

## **Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: Notes on the Letter of James**

Reminder: You should have about 5 pages of notes on the 7 letters/epistles we shall be looking at from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday in February. These summarise various sources which look at the James, Peter, John and Jude letters. I think you will find it worthwhile (re) reading these earlier notes before we start. They include a reminder that we don't always know who actually wrote the letters, when, or to whom. The important thing is that they are in the Bible because they have something to say to us. I have to say I like the James letter, especially in The Message Version. Whatever your preferred Bible version, do have a look at The Message Version if you can – maybe a whole letter read through if time allows,

**Monday February 10: host David, lead Evan: James Chapter 1:** Practical down to earth stuff, from someone who saw the Christian Church and Christian Faith as firmly rooted in Judaism...though seeing God in a significantly different way to all those Jews who had not followed the Jesus route. Our trials are not sent by God to test us, but, with God's help we can use them to grow. Prayer links us with God. "Good fortune" comes and goes; but God stays. WE NEED TO DO THE WORD: in other words to live our faith not just talk about it. We can't be always happy clappy, but we should not despair: when the going gets tough, the tough get going. Learn (LISTEN) before you do: spontaneous isn't good enough. Not least, open your ears and open your brain before you open your mouth. One interesting aspect of all this is liberty meaning obedience – maybe this can be seen as freed from doing bad, in order to do good? Favourite passages?

**February 17: Host Toyin, Lead Andy. James Chapter 2:** Don't let public opinion influence how you live.....A hard concept for a politician! Maybe more realistic to go for "determine how you live"? Don't favour advantaged people... again can be challenging, especially when it means favouring the disadvantaged (and perhaps unpopular). The Kingdom is promised to anyone who loves God. The Royal rule of the scriptures: Love others as you love yourself: the rule that sets us free. Again this interesting concept of rules setting you free! Turn words into deeds – perhaps the key James message. Don't just talk the talk: walk the walk. Faith and works, works and faith, fit together hand in glove. Cut works and faith in two and you end up with corpse on your hands. Faith fruitful in works. Unacceptable distinctions between people: how do we choose the people we like or admire or emulate or team up with, and those we try to avoid? A life of faith demands a life of doing. We tend to focus on Jobs – with or without titles; but un-labelled daily activities are at least as important.

**February 24: Host Toyin, Lead Miranda: James Chapter 3:** Don't rush to become a teacher. You can see why James says this; and he is thinking of people with formal teacher status. (Influencers in today's jargon and culture. ) But actually we are all teachers: the 10 year old is teacher to the 8 year old sibling. If you are known to go to church, non-church goers will tend to assume that you represent and speak for the church. James argues that we get it wrong nearly every time we open our mouths [press our send buttons]. That

really is a serious warning about thinking before speaking: thinking about the audience and the message. But, realistically, we can't spend half an hour reflecting before we respond. So we will get it wrong at least from time to time. So ready to correct?

The power of words, for good or ill: spark starts forest fire. James notes curses and blessings from the same mouth, and challenges this juxtaposition. Love well, love wisely... love everybody? It's the way you love, not the way you talk that counts: yes, but talk lovingly too. Treat each other with dignity and honour.

How do we distinguish wisdom from intelligence from knowledge. (Someone labelled learning disabled can be very wise!)

How you do things matters. The beggar being grudgingly thrown a few coins is that much better off. The beggar also offered conversation and a smile might also be that much happier. The right act/word in the right way for the right reasons.

**Monday March 3: Host Toyin, Lead David. James Chapter 4:** Wars and quarrels. It is interesting to reflect on where these came from and what sustains them. Economic nationalism. Self-interest. Spoilt child syndrome? Each wanting his or her own way. Short-term thinking. The desire for revenge. Is one of Trump's redeeming virtues that he hankers after a Nobel peace prize? Wilful pride and willing humility. What is humility? Think Thackford Squeers: I'm ever so 'umble. Let God work his will in you. Don't bad mouth each other. What divides Church from Church and church member from church member? Why do I not get on with someone? I am recalling a brother who said of his sister: "I don't like her, but I love her" Maybe a wider lesson there?

**Monday March 10: Host Andy, Lead Peta: James Chapter 5:** Warning to the rich – but remember being financially rich is not in itself a bad thing; it is how you got it, how you use it, and how much you rely on it. James is keen on social justice, and expects Christians individually and collectively to promote social justice: voting, writing, protesting, and, not least, doing.

Wait patiently for the Master's Arrival. When does patience become inertia? Learn from the OT prophets: their readiness to speak up and act out, and their readiness to suffer the consequences of speaking up. The patience of Job: we don't necessarily deserve our sufferings, but we can always learn from them and live through them. God cares, cares down to the last detail..... even if it doesn't always feel like that.

Just say what is true. James is not keen on oath swearing: keep it simple, keep true. We need both prayer and song: the asking, the repenting, the rejoicing. Believing prayer will heal you. That assertion is a challenge: yes, sometimes people unexpectedly get better; but by no means all prayer for recovery is followed by recovery.

Confess your sins to each other. How do we feel about that? How do we feel about confession to a priest (which James does not suggest)? Pray for each other: YES! Elijah prayed for drought and got drought, prayed for rain and got rain> A bit dodgy if that was universally true! DON'T WRITE PEOPLE OFF.

Wait patiently, speak rightly, care deeply.

Share one another's burdens: Examples of this?