

A *Discover Together*
BIBLE STUDY

by Sue Edwards

James

Discovering God's Delight in a Lived-Out Faith



LEADER'S GUIDE

 **Kregel**
Publications

James: Discovering God's Delight in a Lived-Out Faith
Leader's Guide © 2019 Sue Edwards

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Before You Begin . . .

When my publisher asked me to consider writing a study on James’s epistle, at first I resisted because of the controversy surrounding the book and its seeming contradictions with the writings of Paul. But as I prayed and began my study process, I rejoiced at Kregel’s request. I discovered that James and Paul agree. It’s human commentators who’ve confused us. My study in James produced a joyful obedience and a sensitivity to harmful tendencies and outright sin that I had ignored or not recognized. This discovery and the consequent actions to cleanse my heart and life led to deeper intimacy in my relationship with God. I pray this study will reap similar results in you.

Every believer should study this letter, and I’m delighted that you have chosen to unearth its riches. Although you may use this study guide for personal devotions, consider inviting other women to join you to add depth to your quest.

If you invite other women to join you, familiarize yourself with this overview. Then, as you work your way through the study, read the week-by-week leader’s guide. I have included discussion topics specific to that lesson, troubleshooting tips, activity ideas, and other pertinent information and counsel to aid in a productive group experience.

If you are new at leading a small group, be sure to digest the “Training Guide for Small-Group Leaders” before your first gathering. You’ll find this resource on my website www.discovertogetherseries.com, along with other helpful tools. Even if you have led groups before, consider reviewing the instructions and tips in the training guide. Skilled leaders enhance the likelihood that a group will bond and thrive, but a poor leader usually stifles healthy interaction. If you encounter particular challenges in your group, refer back to the training guide for help.

GOAL OF THE STUDY

The goal of this study, consistent with James’s purpose, is to prepare Christians to live out their faith with intentionality and intensity in light of God’s grace. God saved you to live forever with him and other believers in the new heaven and earth, but that’s only the beginning. As a Christ-follower, your life matters here on earth too! God infused you with purpose to make a difference. Desperate people surround you who need the Lord, but your works will influence them to trust Christ just as much, and for some probably more, than your words. But for those works to bear real fruit, you must work out of a deep sense of dependence and gratitude to the Lord for his grace. God included James in Scripture to inspire and challenge you in your



daily walk to perform consistent good works to shine forth the light of Christ's love to others. The result—you'll experience deep joy as you fulfill your purpose and delight your Father in heaven.

A secondary goal of the study concerns equipping you for trials and temptations. American culture seems more and more hostile to people of faith. The future looks shaky, not only nationally but globally. It should be easy for women to identify with James's original audience, making the lessons interesting and the insights applicable. This study should draw women who realize they need to prepare themselves and generations that follow for "such a time as this" (Esther 4:14).

A BOLD STUDY

Every book of the Bible has its own ethos, an atmosphere or tone. James is bold and he's not afraid to make you uncomfortable. Since now we live in a culture that fears truths that might cause anyone discomfort, you may find yourself and women you lead resistant and defensive. Fight these tendencies by preparing your group ahead of time concerning the nature of the study. Explain that James's purpose is not for us to judge one another, but instead God wants us to discover our flaws that lead to broken fellowship with God and others, and that end in ultimate heartache. Lean into the discomfort and learn. The study should foster deep discussions that develop true disciples ready for the real world.

SPECIAL NEW FEATURE: GET UP AND GO ACTIVITIES

Because James challenges us to allow our faith to impact every area of our lives so we can overcome bad habits and sinful patterns that drag us down, I've included an opportunity at the end of each lesson to put what we learn into practice through a Get Up and Go activity. I've identified the author's main thrust in that lesson and asked women to pay special attention to that area of their lives during the week ahead. I've also posed related questions to spark discovery and evaluate actions and attitudes, hoping this exercise will lead to specific applications.

Then the next lesson begins with a Get Up and Go Follow-Up discussion. Take a specified block of time each week to focus on the activity, depending on the total time allotted for your discussion. Don't ask anyone by name to share their experiences or embarrass anyone who did not follow through on the exercise. Ask women to limit unnecessary details but to highlight what they learned—and don't let this turn into a "fix-it" counseling session from the other women. Then move into what Scripture has to teach that week.

HOW TO LEAD IF TIME IS LIMITED

A thorough study of any biblical text is vital for biblical literacy that results in sound application, but if you aren't able to go through the questions without rushing or giving everyone time to participate, consider these tips:

- As the leader, quickly summarize any introductory material and move into the questions. Don't read notes or other lesson sections unless needed for clarification.
- Answer observations from the text yourself as the leader or limit the response to one person.
- Skip questions that you discern are not central to the meaning of the biblical text.
- Focus on just one section of the lesson that you sense is most applicable to your particular group. This is better than skipping around and choosing a question here and there. Understanding the flow of the text is important and builds toward valid application. Otherwise you risk twisting Scripture.
- Save the Get Up and Go activity for the end of the lesson, or meet once a month in a home or coffee shop and discuss the Get Up and Go activities for several lessons.

A SAFE PLACE

Making the group an open, protected place will be especially important as you discuss these serious issues. We need a place where we can be brutally honest about our shortcomings, doubts, and fears. We need a place where no questions are off-limits. Your role as a leader is to create a safe place to process and share. Safe places destroy roadblocks to faith and bring down strongholds, resulting in spiritual, emotional, and mental health. As you guide the group with skill and a caring heart, women may actually change the way they think, feel, and act. What a privilege!

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Each lesson walks you, verse by verse, through James's letter. Observation, interpretation, application, correlation, opinion, and discussion questions flow, guiding you through the text to help you grasp God's intended meaning and apply it to life today. This methodical approach is based on sound interpretive principles designed to reduce error and speculation. Occasionally women will be asked to place themselves into the setting or the shoes of the original author or readers; this exercise, although somewhat

speculative, helps the passage come alive in the mind's eye of contemporary readers. Opinion and discussion questions aid in application to current and personal issues.

The goal is more than head knowledge—it's life change. Authentic growth includes new convictions and attitudes. The lessons are designed to move the participant's learning from head to heart to hand. Although each lesson is grounded in James, sometimes you will study other related passages.

I provide short commentaries on unclear or perplexing passages. My goal in this leader's guide is not to overwhelm you with massive amounts of information but instead to give you concise answers that will help you guide your group through any rough spots. I also suggest additional quality resources for further study on your own.

You'll want to acquaint yourself and your group with the supplemental content in the sidebars to enhance your study experience:

- *Memory Verse.* Each lesson begins with an optional memory verse related to the main topic that week. Use this tool on a volunteer basis only.
- *Digging Deeper.* Some women will want to engage with the optional Digging Deeper questions in the margins of the study guide. Determine with your group how you want to use these study prompts. You may want to include them in your discussion, use them at the end if time allows, or simply suggest that women who want to spend more time in deeper study work through these on their own. If a particular woman shows an aptitude for Scripture study, you may want to ask her to tackle a specific Digging Deeper question and report her findings in the next session. Then ask if any other women also worked on that Digging Deeper question, widening the discussion if possible.
- *Quotes, Background Info, and Extras.* Soak up the inspiring sidebars that relate to particular parts of each lesson. If any resonates with you especially, use it as a springboard for discussion or personal application.

WILL YOU END WITH A WRAP-UP MESSAGE?

Leading small groups and teaching are different skills. When you wear your small-group leader's hat, you do not lecture! But you may want to end your time by putting on a teacher's hat. Participants often enjoy hearing a message to crystallize biblical truth.

Your wrap-up might be a ten-minute informal presentation, allowing for interaction and questions, or a thirty-minute formal lecture, more like a pastor's Sunday message. If your study consists of several small groups, you may prefer a formal lec-

ture. If you're meeting in a home, your group may prefer a more interactive format. Use what works for you and your group.

If you believe that God may want you to teach the Bible, step out and try. Women love to hear their own leaders teach them rather than hear virtual teachers in video series. Resources to sharpen your teaching skills are listed below. At first, your skills may not be as honed as more experienced teachers, but in time and with practice you should improve. And you have advantages over a virtual teacher. Women need models they can watch, hug, and talk to. And when one of their own steps out and is used by God, it inspires everyone to step forward and use their gifts too. So, if something in you says, “teach!”—then go for it!

INTRODUCTORY IDEAS

If you plan to include lecturing in your format, you may want to begin with a message on the priority of leaving a legacy, fighting the tendency to resist obedience, or the negative influence of “politically correct tolerance” on living out our faith. What do the women in your study need to know as they embark on a study of James? Do they need insight into the first-century culture? If you take on a teaching role, do they need to get to know you as their teacher? Do they need an opportunity to learn more about each other? Do they need time to interact, building trust and comfort in the group? Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you as you consider how to prepare your group for the study.

ENLIST WOMEN TO TEACH WITH YOU

Other women have something to say that would benefit the group. Listen attentively when they tell how God works in their lives. Identify women who inspire others. Who holds a high view of the Bible and has spent time studying? Who walks close to Jesus? Who lives wisely? Who is articulate? Passionate? Growing? Mature? Organized in her thinking?

If you add a teaching element to your Bible study format, consider asking one of these women to share a short testimony or deliver the message for the entire group that week. She must have a cooperative attitude. When you give a woman the platform, you give her influence. I've worked with a few women who took advantage of this opportunity. They spoke twice as long as the time allotted. Or they refused to prepare, wandering aimlessly. Or they became so emotional that they broke down, upsetting women in the study.

To alleviate these problems, set a time limit and ask women to write out what they will say. Insist that they review their message with you. Stress that if they're a

“time hog,” group time will be shorter, irritating other participants. Use wisdom as you select presenters, but consider how much women will benefit by hearing a variety of voices.

RESOURCES TO HELP YOU TEACH WITH ACCURACY AND SKILL

- Mathews, Alice P. *Preaching That Speaks to Women*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.
- Robinson, Haddon. *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001.
- Stanley, Andy, and Lane Jones. *Communicating for a Change*. Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2006.
- Stott, John. *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.
- Willhite, Keith, and Scott Gibson, eds. *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching: Connecting the Bible to People*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998.

RESOURCES TO HELP YOU STUDY JAMES

An excellent, free online resource are the Bible notes of Dr. Thomas L. Constable, a former professor at Dallas Theological Seminary. His commentaries are thorough, clear, and practical, but not overly detailed or tedious. His resources provide quality help for both academic and lay teachers and leaders. Find them on www.planoblechapel.org/soniclight.

Books

- Cedar, Paul A. *The Preacher's Commentary: James, 1 & 2 Peter, Jude*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984.
- Walvoord, John F., and Roy B. Zuck, eds. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*. Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983.
- Jensen, Irving. *James: A Self-Study Guide*. Chicago: Moody, 1971.
- Motyer, J. A. *The Message of James*. The Bible Speaks Today. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1985.
- Nystrom, David P. *James*. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997.
- Richardson, Kurt A. *James: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. The New American Commentary 36. Nashville: B&H, 1997.
- Sunukjian, Donald R. *Invitation to James: Persevering Through Trials to Win the Crown*. Wooster, Ohio: Weaver, 2014.

LESSON 1

How to Thrive in Tough Times (Part One)

Open with prayer. Should you pray or invite one of the participants to do so? Be sensitive to the women in your group. If they're comfortable praying out loud, give them the opportunity. If not, you, as the leader, pray.

Then spend some time getting to know one another. You might, for example, ask each woman to introduce herself by telling something about her family, hobbies, what she likes to do on a Saturday night, a pet peeve, or what she hopes to gain from the study. If time allows, spend your first meeting connecting with questions or ice-breaker games to help your group bond or focus on the study theme. You can google icebreakers or community-builder games and locate an activity that suits your purpose for the first gathering. You might also find and tell a great story or illustration about follow-through or the importance of living out what you learn. Relate the story or exercise to the upcoming study when the group will work through how to actually apply what they are learning. Remind them that they will need one another, as well as God, to succeed. You may want to pray for one another as you close.

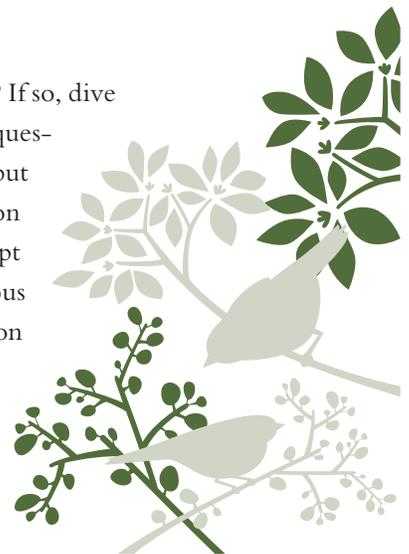
GET FOCUSED

Look over the study guide with your group and express your excitement about the topic. Create and discuss ground rules. If women join later, remember to orient them. Stress the importance of confidentiality.

Some women come to Bible study for the sole purpose of studying Scripture. Others come for community, to find friends. Regardless of your own bent, honor both desires. We all need a relationship with God through serious Bible study, *and* we all need relationships in authentic community. Be sure the schedule reflects time for both.

DISCUSS LESSON 1

Did you ask the women to come prepared to discuss the first lesson? If so, dive in. Paraphrase parts of the introductory section and ask the first question. Spend more time on the discussion and opinion questions, but don't skip observation (what does the text say?) and interpretation questions (what does the text mean?). If you do, you will interrupt the flow of the discussion, as many questions are based on previous questions. If you don't want to spend time discussing the observation



questions, you may summarize the answers yourself and then move into other kinds of questions.

If you are running out of time, cut questions that do not hinder the logical flow of the lesson. If you don't have enough time to cover all the questions well, you may simply want to discuss one part of the lesson thoroughly and not address every section. Make the questions work for you and your group.

Point out that the lesson is peppered with notes to help with difficult passages and to give helpful background. Tell participants to read the quotes in the sidebars as time allows. If they desire more, encourage them to tackle the Digging Deeper questions. These added elements should bring the truths of the lesson alive, and you may even want to discuss them.

LESSON CONTENT

Lesson 1 contains four parts:

- The answers to four questions to orient the women to the letter: Why did James write this letter? What was happening in the ancient world at that time? Who was he writing to? Who was James?
- Passages concerning the relationship of Jesus to his younger brother James and their family dynamics
- Sections covering James 1:1–4 and 12 to lay a foundation for James's first lesson on living out our faith in the midst of trials and temptations
- The first Get Up and Go activity

If you sense these four elements would overwhelm your students, you can divide this lesson into two parts, or you can cover some elements during the first gathering in addition to icebreakers and an orientation to the study. Be creative and use the material however it works best for you.

The purpose of Lesson 1 is to help students understand the original audience and author as well as how to relate to the trials and tribulations they encountered. Although we live in a different era, we continue to face problems and suffering today no matter how hard we attempt to avoid them, and how we live out our faith in tough times is often a powerful witnessing platform.

THE VALUE OF UNDERSTANDING THE AUTHOR

You may be surprised by how much emphasis I give to helping you know James personally. He's a relatively unknown but important person in the early church. Studying the biblical texts about James also teaches us more about Jesus and his interactions with

his earthly family as well as the brother who was next in the family line. Through this study, we discover interesting truths about Jesus's human side that help us relate to him now.

In addition, if any of the women in your group come from a Catholic background, these passages may be eye-opening and you may want to emphasize this section more. Catholic theology teaches that Mary remained a virgin and that Jesus did not have brothers or sisters. However, Matthew 13:54–57 names Jesus's earthly siblings, and other texts infer this reality. The fact that James was Jesus's brother contradicts Catholic doctrine. To former or current Catholics these passages may be disturbing, causing them to reassess what they've been taught. If you find women struggling with these issues, don't be argumentative but simply encourage them to continue studying God's Word for themselves and trusting that God will reveal truth to them in his timing. Don't make this a divisive issue, and do all you can to be sure other women in the group don't either. Please don't talk about the Catholic Church or doctrine in a derogatory manner in the group, but simply let the Bible speak for itself.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Question 10 begins to develop the biblical foundation to help us live out our faith during trials and temptations. James commands us to “consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds” (1:4). The questions that follow help us wrestle with and understand this challenging command. However, for some women new to the faith or still investigating, this passage may present an additional roadblock that hinders them from moving forward in a faith commitment to Christ. Let me explain.

When preparing this study, I used the 2011 New International Version of the Bible, which includes the words “and sisters” in 1:2, but many versions leave out a reference to women as part of the audience. One reason I use the 2011 NIV is my belief that it is more gender accurate than many other translations, excluding the NET Bible. The Greek word in verse 2 often translated “brothers” is *adelphoi*, which refers to believers, both men and women, as part of the family of God. Thus a better translation is “brothers and sisters” instead of just “brothers.”

Have I succumbed to our culture's demands for political correctness? What difference does the way *adelphoi* is translated make? Many women new to the faith or still investigating have been taught that Christianity is a hierarchical religion that devalues women. When they come across a text that seems to refer only to men, they can easily assume women are not included in the letter. Mainstream culture's mistaken stereotype gains support, and this distortion easily builds resentment these women may or may not express. Regardless, the issue sidetracks the essence of what James wants to teach us and

can tragically prejudice a woman from even considering the Christian faith. In his Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20), Jesus commanded us to evangelize a hurting world. If a more accurate translation of a critical word eliminates a roadblock for women, why are so many Christians unwilling to even consider a more accurate translation?

We can't expect everyone to buy new Bibles, so what can we do? Consider these solutions. As a leader when you read the passage, simply insert the words “and sisters” with a quick explanation of the word *adelphoi*. You might also add that James uses the same word in verses 16 and 19, as well as in 2:1, 5, 14; 3:10, 12; 4:11; 5:7, 9, 10, 12, and 19. Ask the women to do the mental gymnastics each time they read “brothers” and explain that this distortion was probably never intentional by male scholars but simply an oversight. Now that women scholars have joined their ranks and are adding their perspectives, changes are ensuing.

Question 13 talks about “the testing” of a Christian's faith. Help women understand that a person's faith is tested not to determine their eternal destiny but to show them and others the reality and depth of their faith. Failing doesn't bar them from eternal life if they truly trust in Christ alone through faith alone for their salvation, but their failure does hinder their fellowship with God and can result in discipline and consequences to help them turn from their sin. James will emphasize this truth throughout the letter.

Question 15 asks participants to decipher Revelation 2:10 where John talks about a “victor's crown.” This passage refers to a Christian's eternal rewards for good works and is not related to salvation, which is not on the basis of their deeds. We will dig into this concept in depth later in the study. For now, ask the women to wait for answers ahead.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- James challenges us to live out our faith. Encourage the women to look for stories or poems about people who have done that to share with the group. If you don't have time to read these stories or poems in the group, ask participants to make copies or email them for others to read outside group time. Consider choosing the best and reading them during a final wrap-up week, as a review of what you've learned.
- Ask each woman to write down a particular struggle that she would like to commit to God and learn to overcome during the James study. One way to provide confidentiality is to furnish black ink and black paper. Then pray over the struggles and place them where they can be seen each week. Or you may want to bury them or plant them under some flowers. Find some way to creatively express your commitment and faith that God is working as you grow through the study. The women in the group can also suggest ideas.

LESSON 2

How to Thrive in Tough Times (Part Two)

Lesson 2 takes us deeper into how to live out our faith when life gets really difficult. The questions move through the text step-by-step, wringing out each concept thoroughly. The verses contain some difficult ideas completely foreign to current cultural thinking. Take time to dissect each part. Understanding these truths is required if we are to stand strong and live well in the crucible. James paints word pictures to express God's truths and help us understand deep, rich spiritual truths that can prepare and strengthen us for life in a fallen world, for the consequences we may reap when others sin, and even for the painful results of our own sin.

TROUBLESHOOTING

The first Digging Deeper question asks what Exodus 28:3 teaches us about wisdom. Be sure women understand that wisdom is not head knowledge but skill in living well—exactly what James wants to produce in us. In Exodus 28:3, Moses commands the Israelite tailors to construct particular garments for the priests. He refers to these tailors as wise. Moses shows us that wisdom is something we do, not something we know. These skilled craftsmen applied what they knew and the result was a beautiful, tangible garment. Godly wisdom is the ability to live out what we know, and the results will be beautiful too.

Finding the correct answer to question 14 is vital. Misinterpreting verse 15 can easily trap participants in a quagmire of misinterpretation and Scripture-twisting. The passage reads, “Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death” (James 1:15). James is explaining the downward spiral of sin and ends by saying sin's ultimate result is death—but what kind of death? The rule of thumb is that when several meanings are possible, we always allow the context to help us discern the meaning.

The word *death* has a number of different meanings:

- Death of the physical body
- Spiritual death as expressed in the excellent sidebar by Donald Sunukjian
- Death of peace and intimacy with God
- The end of a dream or goal
- Eternal separation from God in hell



What is James saying here? In my opinion he can't mean eternal separation from God in hell or losing one's salvation because of sin. The letter is written to "brothers and sisters," believers who are scattered all over the Roman Empire and attempting to live out their faith in these hostile places. The kind of death Christians experience when they allow themselves to be captivated by sin includes various consequences: lack of intimacy with God, natural consequences that often bring heartache and death to relationships, the death of a life of joy and purpose, and a sense of disappointing God that leads to shame. In addition, God may choose all kinds of consequences to discipline his own, the way a loving human father disciplines the children he loves for their good. The goal is to awaken them to their sin and restore them to full fellowship with God and a life of purpose, joy, and inner peace. We observe these kinds of "deaths" every day in those who choose to deliberately walk away from God and what they know pleases him. The entire letter is full of warnings to help Christians understand the seriousness of deliberate sin.

LESSON 3

Take an Honest Look in the Mirror

In Lesson 3, James exhorts his readers to enter into the sometimes painful process of evaluating themselves. Typically today, Western culture avoids asking us to take an honest look at our shortcomings, flaws, and sins by teaching that ultimate truth, right, and wrong do not exist. The highest value is tolerance. As long as we aren't "hurting" anyone else, anything goes. As a result, the women in your group may push back when asked to judge themselves against biblical standards. Encourage the women that we are all in process and unconditionally loved regardless of our faults. Learning to live out our faith is a gradual undertaking and results in good for ourselves and the world around us. God doesn't ask us to live wisely to deprive or punish us but because he has our best interest at heart. Help the women understand that we are all at different places in our walk with God, and discourage any from "playing the Holy Spirit" for the group.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEA

- Choose a verse, possibly James 1:27, and make a bookmark or plaque for each participant, reminding her that how she lives matters.
- Purchase a small mirror for each participant and decorate it with a verse from this lesson to help her continue the quest for inner beauty.



LESSON 4

What God Thinks If We Play Favorites

Lesson 4 focuses on loving people who are different from us, and defines favoritism as sin.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Because racism has become tied to politics in Western culture, this topic easily raises the level of discomfort in some group settings. If you sense this issue will create an uncomfortable group ethos, insist that the group remain a “politics-free zone” and instead limit your discussion to what Scripture says concerning the issue.

Don’t allow these questions to lead to a divisive rabbit trail on politics. If you think your group may wander into this kind of rhetoric, address your concern before you discuss the lesson together. Lay the ground rule that politics is off-limits, and if women forget during the discussion, remind them again.

Beginning with question 12, the lesson attempts to help participants understand verse 12 in light of the *bema* seat. This term refers to a judgment for believers. This reality may startle women in the group who thought that their salvation meant they would never be judged for their attitudes and actions. Help the women understand that they are eternally secure once they place their faith in Christ, but they will stand before the *bema* seat to receive rewards in the kingdom. Scholars disagree on the nature of these rewards. Some say that Christians will rule and reign with Jesus in different capacities aligned with their good works. Others insist that believers will lay their rewards at the feet of Jesus. No one knows for sure. If the women discuss rewards, ask them to do so respectfully.

Be sure you leave time to discuss this important doctrine. Distorting the meaning of verse 12 can mistakenly lead to the idea that we are saved by our good deeds, a doctrine contrary to the rest of Scripture. Lesson 5 will delve deeper into this issue. If participants struggle to understand the *bema* seat judgment for believers, read the notes that explain the doctrine and remind them that Lesson 5 will add clarity.



LESSON 5

How Faith Works

Truths revealed in this lesson are sometimes misunderstood, which explains why Martin Luther argued against including James in the Bible. Understanding how faith and works intersect is vital to living a useful Christian life. I have provided notes throughout to help participants interpret James's writings so they don't conflict with Paul's emphasis that salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone, for the glory of God. Take your time or consider dividing the lesson into two parts if necessary for a thorough understanding of these important passages.

James's goal is to inspire us to good works and a fruitful life through right motivation and the enablement of the Holy Spirit. Encourage the women to follow through on the Get Up and Go activity and take time before Lesson 6 to discuss what they learned about themselves.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Question 5 looks into 1 Corinthians 11:27–32 to reveal that in extreme cases God sometimes cuts short the lives of Christians to limit the damage they do to themselves, others, and his reputation. If some women struggle with this concept, let them air their doubts without shaming them. If women disagree, ask them to do so respectfully, and move on. Trust the Holy Spirit to reveal biblical truths in his timing. Don't use guilt as a motivator but instead emphasize God's grace and the great joy they will experience when they live out their faith.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Ask volunteers in the group to participate in an impromptu role-play of how Rahab illustrated that her faith was living and active. Discuss what you learned.



LESSON 6

Walk Your Talk

This lesson moves into topics that challenge us to tame our tongues—a difficulty for most of us. The lesson is straightforward and not particularly hard to understand. Many women know what James is saying, but they don't do it. Spend much of your time on application and set a tone of transparency. One way is to share your own struggles so that others feel the freedom to do the same. We will never overcome issues of the tongue until we acknowledge the unkind, damaging, and sinful words that sometimes come out of our mouths. This lesson will only work if women get real about taming their tongues.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Question 11 focuses on verses 7 and 8 where James informs us that none of us can tame our tongues. He infers that in our own strength we cannot bridle our words. However, the answer emerges in question 15 as we study passages that show us that only through the Holy Spirit's enablement can we experience success in obeying God's commands concerning our tongue.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Ask for volunteers to write down a conflict that they have observed or were involved in related to their tongue. Be sure they change up the details to protect others. Then use these situations as case studies and analyze how Jesus would counsel them to speak.
- Play a video showing what can happen when unkind words damage relationships or God's reputation. Discuss. Review the film before showing it to the group, as tastes in film differ.



LESSON 7

Plumb Your Real Reflection

This lesson is convicting! James takes us to task concerning our relationship with “the world,” those systems in place that strive against God’s work. I’ve provided notes to help participants recognize possible resistance, and you can help by simply suggesting that some of us own the reality that we’d rather not admit our flaws and sin.

As we analyze our relationship with the world, we may fight accommodation—fitting in for acceptance and benefits—or we may fight an extreme judgmentalism toward the world that can lead to an attitude of disgust and total separation. Neither approach pleases God. Lesson 7 is designed to help women navigate a healthy relationship with the world that leads to purity as well as opportunities to love and engage in conversations about Jesus with nonbelievers.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Witnessing for Christ with nonbelievers scares many women, particularly in countries where “tolerance” is highly valued and any suggestion that there is only one way to God is politically incorrect. Cold-call or in-your-face evangelism is ineffective with many unbelievers today, although not all. Witnessing requires a discerning spirit and often great time and patience. As the women work their way through this lesson, help them find ways to make their witnessing a natural part of their lifestyle as they talk with others about the part God plays in their lives.

Studying the Bible together, and articulating answers in the group, is excellent preparation for witnessing to nonbelievers. Attempt to discuss this topic without guilt, as many of the women probably know they should be witnessing for Jesus but find it extremely intimidating and difficult. Encourage women to initiate conversations about Jesus naturally without an endgame in mind. Help them trust the Holy Spirit as they develop authentic relationships at work or in their neighborhoods, enter into natural conversations about Jesus, and then leave the results to God.



LESSON 8

A Final Word on Honoring God in the Midst of Trials

This lesson covers a variety of important topics to consider when crisis erupts, many of which review or offer a deeper look at particular ways we live out our faith.

James ends with a section on prayer that's difficult to understand and can be controversial. I've added notes to aid the flow of the text and to clarify James's ideas and commands.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Question 22 asks women to discern the meaning of James 5:20, which uses the term *death* to mean physical death now and not eternal damnation, similar to the meaning in 2:14. Hopefully by now the participants understand how James uses this term and why his letter doesn't contradict Paul's teaching about salvation by faith alone in Christ alone.

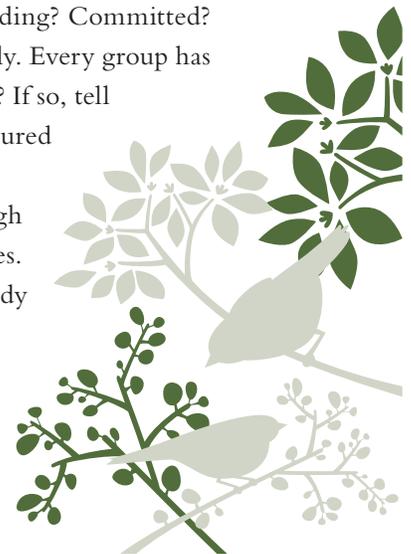
CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Plan a half day in prayer for your group to reflect on what you've learned in James. Find a quiet place. If you like, decorate with candles and lower the lights. Create an idea sheet to hand out with passages to ponder and suggestions for prayer. Include time alone and time together. Pepper your time together with group prayer, worship readings, and singing.

WILL YOU SAY GOODBYE OR GO ON TOGETHER?

Is this a short-term group, or do you, as the leader, want to continue meeting? The first decision is yours. Count the cost. Is the group thriving? Bonding? Committed? Worth the effort you are investing? Answer these questions honestly. Every group has a beginning and an end. Is this the time for your group to disband? If so, tell the group your reasons, kindly but emphatically. Don't be pressured into continuing against your better judgment.

If you determine you're excited about leading the group through another study, you may want to poll the group to learn their desires. If so, plan a date to meet for a brainstorming session on what to study



and what changes might be in order, if any. (See www.discovertogetherseries.com for additional study options.)

Either way, use this last gathering of *James: Discovering God's Delight in a Lived-Out Faith* to reflect, review, and celebrate what has been accomplished. Plan a time that fosters a sense of closure—possibly festive food, a potluck brunch or luncheon, or some other special activity. For example, you might talk about how God has helped you to live out your faith. You could list benefits you now enjoy as a result of the study. You might talk about changes you have observed in the members as a result of sharing this study. In some way, celebrate this final chapter in your group experience. Praise and thank God for what he has done in your lives individually and as a worshipping community. If any of the participants are leaving the group, be sure to say goodbye and pray for them.