

JAMES

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THE IMPLANTED WORD



8 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR
SMALL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS



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The Implanted Word

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» HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THESE STUDIES

1. What is an Interactive Bible Study?

Interactive Bible Studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city. They take you through a particular part of the Bible, helping you to know where to start, pointing out things along the way, suggesting avenues for further exploration, and making sure that you know how to get home. Like any good tour, the real purpose is to allow you to go exploring for yourself—to dive in, have a good look around, and discover for yourself the riches that God’s word has in store.

In other words, these studies aim to provide stimulation and input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do plenty 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 five main components:

- short sections of text that introduce, inform, summarize and challenge
- a set of numbered study questions that help you examine the passage and think through its meaning
- sidebars that provide extra bits of background or optional extra study ideas, especially regarding other relevant parts of the Bible
- an ‘Implications’ section that helps you think about what this passage means for you and your life today
- suggestions for thanksgiving and prayer as you close.

3. How to use these studies on your own

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to what he is saying in the Bible, and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it.
- Work through the study, reading the text, answering the questions about the Bible passage, and exploring the sidebars as you have time.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the ‘Implications’ and ‘Give thanks and pray’ sections at the end. It is important that we not only hear and understand God’s word, but respond to it. These closing sections help us do that.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you’ve learnt.

4. How to use these studies in a small group

- 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 triplets. Get together with a friend or friends and work through them at your own pace; use them as the basis for regular Bible study with your spouse. You don’t need the formal structure of a ‘group’ to gain maximum benefit.

-
- For small groups, it is very useful if group members can work through the study themselves before the group meets. The group discussion can take place comfortably in an hour (depending on how sidetracked you get!) if all the members have done some work in advance.
 - 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 the sections of text to emphasize and read out loud, 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.
 - If your group members usually don't work through the study in advance, it's extra important that the leader prepares which parts to concentrate on, and which parts to glide past more quickly. In particular, the leader will need to select which of the 'Implications' to focus on.
 - 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 the Bible, 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.

5. Bible translation

Previous editions of this Interactive Bible Study have assumed that most readers would be using the New International Version of the Bible. However, since the release of the English Standard Version in 2001, many have switched to the ESV for study purposes. So with this new edition of *The Implanted Word*, we have decided to quote from and refer to the ESV text, which we recommend.

» STUDY 1

A FIRST LOOK AT JAMES

[OVERVIEW]

Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself 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. You could discuss the practical issues 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 20th) 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 Christ. We hope that James will spur you on in 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.

Read all 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?

-
- preservation and endurance of Christians

- final consequences

4. What was happening in the church to which James was writing? (E.g. 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 you 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.

People sometimes have difficulties with James. These are some of the common difficulties:

- 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 Romans 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: "receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only ..." We have here a letter written to people who were struggling under the pressures of living in a fallen world; and the solution is to humbly accept God's wisdom found in God's word. James reinforces this message with many practical examples that will hit us hard. When we read the book of James carefully, we will see it is not a hotchpotch 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.

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 that 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.

» Give thanks and pray

- Thank God for giving us his word, which helps us to know him better and to know how we are to act in this world as his children.
- Ask God to help you understand his word as you read and study James.
- Pray that you will be "doers of the word, and not hearers only".