

James 5

Week 6 - Action And Reaction: Our Choices Matter

Learning Objectives

- We exist in community, and we need to seek God both alone and together.
- Obey God's commands so that you can live a life that glorifies God and blesses others.

Steps To Prepare

- Pull together the items needed for your sciencey icebreaker, if you choose to go that route!

Pray for your time together.

Leader's Note: This is our final study in the book of James. As a recap, in previous chapters we have discussed:

- *The impact of trials and testing on our spiritual journey.*
- *Our calling to put our faith into action.*
- *How to fight favoritism and love people well.*
- *The power of the tongue and the importance of wisdom.*
- *Aligning our desires with God's.*

Optional Sciencey Icebreaker:

Items needed: Two small glasses, two medium or large bowls, 12 tablespoons water, 12 tablespoons white vinegar, 1 tablespoon baking soda, 1 tablespoon powdered sugar. (Make sure the bowl is large enough to contain the vinegar and baking soda reaction!)

1. Before small group, prepare two unlabeled glasses, one holding water, the other holding white vinegar. You should also prepare two unlabeled bowls, one holding baking soda, the other holding powdered sugar.
2. The goal of this is, as a group, to try to find the most impressive reaction from combining one liquid with one solid. The study members are not allowed to touch or taste any of the items, but they can smell and look at them.
3. When the group's decision is made, pour one of the glasses into one of the bowls and observe.

Discussion Questions:

- ? Did you get the reaction you expected?
- ? How did you make an educated guess on what was there?
- ? What would you do differently in the future?

If you want, you can have a backup bowl of baking soda and a backup glass of white vinegar, and demonstrate the most impressive reaction by combining the two.

Alternative Icebreaker:

? What's an action someone else took that had consequences for you this past week? How did you respond?

Optional Transition: James wraps up his letter with three main themes, each giving commands about how to live out your faith in a way that recognizes that there are consequences from what you do. Our choices affect our relationships with God and others.

Wealth Does Not Excuse Exploitation

Read Out Loud: James 5:1-6 (NIV)

¹Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. ²Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. ³Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. ⁴Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. ⁵You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. ⁶You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you.

? This passage lists consequences for rich people who are hoarding money, as well as workers and innocent people. What consequences stand out to you?

Possible Answers: The wealth the people tried to keep is lost, rotted, and corroded. The contaminated wealth will testify to the rottenness of their hearts and motives. The workers are suffering; they have been condemned and murdered despite their innocence.

? How does this passage speak to the attentiveness of God?

Possible Answers: God sees the consequences both to those who take the action and to the powerless who are disadvantaged. God doesn't miss anything, and you will be held accountable for your choices.

? Throughout Scripture God chooses the lowly and oppressed people to be those who carry His message. How does this run counter to American expectations of wealth resulting from following God?

Possible Answers: The idea of a "prosperity gospel" where being a Christian is equated to being successful, rich, healthy, or otherwise blessed is a false one. God promises a right and good life, but not a comfortable and affluent one. God chooses the foolish things to shame the wise, and the humble things to shame the proud.

Optional Transition: In Western culture we focus on profit and time in an almost obsessive way. We want to have wealth and convenience in our own way. However, God's timing is better than ours, and frequently we are called to wait on Him and what He sends.

Persevere—God Has Perfect Timing

Read Out Loud: James 5:7-12 (NIV)

⁷Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. ⁸You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. ⁹Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

¹⁰Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

¹²Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple "Yes" or "No." Otherwise you will be condemned.

Leader's Note: Use the following questions to complete the chart below. You may split into smaller groups to do this if desired.

? What are the three commands that are given in this passage?

? What are examples given with these commands? What examples can you add from your own life and experiences?

? What are the consequences or blessings associated with obeying or rejecting these commands?

Three commands:	<i>Be patient/persevere</i>	<i>Don't grumble</i>	<i>Do not swear</i>
Examples in the passage:	<i>The farmer waits for the crop</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>
Examples from your own life:	<i>Will vary</i>	<i>Will vary</i>	<i>Will vary</i>
Consequences:	<i>You will not see the best outcome</i>	<i>You will be judged</i>	<i>You will be condemned</i>
Blessings:	<i>The Lord will bless you</i>	<i>God already sees what we do (at the door)</i>	<i>God rewards honesty</i>

? Which of these commands are the hardest for you to actually implement in your everyday life? Why? How can you work on obeying these commands this week and in the future?

Possible Answers: Leaders, this is a great time to lead with examples. Your openness will encourage others to be open too.

Leader's Note: Verse 11 refers to the book of Job. Job was a righteous man who was tested through the loss of his family, wealth, and physical health. Job remained steadfast in the Lord and eventually experienced full restoration.

Verse 12 is often one that is taken out of context and used as an ultimatum against deception. While condemnation is a result of all sin in our lives without the Gospel, there are often other consequences that come with sin. In the Zondervan Life Application Study Bible we find this note regarding verse 12: "Always be honest so that others will believe your simple yes or no. By avoiding lies, half-truths, and omissions of the truth, you will become known as a trustworthy person."

The Power of Godly Relationships

Read Out Loud: James 5:13-20 (NIV)

¹³Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. ¹⁴Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. ¹⁶Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

¹⁷Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. ¹⁸Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

¹⁹My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, ²⁰remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

? James is calling us to pray in every circumstance. Why is that? How do we do that in a way that is sincere rather than checking a box?

Possible Answers: Prayer is how we intentionally seek to connect with God. We need that connection for our relationship and to see God's goodness and provision. Sincere praying should be not a rote, performative experience, but words and feelings from your heart with no filter.

? Optional: What does it look like to seek God in every circumstance and be in conversation with Him?

? What are your initial reactions when you're in trouble, happy, or sick? How does inviting the Lord into the equation enhance the experience? What does it look like to seek God first and focus on Him in community?

Possible Answers: Answers will vary based on experiences.

? Optional: Why is confessing to other Christians important? What is often the result of that?

Possible Answers: We exist in community as Christians; we are the body of Christ. We need to be honest with one another so we can support one another, and God blesses that openness and sincerity with healing and forgiveness.

? Optional: Brainstorm lists of where you see prayer and response happening in Scripture. Which ones are personally meaningful for you? Why?

Possible Answers: Healings in the NT (e.g. Acts 3, 9, 28), Elijah and the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18), Abraham praying for Sodom (Gen. 18), etc.

Verses 17-18 of James 5 reference Elijah, an Old Testament prophet. We find this particular story in 1 Kings 17 and 18, where Elijah prays for the rain to cease (which it does for about 3 years) and then start again as a way to demonstrate God's authority to King Ahab. "Those who do God's will are exhorted to pray as Elijah did, with fervency, and they too can bring healing, both physical and spiritual, to the community." *The New International Commentary of the NT: James, McKnight, pg. 451-452*

? What do we do when we earnestly pray for something and

God chooses to respond in a way that is contrary to what we had hoped for? How do we believe that God is the God who will answer our prayers without believing He HAS to do so to be a good God?

Possible Answers: Looking to Scripture to remind myself of who God is and how much He loves me. Sharing my pain/frustration/etc. With trusted voices and asking them to gently point me back to truth. Remembering past experiences when I've felt known and heard by God.

? James' final command is to call sinners back to God. How can we reach out to those who are tempted or who have fallen into sin and draw them back?

Possible Answers: Maintain a relationship first before trying to intervene. Pray/ask the Holy Spirit for guidance as to when/how to approach them. Continue to live a life reflective of the Gospel at work in your heart. Remember that it's not your job to save them or be their functional Jesus.

? What can we do to live a life reflective of God's truth?

Possible Answers: We need to know God's truth, and then live it out. This means speaking truth, making our actions consistent with our words, and living love in practical and personal ways even when it's difficult.

Final Thoughts

? The book of James is a call to live our lives in a way that reflects Gospel transformation. How can we avoid being driven by fear and legalism? How can we be aware of what God is calling us to do?

Possible Answers: We can strive to be aware of when we fall into legalism by being careful to live focused in love and obedience to God over following strict rules. We can be aware of what God is calling us to do by seeking Him in prayer, Bible reading, and community, and being humble and teachable.

For Discussion And Accountability

? Which of the commands from this passage do you feel called to live out this week and long-term?

? As a believer in community, how can you encourage and support others in their obedience to God?