

James: A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO **WISDOM** LIVING



church for all who believe, doubt, and seek.

All Saints

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF JAMES' LETTER

The church James led was in Jerusalem about 15 years after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Actually, he led a bunch of house churches that were attended by 20 to 60 people apiece, each church was directed by one or more pastors; James presided over the entire community.

There were also ministry leaders (deacons) whose job it was to collect donations and distribute them to the poor in the church.

These churches provided a place for nurturing people who had come to the faith. Second, there were many people who wanted to learn about Jesus and the gospel, they were on a pilgrimage and needed to be cared for so these churches would provide food and shelter.

Third, many oppressed and marginalized were attracted to these churches because of their desire to make Jerusalem a better place, the unconvinced felt relief and acceptance in these communities of believers. Fourth, the city of Jerusalem was having some economic hardship it relied on wealthy aristocrats from other cities to help feed the many hungry people that suffered the most inside the city.

The church suffered as well, but was a great catalyst of relief and aid. Finally, there was persecution. Christ followers suffered for their belief. It wasn't harsh, just subtle. For example, if a Christ follower had been looking for a job they would be the last to get hired. It crippled the churches ability to really flourish financially.

James' church was right in the middle of this tumultuous world. Although as a whole, the Church was growing and spreading its influence all over the known world; believers were feeling the oppression. In their suffering, their tendency was to imitate the world and try to gain power within the church. There was an apparent weariness in the church regarding Christ's return and the suffering they were enduring in their culture. There were power plays, gossip and complaints. Since the church was suffering financially, some would coddle the wealthier members to have them withhold contributions so they could get what they wanted.

James senses a general "worldliness" in the church despite the fact that the church was growing numerically and in influence. **James addresses the situation with his "pull no punches" letter hoping to shake the people free from their lethargy and pettiness.**

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

The goal of this letter is growth in godliness. This is a word that we would use as Christ likeness; it is significant in the maturity process for those who are following Jesus. **Just like James, our desire as a church is that every believer must grow up in Jesus Christ.**

It's exciting to observe people who show measurable amounts of growth and maturity. I enjoy the stories and thank God for the changes that take place in those who have crossed the line of faith and begin to practice and apply the "new life" of Jesus into their day to day living.

There are times when I am disappointed in myself when I don't see growth in a certain area. As Pastor, I also feel disappointment when I see fellow believers staying immature and static in their growth and love of Jesus. **Just like a gardener, God checks his garden to prune, weed and water.** He is looking for healthy vines and shoots to produce the desired fruit in the lives of his people. I wonder if he ever leaves his "garden" frustrated or disappointed in the lack of growth and fruit? We all must understand that God does not bring people into the family to just stand by and wait for the "blessings." **He has designed our lives as Christ followers so that we may grow more and more like his Son... right now! It is the joy of following Christ to know that Father God has a desire for us to pursue a daily maturing process.**

James knows all about this and is very poignant to the fact. **As we go through this thorough look at maturity and growth for following Jesus we will learn to be people who measure growth by obedience, conversations with those who have yet to meet Jesus, and service.**

What does this mean for All Saints



As a young church in an Urban setting, we see oppression, the poor, materialism, indifference and a very pluralistic culture that squeezes truth into relativism and looks at Christianity as weak, lacking in any kind of intellectual merit. It is similar to what the Christians in James' church were dealing with.

A major difference is the wealth that is in Seattle compared to Jerusalem.

This letter of James is quite the challenge to all of us that follow Christ and will really seem "ridiculous" to those who see religion and the church as irrelevant. However, a careful observation and sincere contemplation will show how credible this letter is to our culture and society.

We are going to discover and learn how to apply 12 things that James instructs believers by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to live as believers in a city like Seattle. We will seek to understand these areas and learn to apply them to our lives. As a church for all who believe, doubt and seek there are some topics that will seem very strange to those who are seeking or are very new to church and the person of Jesus. Don't think they are not applicable, if you are honest, and sincere about your seeking and questioning, these will be excellent places for anyone to drill very deep. I am quite sure that if believers live the way James instructs, there will be no reason for anyone to think of Christ followers as irrelevant, lacking intellect, close-minded and self-righteous. **This series will be a wonderful catalyst for a dynamic movement in Seattle and around the world.**

HERE ARE THE 12 TALKING POINTS:

1. God uses tough times to produce growth (1:1-12)
2. Trouble may produce growth, but yielding to temptation (sin) halts growth. (1:13-18)
3. The consistent reading and application of the God's Words (Bible) causes measurable growth. (1:19-27)
4. Part of godliness is the capability to care for others without prejudice or partiality, serving is a key to maturity. (2:1-13)
5. Serving should be a result of our faith, maturity is seen by our desire to do acts of grace, mercy and justice. (2:14-26)
6. Learning how to tame our speech, the ability to use our words for power rather than destruction is an aspect of maturity. (3:1-12)
7. Maturity also brings good judgment. Learning to obtain and use wisdom is essential. (3:13-18)
8. The lifelong fight of the world, the desires that war against us, and the enemy (devil). We are in the fight as believers it part of growing up. (4:1-12)
9. Following Christ is all about learning to lean on God for everything. We learn to go from independence to dependence on God. (4:13-17)
10. We will also learn about how to spend, invest and use our money. It is not a sin to be wealthy, it is sinful to have more than you are able to use. (5:1-6)
11. Learning to anticipate the arrival of Christ, another part of maturity is being aware of his prophetic timetable. (5:7-12)
12. A maturing believer is a praying believer. We will be encouraged by James to pursue the power of prayer. (5:13-20)

Where is this going to take

IT IS THE VISION OF ALL SAINTS TO HELP THE PEOPLE OF SEATTLE GRASP THE REALITY OF ABUNDANT LIFE IN CHRIST.

We understand the tension in that statement is, “the people of Seattle.” As I mentioned earlier, this city is indifferent toward Christianity and at times uses it as a reason why people dislike organized religion.

To be frank, I can understand that sentiment. As I read this letter from James I get the feeling that he was dealing with the same kinds of cultural dealings in Jerusalem as we do in Seattle. His initial chastisement isn’t the people who inhabit the city; it’s to those who called themselves believers in the church he was presiding over. He saw that some were trying to resolve some problems by bringing worldly thinking and process into the church. He addressed issues of favoritism, gossip and manipulation. He encourages extravagant giving, patience in trouble and suffering. He tells the church to be doers of this message, not slick talkers. He ends this letter with a passionate call to prayer.

James desires a healthy, vibrant, relevant church. He wants believers to grow up! Quit acting like babies and obey what Jesus has instructed you to do with regard to prayer, the Bible and serving.

For All Saints, this letter is coming to us at a good time. We have an extraordinary opportunity to start a movement of service, grace, mercy, love and righteousness. To follow Christ has everything to do with obedience to the cause of Christ.

We are not God’s gate keepers, we are his servants who follow his will at all costs. *Jesus said, “as the Father has sent me, so I send you.”*

All Saints as a church?

We are being sent to demonstrate this life of following Jesus, it is imperative that those who believe are in a process to mature daily. I am positive as a result of this series some of you will be called to ministry, plant churches, and go overseas for the sake of the gospel message.

The joy of maturity is the exciting journey that God takes us on as we follow him. I am excited to hear the stories, listen to the passionate desires to serve, watch people do things they only dreamed of doing; all of this because the abundant life of Christ changes our dreams to reality and our passion to action.

Let’s watch as people go from doubting to believing, praying and expecting God to answer, participating and facilitating life groups, encouraging and forgiving each other, answering the call to be a part of and plant churches all over Seattle and the world, finding joy in the middle of life’s pain and suffering, happily giving money, going on trips to serve the oppressed and poor in Seattle and other countries, and getting inspired to make Seattle better! **I can’t wait!**

Other resources:

Adamson, James. The New International Commentary on the New Testament, The Epistle of James. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI: 1976

Phillips, John. Exploring the Epistle of James. Kregel Publishers, Grand Rapids, MI: 2004

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