

A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of a person's hands holding a smartphone. A warm, golden light flare emanates from the screen, creating a soft glow. The person is wearing a blue and white plaid shirt. The background is dark and out of focus.

James

Daily Reflection

Through September 2026

**Quick to hear
Slow to speak
Slow to anger**



Gracious Street
Methodist Church

KNARESBOROUGH

James was devalued by the great reformer Luther and reduced in the 20th Century to ethical slogans. Consequently James has been ignored, given little voice or attention, but the wisdom of this letter holds a powerful message of how to live well.

Author and Audience

The opening verse is a simple introduction that simply identifies the author as 'James' (Jas 1:1) but which James has been contested. It is thought the author is either James, brother of Jesus and leader of the early church in Jerusalem, or his writings were later edited by another unknown individual. While not unanimous, the leaders of the early church did attributed the letter to James, the brother of Jesus.

Similarly, a particular audience is not addressed because the recipients are identified as 'the twelve tribes scattered among the nations' (Jas 1:1). Scholars again have differing opinions but it is quite possible the letter was addressed to Christians (predominantly Jewish) living outside of Judea and experienced oppression.

Date

Some scholars are in favour of a date after the martyrdom of James (62 AD) but others suggest an earlier date of the middle 40s AD. This is approximately 10 years after the ministry of Jesus. The reason for the earlier date is due to synagogue being used as the meeting place and the absence of the debate around Gentile inclusion. So the letter may predate the Gentile expansion.

Canon (officially accepted documents)

The earliest list of the New Testament canon is from Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria (367 AD). He located the letter of James after the four Gospels and Acts, and before Paul's letter. However, our modern Bible reflect the later version of the Latin Vulgate Bible that pushes the location of James after Paul's letters and near to the back of the canon.

Athanasius ordering of the canon may suggest that James, brother of Jesus, wrote a pastoral letter to Jewish Christians living in the diaspora. While there would have been Gentile converts, it may predate the prominence of Paul's ministry to Gentiles because he does not discuss their inclusion, circumcision or the debate between law and Spirit.

At the same time, his focus on justification differs to Paul but James would agree with the need for justification by faith.

Though the letter is not explicitly Christ-centred (Jesus is mentioned by name twice), there are a number of allusions to Jesus' teaching from the Sermon on the Mount (Matt: 5:3; 5:7; 5:10-12; 5:33-37; 5:22; 7:7-11; 7:24-27; to name a few) that offers pastoral support to this struggling community.

Message

While Martin Dibelius conclusion that the letter is a paraenesis of loosely connected moral saying is a stretch, the letter doesn't have a strong structure. However, this pastoral letter provides wisdom in supporting a struggling community to live well. The letter focuses on spiritual development that is being influenced by social and economic issues, injustices and poor choices. The purpose of the pastoral letter to the diaspora is to maintain their faith in God and care for the powerless. Perhaps the purpose of this letter is loosely structured by the proverb 'Let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger' (James 1:19).

James 1:1 - 26

Introduction

The diaspora community experienced many trials that tested their faith in God. They were in danger of being rudderless, lacking wisdom and direction as they were blown around by the whims of the wind (Jas 1:2-6). They were encouraged not to be tempted by deception of wealth and power that decays (Jas 1:9-11, 13-16) but to persevere and trust in the promises of God (Jas 1: 12, 17-18).

This introduction leads to a proverb that outlines the loose structure of the letter. 'Let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger' (James 1:19). The three instructions of this structure are briefly unpacked in this introduction. The diaspora community were to quickly hear the Torah, keeping 'a tight rein on their tongues' (Jas 1:26) and 'human anger' (Jas 1:20). Thus forming God's righteousness that cares for the powerless (Jas 1:20, 27).

James 2:1 - 2:26

Quick to hear

'Listen' (Jas 2:5) links to hear and obey the Torah (Jas 1:22-25) with doing. This begins with the poor being neglected in favour of the wealthy who were causing oppression (Jas 2:1-7). However, hearing the Torah and the teachings of Jesus acknowledge the poor will inherit the kingdom (Jas 2:5). Furthermore, loving your neighbour and mercy requires liberation rather than favouring the wealthy for short term survival (Jas 2:8-12). After-all, the glorious Lord Jesus Christ (Jas

2:1) loved the poor and the powerless. This diaspora community was failing the 'test of faith' because the Torah reveals that faith without deeds of mercy is dead (Jas 2:14-26).

James 3:1-18 **Slow to speak**

It is easy for this diaspora community, who were experiencing struggles, to fail the test of controlling the tongue (Jas 3-8). An untamed, foolish tongue of 'teachers' (Jas 3:1-3) and the people who make the 'whole body' (Jas 3:6) can lead to disorder (Jas 3:16) of a parched and hungry community (Jas 3:11-12). What exists within us matters most. So they needed to choose between selfish ambition (Jas 3:14) or a merciful wisdom that comes from God (Jas 3:17-18).

James 4:1-5:6 **Slow to Anger**

Finally this diaspora community needed to reflect on its quarrelling (Jas 4:1). This anger was rooted in their passion for material pleasure (Jas 4:2-3). Instead of being humble and drawing near to God, they coveted and were jealous of others that caused them to be filled with Judgment (Jas 3:4-12). They had forgotten the wisdom that God exults the humble (Jas 4:6) because their foolish, self-centred passion focused on profit, rather than God's will (Jas 4:13-17). Yet their foolish motives that caused inequality and hostility will corrode and misery will come (Jas 5:1-6).

James 5:7-20

Conclusion

The letter concludes with its opening introduction to persevere and trust in God through the language of 'patience' (Jas 5:7-8) and the metaphor of a farmers' crop links back to being 'firstfruits' (Jas 1:18).

The diaspora was encouraged to recognise the value of prayer. So they were encouraged to be vigilant in prayers of intercession, praise and confession.

Finally, they were instructed not to judge people who gave into temptations but encourage them to rediscover their faith.

Structure of Devotions

Through September, we will follow the structure below as we consider how the message of this pastoral letter may help us to live well and deepen our relationship with God.

Tue	1st Sep	James 1: 1 - 8	Faith, Trials & Wisdom
Wed	2nd Sep	James 1: 9 - 18	Wealth & Temptations
Thur	3rd Sep	James 1:1 19 - 21	Hearing & Listening
Fri	4th Sep	James 1: 22 -27	Faith in Action

Sun 6th Sept James 1: Trial and Wisdom

Mon	7th Sep	James 2: 1 - 4	Trap of Favouritism
Tue	8th Sep	James 2: 5 - 7	Rich in faith

Wed	9th Sep	James 2: 8 - 13	Law of Love & Mercy
Thur	10th Sep	James 2: 14 - 19	Alive Faith
Fri	11th Sep	James 2: 20 - 26	Faith Proved by Actions

Sunday 13th Sep James 2: Wisdom of Quick to hear

Mon	14th Sep	James 3: 1 - 2	Leadership
Tue	15th Sep	James 3: 3 - 5a	Power of Small
Wed	16th Sep	James 3: 5b - 8	Power of the Tongue
Thur	17th Sep	James 3: 9 - 12	Double Speech
Fri	18th Sep	James 3:13 -18	Wisdom

Sunday 20th Sep James 3: Wisdom of Slow to Speak

Mon	21st Sep	James 4: 1 -10	Pride & Humility
Tue	22nd Sep	James 4: 11 - 17	Judging & Boasting
Wed	23rd Sep	James 5: 1 - 6	Wealth & Injustice
Thur	24th Sep	James 5: 7 -12	Patience
Fri	25th Sep	James 5:13 - 20	Prayer

Sunday 27th Sep James 4-5: Wisdom of Slow to Anger

Each day we will prayerfully read the letter using the spiritual practice of of Lectio Divina.

1. Read the verses several times, listening for a word or phrase that speaks out to you
2. Read the verses again, prayerfully pondering why this word or phrase spoke to you
3. Read the verses a final time, praying for wisdom of what God might be saying to you

In addition to reading James, I also encourage us to engage with Ignatian spirituality. This was developed over 400 years ago by Ignatius of Loyola. It is rooted

in the belief that God is present in the world and uses the prayerful practice of what is called "Examen" to reflect on the day. See below.

1. **Gratitude**: spend a few moments in thankfulness for the gifts and blessings of the day
2. **Ask**: pray that God might enlighten you to his presence in the events, people and places off your day.
3. **Examine**: review the moments of your day, so that you can reflect on what has happened; who you have encountered; where you have experienced joy or trouble; what success or challenges you experienced; and where was God's presence.
4. **Forgiveness**: pray for forgiveness for the time you have acted or spoken in way contrary to God's will.
5. **Resolve**: decide what of your behaviour or attitude you will seek to change for tomorrow

Reading James Together

In addition to a prayerful reading of James, Gracious Street will provide other ways that will help to enrich our experience.

1. Celebrate the letter of James during Sunday services
2. Live online reading of James at 9:30am on Gracious Street's social media
3. Listen and share your thoughts in a Whats App group
4. Discuss James in a pop-up house group on a Thursday evening (7:30pm) at Gracious Street.

Prayer

‘Take Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. You have given all to me. To you, O lord, I return it. All is yours, dispose of it wholly according to your will. Give me your love and your grace, for this is sufficient for me. Amen’

Ignatius Loyola