alphaeus.

James was the half-brother of Jesus.

That leads us to the third and most likely scenario, which is that the writer of this book is James, the half-brother of Jesus. The early church ascribed James the brother of Jesus as being the author of the book of James. He was prominent in the New Testament church. Even more, he grew up with Jesus as his older Brother. After the resurrection, he was converted and began to associate with the apostles. He also served as the presiding elder in the Jerusalem council around 50 A.D. This council first met to discuss the issues involved with the entry of Gentiles into faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Because Acts 15 records James' leadership in this council, the prevailing understanding is that he was also the author of the book of James.

I should tell you that my statement that James was the half-brother of Jesus actually throws a bunch of elephants into the room. Can you see them running all around here? Let me address these for you. When we say James was the half-brother of Jesus, we are making an assumption that many of you have never thought about. We don't know much about Jesus' early life.

If you grew up in a mainline denomination or were part of a creedal church, the early church creeds state that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary...but then what happened next? What do the creeds say? "He suffered under Pontius Pilate." Wait a minute. He was born, and then he suffered. Where's the "in between" information? There is very little recorded about the early life of Jesus and his family.

So today we're going to look through Scripture to see what we can learn about what it might have been like to have a sibling Who was the Savior of the world. The first question is: why the half-brother? Let's be reminded of our recent Christmas celebration and the songs we sang. Jesus' mother was Mary, but His father was not Joseph. His Father was God Himself. That's what we call the virgin birth, the immaculate conception. Joseph was what we might call an "adopted" father of Jesus, but he was not part of the union that brought Jesus into the world.

Turn in your Bibles to Luke 1:26–35. This is the story where the angel Gabriel tells Mary that she is going to be with child, even though she has not had relations with a man:

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

³⁵ And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God."

This is called the Annunciation, the announcement by Gabriel that told Mary that even though she had not been with a man, she was soon to become miraculously pregnant. She was to become the means by which God would bring His Son, the Messiah, into the world. He would become a Man of flesh and would dwell with us.

Notice that the word "virgin" occurs three times in this passage. If you don't know what that word means, talk to your mom or dad, or talk to your pastor and I'll explain it to you later. Mary is about to be with child and as a result Joseph was ready to divorce her.

It was like you'd been dating a nice girl and everything was going great. You go out for a nice dinner and a movie. Mary and Joseph went out to see the "Sing" movie, and then right as the previews are starting, Mary says, "Hey, I need to talk with you, Joseph. Um, I'm pregnant." "What do you mean, you're pregnant? We've just held hands. How can you be pregnant? Where have you been? Who's the dad? I know I'm not. Who did this?" Then your girlfriend looks at you and says, "Um, an angel came to me and said I'm pregnant with God's Son."

I've heard a lot of excuses for things, but surely that's not an excuse that would work. But that's what Mary said, and Joseph was like, "You're a crazy woman. I'm so glad that we haven't consummated this marriage, because I can still get out—and that's exactly what I'm going to do. I like you, Mary. You're a great lady. But you've made one massive mistake, and that mistake is going to wreak havoc in your life for years to come. So I'm going to divorce you quietly and I'll go on my merry way."

But then an angel appears to Joseph in a dream. Let's read Matthew 1:20–22:

²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will

save his people from their sins.”²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.”

Joseph wakes from sleeping, verse 24, “*he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife,*” but notice this phrase—and this is an important one that we’ll come back to—“*but he did not know her until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.*”

The term “to know her” isn’t saying that Joseph had dementia: “Who are you? I’ve never seen you before.” The phrase to know somebody within a husband and wife relationship is speaking of physical intimacy. They didn’t have this until after Jesus was born. Joseph and Mary did what God commands all couples to do from the book of Genesis: “be fruitful and multiply.” But in their case it was only after Jesus was born.

Turn now to Mark 6. Here we learn a little more about Jesus’ family. At this point Jesus is 30 years old and is starting His earthly ministry. Beginning in verse one we read:

“[Jesus] went away from there and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him.² And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying, “Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?”

And because they’re home-town people and had known Him for years, they asked, “*Is not this the carpenter?*” Who’s the carpenter? Joseph. “Isn’t this Joseph the carpenter’s son? We used to hang out in his workshop. He built our pinewood derby cars for the Boy Scouts and Awana. We were there; we know His dad.”

They go on to say, “Don’t we know His mom, Mary? Don’t we know that this Jesus is the brother of James, Joses, Judas,”—not the Judas who betrayed Jesus, by the way—“and Simon?” So Jesus was the oldest son of Mary and Joseph. They lived in Nazareth. Joseph was a carpenter. Joseph had adopted Jesus as his son, and then afterward we see that Joseph and Mary had four more sons. Also, it says:

“And are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. And Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.”

This then gives us a picture of Jesus’ family. There’s Joseph and Mary and Jesus, who is Joseph’s stepson. Then there are four brothers and at least two sisters. So when Joseph and Mary drove into church on a Sunday morning they had to drive a 15-passenger van. They were the mini-version of the Dugger family.

Okay, seriously now, some of you have been believers and been in church for a long time, but you’ve never thought about Jesus’ early life. Perhaps this gives you a whole new picture of what we can know about him.

Elephant #2 is this: not all religions are okay with the idea that James is Jesus’ half-brother. Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox individuals would take exception to that statement. In their understanding, based on church traditions and theologies regarding Mary, there was no way Jesus would ever have any brothers or sisters. They would say what we just read doesn’t really mean brothers and sisters.

The Greek word in that passage is *adelphos*, which you might recognize as part of the name Philadelphia—the City of Brotherly Love. But their interpretation was that the word referred only to close relatives, such as cousins. Why would they not read the text naturally and accept that James is the half-brother of Jesus, along with these other siblings?

First, they believe that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, but they say that Mary remained a perpetual virgin after His birth, that she never had relations with Joseph. And because of that, they say, Jesus is the only child of Mary. One reason I can’t agree with that, and why most evangelicals also don’t agree, is what we read in Matthew 1:25. It says that Joseph “did not know” Mary until after Jesus was born. It doesn’t say he never had relations; just that he waited until after the birth of Jesus.

Also, to say that Mary would withhold intimacy from her husband goes against every command in both the Old and New Testaments for husbands and wives that says they should not deprive one another of intimacy, the gift God has given married couples.

Then too, this doctrine begins to elevate Mary to a place beyond what Scripture describes her as having. Listen, Mary was a phenomenal woman. She was “blessed among all women,” as the angel Gabriel said (Luke 1:26–38). But she wasn’t super-human. As some churches practice, we need to be careful not to separate and elevate Mary in a fashion that Scripture never allows. I believe that while the intentions of these churches may be noble, their theology is wrong. First, this sets apart Jesus’ birth from all

other births. Jesus is indeed unique and His birth was a miraculous event, never to be duplicated in human history. But we should not make Mary something she isn't to fulfill that. There's enough miracle there already.

Second, it begins to separate Mary from every other member of the human race—and we don't need to do that. Mary recognized that she was a humble servant before the Lord, used by God to be the mother of the second Person of the Trinity. She should be praised for that, but we don't need to worship her or to pray to her. Like you and me, she too was a sinner in need of her Son's grace.

This is what makes our study of the book of James so awesome, because we get to learn from one of Jesus' brothers. Some of you have run into my parents at a store or some event, and my parents will tell me, "We ran into so-and-so from your church." I say, "Oh—what did they say?" And it's always the same story. "Tim, they always ask if you truly did all those crazy things you say you did. And how in the world did we parent a kid like that?" Why do you ask my parents these questions?

There's an indispensable truth here. If you really want to know somebody, get to know their family. So as we're studying James, we are going to try to understand the family of Jesus. Which brings me to the third elephant in the room: what would it have been like to have Jesus as a sibling? I'm sure it must have been crazy. So let's talk about it for a moment.

Amanda has done a great job of chronicling the early lives of our three boys, from the pregnancy to the delivery to the first steps and first words for each of them. And at each birthday, inevitably one of the boys will grab his baby book and bring it out for us to go over. We read about the events and look at the pictures, and we'll laugh at various things in these records.

I want you to imagine you're in Jesus' family—and it's His birthday. They bring out the baby book and Mary starts saying, "This was so wonderful. I remember when I first found out I was going to be pregnant—I heard it from an angel. And Dad heard from an angel too. Then I visited my cousin Elizabeth. You guys remember her. As soon as I came into the room, the baby in her womb started swirling around. Jesus just had that impact on people. Then we had to go on the long journey to Bethlehem for the census, but there was no place for us at the inn. So we had the Baby and put Him in a manger—and then some shepherds showed up. They told us they'd seen angels, who talked about how your Brother Jesus had been born. A couple years later, some good-looking Assyrians came from the far east, and they brought gold and frankincense and myrrh, and they worshiped your Brother."

Then James raises his hand, "Hey, Mom, can we pull out my baby book, too?" "Yeah, but nothing really happened." How many of you are younger brothers or sisters? Raise your hands. You think you live in a shadow? Think about Jesus' parents. Every time you go out with Jesus, they say, "Be sure you watch Jesus. Keep track of Jesus." Think about when you fight with Jesus. "But Mom, Jesus started it." "You and I both know...." That's not going to work, right? Today they would be labeled dysfunctional, right? Think about it. James would be sitting there thinking, "Mom and Dad think my Brother is God." Do think James could have used some therapy?

James becomes a believer only after the resurrection.

James is a sibling, the younger brother of Jesus. Now, here's the problem. He becomes a believer only after the resurrection. Wait a minute? After spending his entire life with Jesus, James did what might seem utterly impossible to do: he didn't believe. Jesus tells us this truth in Mark 6:3–4, remember? He says, "*A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.*" He was honored everywhere else He went. But when He came back home, nobody honored Him for Who He was. His neighbors and even His family didn't buy Who He was—that He was the Son of God. In fact, they were offended by the idea. James got angry. James was tired of hearing how Jesus was all He said He was and was going to do all He said He would do. James had a front-row seat to Jesus' life, but he still did not believe.

Turn to Mark 3. Jesus is preaching to and teaching a great crowd of people. In verses 20–21 we read this: "*Then he went home.*" At this point He had 12 disciples who were all calling Him Rabbi and the Messiah. A large following of people were hanging on His every word.

But after He went home, "*the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat.*" There were so many people they couldn't even call the caterer in to take care of things. "*And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him.*" Wait a minute. "*For they were saying, 'He is out of his mind.'*"

So as Jesus was doing His earthly ministry, things were happening and his family heard about. They concluded that Jesus had lost His mind. It was one thing when He was young for Mom and Dad to say those things, but this was different. Surely their brother wasn't really the Messiah or the Son of God. They thought, "We've got to go get Him." They were reading His Facebook posts and going, "Man, He's off His rocker. He's talking craziness." They loved Him enough that they decided to stop Him. "Maybe we can get Him some help, some therapy, because if we don't, He's going to make a fool of Himself and a fool of us."

This is James, the author of this letter we're going to look at. For a large part of his life, into adulthood, he believed his older brother was a madman who had lost his marbles, who needed to be seized and taken away. But something happens.

This Man Who said He had created the world, this Man Who said He was the way to the Father, this Man Who said He would pay for the sins of the world, this Man Who said He would judge the living and the dead—the family had heard all that, and said, “Let’s get this guy home.”

But everything changes around the time of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. We read in John 19:25, as Jesus was hanging on the cross, that women were watching—including His mother Mary, along with John, His disciple. And Jesus looks down at His mother and says, “Mother, here is your son.” He then says to John, “You take care of My mom.”

Why would Jesus put Mary into the care of one of His disciples? I’m speculating a little, but I think it’s because none of the other family members wanted anything to do with Jesus and Mom. So Jesus asks John, “Take care of My mom. Be with her. Minister to her, especially in these hours after I am gone.”

Maybe today you’re the only person who’s a Christian in your household, and you have been mocked—maybe even abused. Maybe at family events you’re ridiculed for what you believe. Based on what we’ve read about Jesus, know that you are not alone. He also felt the sting of being the only Person Who believed what He did. He understands your pain and what you’re going through.

But that changes for James. In 1 Corinthians 15 we are told of the events that transpire after Jesus is resurrected from the grave. After Jesus presents Himself to the people who are at the gravesite—who have seen the empty tomb and the folded clothes—He then appears to many different people. In fact, Scripture says He was seen by 500 at one time. But then it specifically says in verse seven that Jesus appeared to His brother James. And after that, James was never the same. This was the Brother whom he ridiculed and mocked, whom he was so skeptical about. But now James has come face to face with the risen Lord and Savior, and it changed the way he lived for the rest of his life.

So today we need to ask: have we met the risen Savior and Lord? Are we skeptics? Have we scoffed at the claims of Jesus? James did—and then he met the risen Lord. He bowed the knee and said, “You are not just my Brother, but I am Your servant. I’m going to worship and serve You, because You’re the God of the universe—and because I need Your salvation.” He was changed by the resurrection.

In Acts 1:12–15, we’re told that after Jesus was raised from the grave and ascended into heaven, all the disciples met in the upper room. There were the Twelve minus Judas. Mary, Jesus’ mother, and some other women were there. Then in verse 15 it says that Jesus’ brothers were also there. So James locks in to becoming a follower of Jesus. He believed His words were true. And James would go on to live the rest of his life serving his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

In Acts 15 we read that the council of Jerusalem met, and this skeptic-turned-believer is now a leader in the development of the early church. Along with Peter, James and John, this James stands before the Apostle Paul—the man who wrote more of the New Testament than anyone else—and he speaks with authority to this group of people. And when James is done speaking, the entire group agreed to do what he proposed.

James served boldly on behalf of God and the church.

James went from a skeptic to a leader, all because he was changed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And that same change can happen in your life as well. James went on to serve boldly on behalf of God and the church. In fact, in Galatians 2:9 he is called “a pillar of the church” by the Apostle Paul.

This is one cool dude. He’s got a great testimony. He should have gone on a motivational speaking tour. But he serves the church to the very last moments of his life. We’re told by Josephus, a first-century secular historian, that as James was preaching in Jerusalem, the chief priests and other leaders became so enraged by what he was saying that they grabbed him, took him to the pinnacle of the temple and told him he must denounce Jesus. When he refused to deny Him, they pushed him off the roof of the temple, thinking he would die in the fall. But he did not die, so people then took up rocks and stoned him. They thought he was dead, but even then he was alive enough to say, “Father, forgive them. Lord, forgive them. They don’t know what they’re doing.” Josephus records that a man then grabs a club and beats James to death over the head. There is even some 13th-century art that depicts this sequence of events. Another picture, this time from the 10th or 11th century, shows the same scenario.

This man lived with a real faith in Jesus Christ. And he also wrote a book for us to read and learn from.

Okay, now buckle your seatbelts as we run through several more points here.

2. James is writing to a scattered group of believers.

James 1:1 says, “...to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion.” Many people believe these are Jewish believers who had followed the ways of God but who had then come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, probably through the preaching of the disciples in Jerusalem. They were part of the early church, enjoying fellowship, studying the doctrine of the apostles, caring for each other—and then something happened.

In Acts 7 we’re told about Christianity’s first martyr—besides Jesus, of course—who was Stephen. He was preaching in Jerusalem about how Jesus had changed his life and a man by the name of Saul said, “Kill him.” They picked up stones and stoned Stephen to death.

After that, in Acts 8, we’re told that a great persecution broke out in Jerusalem where religious leaders under the advisement of Saul—the man who would later himself be converted, whom we know as Paul—would go house to house, door to door, and drive people who claimed to follow Jesus from their homes.

James addresses Christians who were suffering persecution.

That’s why he starts his letter, “*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds*” (James 1:2). They’re not dealing with their fantasy football league not turning out the way they wanted it to. Their trial isn’t that they’re trying to lose weight and they can’t shed those extra two pounds. They have been thrown out of their homes, away from their families and friends; they’ve lost their property and they’re running for their lives. James then writes this letter and sends it to wherever they may have been scattered.”

James addresses Christians who were seeking direction.

These people were also seeking spiritual direction and as a pastor, James was teaching them what it’s like to be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. He talked about how to live amidst persecution, how to live amidst temptation and trials. It has been said that the book of James is the “Proverbs of the New Testament.” It’s chock full of wisdom on how to live life.

3. James was showing them what real faith in action looks like.

Okay, let’s land this plane now. This letter was written by a humble servant to a scattered group of believers, showing them what real faith in action looks like. Here’s where we’re going in the next few weeks. You’re going to learn through our study of James that real faith is not just saying you’re a Christian. It’s not just saying you did something in Sunday School years ago. If your faith is real, it will be faith in action which will be seen in four ways.

Our compliance.

How good are you at obeying your Master? James says, “I’m a servant.” And we’re going to ask the question every week: “How well am I following Jesus, my Master?” In the 108 verses in the book of James, there are 59 commands that we are to follow. Let me tell you—James is “paint by numbers” for Christianity. Do this. Do this. Do this. Don’t do that. Don’t do that. But do this, and you’ll be on the right track.

Our conversation.

James is going to ask you about your conversation. James 1:26 says if you think you’re religious, but can’t keep a tight rein on your tongue, then you deceive yourself. So we’re going to learn that what comes out of our mouths—what we say about people and things—is a direct indication of what’s in our hearts and the nature of our faith.

Our compassion.

Our faith will be seen in our compliance, our conversation and also in our compassion. James 1:27 tells us we’re to look after orphans and widows in their distress. Do we have a love for people? Do we care for them? Do we show people mercy instead of wrath and anger? James is the book for us if we struggle in our conversation, our compassion or our compliance.

Our conduct.

Finally, how about our conduct? James 1:27 says we are to keep ourselves unstained by the sin of the world. Do you struggle with temptation? Is it hard for you not to go with the flow? Are you having trouble saying no to sin? Then James is going to be the book for you. It's going to teach you to be compliant servants, to keep your conversation seasoned with grace, to have compassion like Jesus did, Who came to seek and save that which was lost (Luke 19:1–10), and to live upright and holy lives until God comes back.

I hope and pray that this introduction to the book of James has helped you and has whetted your appetite for where we'll be going in this study.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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