

JAMES

BOOKS OF FAITH SERIES
Leader Session Guide

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 AUGSBURG FORTRESS
Minneapolis

JAMES
Leader Session Guide

Books of Faith Series
Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies

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Introduction

Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies

Welcome to the conversation! The Bible study resources you are using are created to support the bold vision of the Book of Faith initiative that calls “the whole church to become more fluent in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture, in order that we might live into our calling as a people renewed, enlivened, empowered, and sent by the Word.”

Simply put, this initiative and these resources invite you to “Open Scripture. Join the Conversation.”

We enter into this conversation based on the promise that exploring the Bible deeply with others opens us to God working in and through us. God’s Word is life changing, church changing, and world changing. Lutheran approaches to Scripture provide a fruitful foundation for connecting Bible, life, and faith.

A Session Overview

Each session is divided into the following four key sections. The amount of time spent in each section may vary based on choices you make. The core Learner Session Guide is designed for 50 minutes. A session can be expanded to as much as 90 minutes by using the Bonus Activities that appear in the Leader Session Guide.

• Gather (10-15 minutes)

Time to check in, make introductions, review homework assignments, share an opening prayer, and use the Focus Activity to introduce learners to the Session Focus.

• Open Scripture (10-15 minutes)

The session Scripture text is read using a variety of methods and activities. Learners are asked to respond to a few general questions. As leader, you may want to capture initial thoughts or questions on paper for later review.

• Join the Conversation (25-55 minutes)

Learners explore the session Scripture text through core questions and activities that cover each of the four perspectives (see diagram on p. 6). The core Learner Session Guide material may be expanded through use of the Bonus Activities provided in the Leader Session Guide. Each session ends with a brief Wrap-up and prayer.

• Extending the Conversation (5 minutes)

Lists homework assignments, including next week’s session Scripture text. The leader may choose one or more items to assign for all. Each session also includes additional Enrichment options and may include For Further Reading suggestions.

A Method to Guide the Conversation

Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies has three primary goals:

- To increase biblical fluency;
- To encourage and facilitate informed small group conversation based on God’s Word; and
- To renew and empower us to carry out God’s mission for the sake of the world.

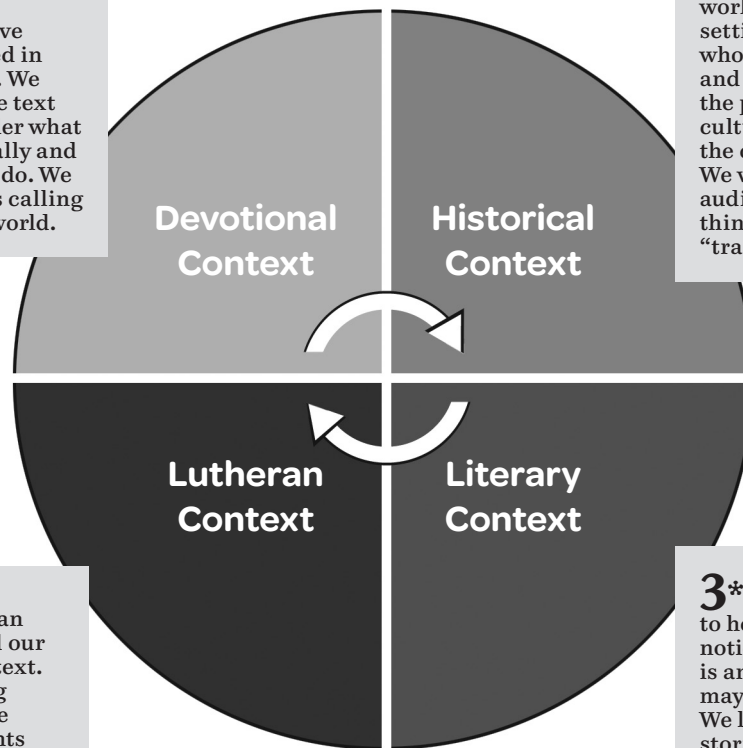
To accomplish these goals, each session will explore one or more primary Bible texts from four different angles and contexts—historical, literary, Lutheran, and devotional. These particular ways of exploring a text are not new, but used in combination they provide a full understanding of and experience with the text.

Complementing this approach is a commitment to engaging participants in active, learner-orientated Bible conversations. The resources call for prepared leaders to facilitate learner discovery, discussion, and activity. Active learning and frequent engagement with Scripture will lead to greater biblical fluency and encourage active faith.

1 We begin by reading the Bible text and reflecting on its meaning. We ask questions and identify items that are unclear. We bring our unique background and experience to the Bible, and the Bible meets us where we are.

5 We return to where we started, but now we have explored and experienced the Bible text from four different dimensions. We are ready to move into the “for” dimension. We have opened Scripture and joined in conversation for a purpose. We consider the meaning of the text for faithful living. We wonder what God is calling us (individually and as communities of faith) to do. We consider how God’s Word is calling us to do God’s work in the world.

2* We seek to understand the world of the Bible and locate the setting of the text. We explore who may have written the text and why. We seek to understand the particular social and cultural contexts that influenced the content and the message. We wonder who the original audience may have been. We think about how these things “translate” to our world today.



4 We consider the Lutheran principles that help ground our interpretation of the Bible text. We ask questions that bring those principles and unique Lutheran theological insights into conversation with the text. We discover how our Lutheran insights can ground and focus our understanding and shape our faithful response to the text.

3* We pay close attention to how the text is written. We notice what kind of literature it is and how this type of literature may function or may be used. We look at the characters, the story line, and the themes. We compare and contrast these with our own understanding and experience of life. In this interchange, we discover meaning.

*** Sessions may begin with either Historical Context or Literary Context.**

The diagram on p. 6 summarizes the general way this method is intended to work. A more detailed introduction to the method used in Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies is available in *Opening the Book of Faith* (Augsburg Fortress, 2008).

The Learner Session Guide

The Learner Session Guide content is built on the four sections (see p. 5). The content included in the main “Join the Conversation” section is considered to be the core material needed to explore the session Scripture text. Each session includes a Focus Image that is used as part of an activity or question somewhere within the core session. Other visuals (maps, charts, photographs, and illustrations) may be included to help enhance the learner’s experience with the text and its key concepts.

The Leader Session Guide

For easy reference, the Leader Session Guide contains all the content included in the Learner Session Guide and more. The elements that are unique to the Leader Session Guide are the following:

- **Before You Begin**—Helpful tips to use as you prepare to lead the session.
- **Session Overview**—Contains detailed description of key themes and content covered in each of the four contexts (Historical, Literary, Lutheran, Devotional). Core questions and activities in the Learner Session Guide are intended to emerge directly from this Session Overview.
- **Key Definitions**—Key terms or concepts that appear in the Session Overview may be illustrated or defined.
- **Facilitator’s Prayer**—To help the leader center on the session theme and leadership task.
- **Bonus Activities**—Optional activities included in each of the four sections of “Join the Conversation” used by the leader to expand the core session.
- **Tips**—A variety of helpful hints, instructions, or background content to aid leadership facilitation.
- **Looking Ahead**—Reminders to the leader about preparation for the upcoming session.

Leader and Learner

In Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies, the leader’s primary task is facilitating small group conversation and activity. These conversations are built around structured learning tasks. What is a structured learning task? It is an open question or activity that engages learners with new content and the resources they need to respond. Underlying this structured dialog approach are three primary assumptions about adult learners:

- Adult learners bring with them varied experiences and the capability to do active learning tasks;
- Adult learners learn best when they are invited to be actively involved in learning; and
- Adults are more accountable and engaged when active learning tasks are used.

Simply put, the goal is fluency in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture. How does one become fluent in a new language, proficient in building houses, or skilled at hitting a baseball? By practicing and doing in a hands-on way. Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies provides the kind of hands-on Bible exploration that will produce Bible-fluent learners equipped to do God’s work in the world.

Books of Faith Series

Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies includes several series and courses. This James unit is part of the Books of Faith Series, which is designed to explore key themes and texts in the books of the Bible. Each book of the Bible reveals a unique story or message of faith. Many core themes and story lines and characters are shared by several books, but each book in its own right is a book of faith. Exploring these books of faith in depth opens us to the variety and richness of God’s written word for us.

James Unit Overview

The letter of James does not offer much information about who wrote it, when it was written, or who received it. What is clear is that the key to understanding and appreciating James is wisdom. *Wisdom* here means the creative gift of God that enables God’s people to live and grow in responsible

maturity. This advice for responsible, faithful behavior is scattered throughout James like pearls. Readers of James receive pearls of wisdom for living the life of faith.

Martin Luther called James an “epistle of straw” because its major focus is not Christ, the cross, and the resurrection. In other instances, however, Luther showed great appreciation for wisdom literature in the Bible. Many Christians over time have found comfort, strength, and power in the letter of James.

Session 1, What Is Wisdom? (James 1:1-18), describes how the power of God for living daily life is revealed in the collection of wisdom sayings in James.

Session 2, Wisdom: Faith and Action (James 1:19—2:26), explores how God’s gift of wisdom binds together hearing and doing, faith and actions, in Christian life.

Session 3, Wisdom: God’s Sustaining Care for the World (James 3-4), examines how wisdom’s exhortations and commands represent the collective insights of the world and show God’s sustaining care for the world.

Session 4, Wisdom: Healthy Habits that Sustain Christian Hope (James 5:7-20), looks at how prayer, praise, confession, and healing inspire hope for a community as it waits in the promise of our Lord’s return.

James 1:1-18



Focus Statement

The power of God for living daily life is revealed in the collection of sayings in the book of James.

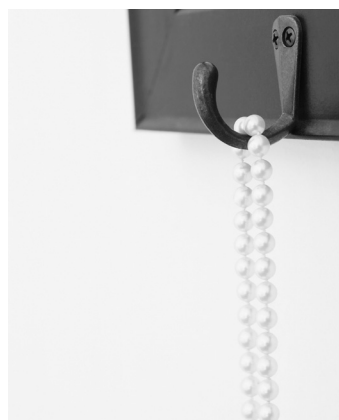


Key Verse

If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. James 1:5



Focus Image



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What Is Wisdom?

Session Preparation

Before You Begin . . .

Take a few moments to think about wisdom. Write down your own definition of *wisdom*. Think about someone in your life who personifies wisdom. What characteristics does he or she display? What “pearls of wisdom” have been important in your life? Did someone give you these pearls, or did you discover them on your own? What role do you think God plays in acquiring wisdom? Is there a difference between wisdom and knowledge? What do you think of the following definitions?

- *Knowledge* is acquisition of information.
- *Wisdom* is applying knowledge in appropriate ways at the appropriate time.

Session Instructions

1. Read this Session Guide completely and highlight or underline any portions you wish to emphasize with the group. Note any Bonus Activities you wish to do.
2. If you plan to do any special activities, check to see what materials you’ll need, if any.
3. Have extra Bibles on hand in case a member of the group forgets to bring one.
4. Keep in mind the conversational nature of Book of Faith adult Bible studies. Your role is to facilitate the conversation so that everyone has an opportunity to contribute to the discussion.
5. Mark the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament section of the Bible for easy access later in the session.

Session Overview

The main theme of James and the key to understanding and appreciating this letter is wisdom. *Wisdom* here means the creative gift of God that enables God’s people to live and grow in responsible maturity. This advice for responsible, faithful behavior is scattered throughout James like “pearls” of wisdom. Though a number of New Testament books have examples of biblical wisdom, James is the only book in the New Testament primarily focused on this wisdom perspective. In this session we

? **Apocrypha:**

This term is usually applied to the books that the Protestant Christian church considered useful but not to be included in the accepted canon, or list, of books in the Bible. Roman Catholic and Orthodox versions of the Bible include slightly different lists of apocryphal, also known as deuterocanonical, books.



Tip:

You may wish to have a Bible with Apocrypha available in class. *Lutheran Study Bible* includes a detailed chart of different Old Testament canons (see pages 28–29).

will learn the source of wisdom, discover the role it is to play in a Christian's life, and discern the perspective that wisdom provides for all who acknowledge it.

LITERARY CONTEXT

James fits into a category of writing known as wisdom literature. This type of writing has a rich tradition in the Old Testament and appears in many places in the New Testament as well, including Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7). A number of books in the Old Testament fit into the wisdom category. These include Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes, to name a few. Wisdom can also be found in a number of psalms. The **Apocrypha** includes wisdom books, such as Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon.

Wisdom literature communicates advice and instructions from one in authority (a king, teacher, or parent), based on his or her experience of how to lead a successful life. In wisdom literature, wisdom is God's perfect gift. It belongs to God's goodness and purpose in creation, and it empowers all of creation, especially those who know the fear of the Lord (respecting and honoring God, living according to God's commands) as the beginning of wisdom.

In Proverbs, for example, wisdom is personified and speaks in the first person. "Woman Wisdom" calls and invites all to listen to her advice. Wisdom was present with God from the very beginning (see Proverbs 1:20–33; 8:1–9:6). This is the tradition that lies behind the letter of James.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Traditionally, the author of the book of James is identified as James the brother of Jesus (Mark 6:3), who led the Jerusalem church until his martyrdom just prior to the Jewish war of 66–70 C.E. (Galatians 1:19; Acts 15:13–21). However, many believe that James was written by someone who dedicated this religious work to a hero of the faith, a common ancient practice. The moral exhortation and references to testing, rich and poor in the assembly, doing business and making money, and laborers and harvest could fit with many times and settings.

The author of James does appear to come from the Jewish tradition. His reference to the "twelve tribes in the Dispersion" is a bit unclear. It may refer to the early Christian community and its Jewish roots, or to the people of Israel in general—and so to

all Christians also. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel can be found in Numbers 1:20-43. If any in the group would like to know the names of the tribes, you could list them on chart paper or a whiteboard.

An interesting historical fact is that the book of James was one of seven books often disputed in the early church. In other words, not all early lists of accepted or authorized books included James. But eventually James became one of the 27 books that made up the New Testament canon.

LUTHERAN CONTEXT

Martin Luther had mixed feelings about the book of James. He believed that Jesus Christ, the cross, and the resurrection were at the heart of Scripture, but he did not see this reflected in James as clearly as in other New Testament books. For this reason, he sometimes referred to James as an “epistle of straw.” Luther did include James in his translation of the Bible, however. He discussed it in prefaces to the New Testament and to the epistles and did not oppose people reading it.

Luther thought some New Testament books were more important because they so clearly communicated the gospel. This included Romans, Galatians, and John’s Gospel, to name a few. Each had great substance and teaching about God’s grace. For Luther, James did not compare in importance. Most modern folks are not familiar with the idea of putting the books of the Bible in any kind of hierarchy. Sometimes Lutherans talk of this hierarchy as a “canon within a canon.” This means that all of Scripture is inspired and authoritative, but some passages bear the key message most clearly. Many Christians would look up or quote 2 Timothy 3:16 and assume that because all of Scripture was “inspired” by God, it is all of equal importance. Is that true for you or for your learners?

A key Lutheran principle for interpreting Scripture is “what shows forth Christ.” You and your learners may at times find it hard to apply this principle directly while studying James. But as you hear God’s wisdom in the letter, you might also think about Jesus as teacher, as one who embodies God’s wisdom.

DEVOTIONAL CONTEXT

In the Old Testament especially, wisdom is often linked to what we might call practical wisdom or common sense. Explore with the participants their own experiences with practical “pearls” of

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wisdom that they have received from others or discovered on their own. In Old Testament wisdom, practical wisdom is linked directly to God and God's law. How are God's law and wisdom related to practical wisdom and laws we live by or are governed by?

You will also spend time considering the role of wisdom in the life of faith, as well as praying for the gift of wisdom. The important point to remember is that wisdom and law point to God's gifts that enable responsible maturity in the faith. But they do not replace the gospel. Many adults, including Christians, confuse living a good life with what it means to be Christian. This can lead to a sort of moralistic understanding of religion. But Christian faith puts Christ at the center. Our wisdom and "good work" flows from faith in Christ who has saved us by grace.

Facilitator's Prayer

Lord, your Scriptures have so much to teach us. Please set your Spirit free in our midst. Give the learners and me honesty to share openly the verses that confuse us. Encourage us with the verses that touch our hearts today, and grant us your wisdom to understand those verses that would add meaning to our walk with you. In Jesus' powerful name we pray. Amen.



Gather (10-15 minutes)

Check-in

Welcome each learner to the group. If there are new participants, or if group members are not familiar with one another, consider using name tags. If possible, refer to learners by name throughout the session. For reference, you might want to jot down names according to where they are seated. Invite each person to share a highlight or a lowlight from their past week. As leader, be prepared to go first to show the group how it is done.

Pray

Gracious God, thank you for revealing wisdom to us in the Bible. Empower us with wisdom to live faithfully in our daily lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.



Tip:

Remind learners that it is okay to pass if they prefer not to share a highlight or lowlight.

Focus Activity

Write down as many wisdom quotes as you can in one minute. “An apple a day keeps the doctor away” would be an example. When you have completed your list, put a star by those sayings you have actually followed in your life. What do you observe?

**Open Scripture** (10-15 minutes)

Read the session Bible text yourself, or ask one or more volunteers to read the text aloud. Make sure that everyone has a Bible or can see one. Participants may follow along in their Bibles and underline key words or phrases, or they may simply listen with the three questions in the learner guide in mind.

Read James 1:1-18.

- How did you feel as you heard this text read?
- What words or phrases stand out the most to you?
- What questions do you have about this text?

**Join the Conversation** (25-55 minutes)**Literary Context**

1. James is a letter that begins, like other letters in ancient times, by identifying the writer and recipient(s) and offering a salutation or greeting. The main theme of James and the key to understanding and appreciating this letter is wisdom. *Wisdom* here means the creative gift of God that enables God’s people to live and grow in responsible maturity. This advice for responsible, faithful behavior is scattered throughout James like “pearls” of wisdom.

- Read James 1:1-4 and underline words and phrases indicating that James is a letter.
- Review James 1:1-18. Where does wisdom or the “word of truth” (1:18) come from, and how do we receive it?

2. Not only is wisdom the main theme and key to understanding and appreciating James, but also the letter

**Tip:**

You might note for the group that just being able to recite a wise saying doesn’t mean we live by it. How many wise sayings actually influence our daily living? Might this be the beginning of wisdom?

**Bonus Activity:**

Have participants compare Proverbs 3:12 (“The LORD reproves the one he loves”) to James 1:13 (“No one . . . should say, ‘I am being tempted by God’”). Have learners discuss their view on these two texts. How might the Lord discipline? Have they ever heard someone say that God gives people tests? Are these texts in conflict? If so, how might they be reconciled? If they are not in conflict, how do they complement one another?

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Bonus Activity:

Invite learners to make a list of ways their faith has been tested. Ask them to choose one such time of testing and think about who or what caused the trial. If the testing is over, ask them to write down some insights they learned from going through that experience. Then invite them to read James 1:12. Has there been a crowning insight from the experience?



Tip:

Wisdom in James comes from God as a gift (1:17). Believers are encouraged to ask for wisdom and strength to endure in prayer (1:5-6). The benefits of wisdom include insight, righteousness, justice, equity, shrewdness (Proverbs 1:1-9); fear (respect) for God and understanding (Proverbs 9:10; Psalm 111:10).



Tip:

Some learners may be surprised by the idea that a person might write a letter using the name of a person more influential or recognizable (such as James, the brother of Jesus). Knowing the exact details of an author does not make a biblical book more or less trustworthy. The key is the book's message. They may also be surprised to find out that not all early Christians included James on the list of authoritative books of Scripture. This is a good example of how the church deliberates about matters to come to agreement or consensus.



Bonus Activity:

James would become an important leader in the Jerusalem church. Invite learners to look up the following texts and make a list of important roles James is taking: Acts 15:13-21; Acts 21:17-25; Galatians 1:19; Galatians 2:8-10.

is made up of a specific type of writing called *wisdom literature*. This type of writing has a rich tradition in the Old Testament and appears in many places in the New Testament as well, including Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). Wisdom literature communicates advice and instructions from one in authority (a king, teacher, or parent), based on his or her experience of how to lead a successful life. In wisdom literature, wisdom is God's perfect gift. It belongs to God's goodness and purpose in creation, and it empowers all of creation, especially those who know the fear of the Lord (respecting and honoring God, living according to God's commands) as the beginning of wisdom. As you read through wisdom literature, wisdom sometimes speaks as "I" (in Proverbs 1:23-26, for example).

- What evidence do you find in James 1:1-18 that it is part of the wisdom literature in the Bible?
- Read Proverbs 1:1-9 and 20-33; Proverbs 9:10; and Psalm 111:10. List the benefits that are in store for the person who heeds wisdom.
- Read 1 Kings 3:5-14—Solomon's prayer for wisdom. How does this compare with James 1:5? King Solomon would have faced the temptations of wealth and power. Make a list of what James 1:12-16 says about temptation.

Historical Context

1. There is little detail in the letter of James to tell us who wrote it, when it was written, and who received it. Traditionally, the author is identified as James the brother of Jesus, who led the Jerusalem church until his martyrdom just prior to the Jewish war of 66-70 C.E. (Galatians 1:19, Acts 15:13-21). However, many believe that James was written by someone who dedicated this religious work to a hero of the faith, a common ancient practice. If this is the case, James may have been written as late as 130-140 C.E. The moral exhortation and references to testing, rich and poor in the assembly, doing business and making money, and laborers and harvest could fit with many times and settings. The address to "the twelve tribes in the Dispersion" is also unclear. It may refer to the early Christian community and its Jewish roots, or to the people of Israel in general—and so to all Christians also.

- What do you think about the fact that many things about the author, time, setting, and recipients of James are unclear? How does this affect the way you think about this letter?
2. Many writings and books were available to the early church. Early on, when Christians drew up lists of books that were

accepted, disputed, and rejected, James was one of seven books that were disputed. By the fourth century C.E., however, the 27 books in the New Testament, including James and the other “disputed” books, became *canon*—or the standard list—for Christians in the Greek and Latin traditions. Since that time, many Christians have drawn strength, comfort, and power from the letter of James.

- How does this affect the way you think about James?

Lutheran Context

1. Martin Luther had questions about James. He believed that Jesus Christ, the cross, and the resurrection were at the heart of Scripture, but he did not see this reflected in James as clearly as in other New Testament books. Luther did include James in his translation of the Bible, however. He discussed it in prefaces to the New Testament and to the epistles and did not oppose people reading it. More importantly, Luther’s theology, teaching, and approach to Scripture demonstrate his appreciation and use of wisdom.

- Read Luther’s explanation to the First Article of the Apostles’ Creed in the Small Catechism. What does God do? What does God provide? How does this compare with James 1:5, 17-18?
- Lutheran teaching emphasizes grace—the undeserved gifts of God poured out on us through Jesus Christ. Review James 1:1-18 and underline words and phrases that tell about God’s grace. How are grace and wisdom connected to each other?

2. Luther taught that some books in the Bible, such as the letters of Paul and the Gospel of John, are more important than other books because they more clearly show who Christ is and what Christ came to do. This criteria or principle is called “what shows forth Christ.”

- What do you think about the idea that some books in the Bible are more important than others?
- On your own, list the books in the Bible that are most important to you. Compare your list with others in your group, and discuss how you made your choices.

Devotional Context

1. Look again at the Focus Image for this session. You’ve probably heard of the phrase “pearls of wisdom.” What pearls of wisdom have been important in your life? Did someone “give” you those pearls, or did you discover them on your own?



Bonus Activity:

Ask volunteers to do some research on the topic of the creation of the New Testament canon. How long did the discussion about which books would be part of the accepted list go on? At what point was the matter mostly settled? What criteria was used to determine whether a book would make the list or not?



Tip:

Read the First Article and Explanation from *Luther’s Small Catechism*. A number of versions exist, including one that can be found in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (p. 1160). God gives and preserves body and soul, as well as reason and all mental faculties. That would include wisdom. In addition, God gives physical gifts and protects from danger and evil. All is given, not because we have obeyed but out of God’s divine goodness and mercy without any worthiness or merit on our part.



Bonus Activity:

If James had been dropped from the Bible, what do learners think might be missing from the New Testament? Have the group brainstorm some thoughts.



Tip:

Martin Luther’s hierarchy on New Testament books was based on his belief that the message of the highest importance focused on Jesus, grace, and faith. Luther believed the books of greatest value were the Gospel of John, 1 John, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and 1 Peter. In his opinion, each of these books communicated the gospel message the most clearly.



Bonus Activity:

In Martin Luther’s 1522 version of the New Testament, he put the books of Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation at the end as supplemental, rather than in their usual places. Had these books been eliminated from the New Testament, what important verses and/or ideas from each would no longer be considered Scripture? List some of those verses.

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Tip:

You might consider how pearls of wisdom have been “strung together” in your own life. Be prepared to talk about your own pearls if the group needs your help to start talking.



Bonus Activity:

Have learners discuss whether they have ever had doubts concerning God and/or faith. Assure them that doubt is not the absence of faith, but is actually a sign of one who is engaged with God and belief. Even the disciples doubted.



Tip:

Some of the category headings you might consider: wisdom, warnings, Christian actions, healthy habits, rich and poor. You may discover others as you go through each of the chapters. This may be a helpful activity to repeat at the end of each session. In this way, as the themes of James reappear, their connectedness might make more sense.

2. James 1:2 calls us to consider trials or times of testing as “nothing but joy.” Tell about someone who faced a difficult time with joy. How was joy possible during this time?

3. James tells us to ask God for wisdom. We are to ask in faith, not doubt, which is “like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind” (1:6-8).

- Draw or describe how you would picture doubt, then do the same for faith. What similarities and differences do you see between doubt and faith?

4. Write or say a prayer asking and expecting God to give you the gift of wisdom.

Wrap-up

1. Ask learners: What did you learn in this session that was new or surprising? How do you see James or your own faith in a different way?

2. If there are any questions to explore further, write them on chart paper or a whiteboard. Ask for volunteers to do further research to share with the group at the next session.

3. Explain and assign any homework for the coming week.

Pray

God of wisdom, thank you for showering us with every good gift. When we face difficult times, give us the courage to change the things we can change and to let go of things we cannot control. When we have doubts, be our anchor and strengthen our faith. Give us the gift of wisdom to live and grow in your grace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Extending the Conversation (5 minutes)

Homework

1. Read the text for the next session: James 1:19—2:26.

2. Find three passages in James 1:1-18 that really speak to you. Write each one on an index card and carry the cards with you. After every meal, take out one of the cards and read it.

3. Check out the Book of Faith Web site at www.bookoffaith.org and consider starting or joining a conversation on the book of James.

4. Think about a trial or difficulty you are experiencing in your life right now. Pray for God’s wisdom in this situation each day for the next week, expecting God to give generously.

5. As you review this week’s session text or read the text for the next session, consider using the following questions to guide you:

- Which verse or verses causes me some concern?
- Which verse or thought enlightens me right now?
- Which verse or thought encourages me right now?

Be prepared to share your responses with the group, if you wish to volunteer.

Enrichment

1. Do some additional research on the meaning of *wisdom* in the Bible. For example, read about wisdom literature in a study Bible, look at an introduction to the book of Proverbs, or do an online search on the term “biblical wisdom.” Prepare a brief report to share with the group.

2. If you are looking for insights on how to deal with trials related to addictions, check out a 12-step program such as Alcoholics Anonymous or Gamblers Anonymous. Check local listings for groups meeting near you. If you are looking for insights on how to deal with a loved one who has an addiction, check out Alanon or a treatment center near you.

3. Listen to a recording of the song “Turn, Turn, Turn (To Everything There Is a Season)” (Book of Ecclesiastes/Pete Seeger, Columbia Records, 1965) by The Byrds. The song is based on the wisdom literature in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. What life experiences does it highlight? How many does it mention? They are presented in random fashion, probably because life can happen in just such random ways. Which of these experiences have you encountered in your life?

For Further Reading

First and Second Peter, James, and Jude by PHEME PERKINS. Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995).



Tip:

There are 28 different life experiences mentioned. Consider doing this activity in class.

SESSION ONE

Available at www.augsburgfortress.org/store:

James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, and Jude by John H. Elliott and R. A. Martin. Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg Books, 1982).

Lutheran Study Bible (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009).

Looking Ahead

1. Read the text for the next session: James 1:19—2:26.
2. Read through the Leader Guide for Session 2 and decide which portions you want to cover in next week's session.
3. Make a checklist of materials you will need to do any of the activities, including Bonus Activities.
4. Pray for members of your group during the week.