GENUINE FAITH

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How to Use *Life Design*



LIFE DESIGN: Bible Study Designed for the Life You Live. These Bible study materials are designed to engage adult learners in inductive Bible study and in applying the truths of that study to their daily lives.

As you prepare to teach these lessons, keep these two factors in mind:

- The FOCUS of productive adult Bible learning is the learner. The intent of teaching is not teaching, but learning—the learner's learning.
- The GOAL of productive adult Bible learning is an appropriate life-response to Biblical truth. You do not teach simply to impart information; you teach so that the Holy Spirit of God can use the truths of the Word of God to change the child of God into the image of the Son of God.

The Lesson Plan

Each *Life Design* lesson has three distinct parts. GETTING STARTED is the attention-getter. The questions and activities "set the table," as it were, for the Bible study. SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES is the heart of the lesson. A series of inductive Bible study questions leads the teacher and learners through the Biblical text. MAKING IT PERSONAL applies the truth to life.

As is true of any teaching experience, you can adapt the parts of the lesson to fit your particular class. You may choose to alter the beginning activities or change the focus of the application. You will find more material in the Bible study than you can cover in one class session. Ask God to help you as you tailor the lesson for your learners.

The Study Book

This leader's guide is designed to accompany the Bible study book. As the teacher, you will want a copy of the Bible study. Commit to working through the questions before you plan your lesson. We encourage you to distribute Bible study books to your learners. Urge them to complete the study before class. The more your learners have studied on their own, the better the class discussions will be. When a question in the leader's guide is picked up from the Bible study book, you will notice the question number in parentheses. The answers to the questions are usually in the lesson commentary. They are also grouped together in the back of this book.

Other Resources

If you want to use transparencies as you teach, a packet of sixteen full-color transparencies is available. If you prefer to use PowerPoint, the resource CD includes a PowerPoint presentation for each lesson.

Some teachers stay very close to the outline as they teach. If this is true of you, and if you want your learners to capture that outline, reproducible in-class worksheets are included on the CD. The same worksheets may be downloaded from the Web and photocopied for class members. Visit www.regularbaptistpress.org/downloads or www.rbpadultministries.org. Thank you for choosing *Life Design* teaching materials. May God richly bless you and your learners as you study and apply His Word.

Preface

The book of James reads like a manual for practical daily life. In fact, James has been called the Proverbs of the New Testament because it prepares believers to live wisely. James stirred up his readers to realize that saving faith is living faith. Faith is dead, said James, if it does not display itself in works.

The chapter titles in this study reflect how faith demonstrates itself in a person's life. Chapters 2 through 13 all begin "Faith is . . ."; then each one focuses on some outworking of faith.

Believing and behaving are inseparable. However, right behaving cannot earn salvation, which God gives on the basis of faith, not works. The proper order is right believing first, and then right behaving should follow. Attempting to practice the works James demands will be impossible and frustrating for the person who has not received the gift of eternal life by faith in Christ.

The life-related nature of James should make applying the book easy. Don't skip the Making It Personal sections at the end of each lesson. Challenge your learners to examine their own lives in light of the plain, practical truth of James.

Resources for This Course

The transparency packet for this course (RBP0022) includes a transparency on which to record the summary statements from each lesson on James. The transparency will help you track and review these lessons. Starting with lesson 1, use transparency 1 at the end of each lesson or at the beginning of the next lesson to record the summary statement for each lesson. You may use the suggestions in this leader's guide or ask your learners to suggest summary statements.

The Resource CD (RBP0023) for this course includes a PowerPoint presentation for each lesson. All of the transparencies are part of the PowerPoint presentation. The transparencies are also included on the CD as printable PDFs. If you would like to make your own transparencies or PowerPoint slides, the CD includes backgrounds ready for your own text.

To help in your promotion of this course, the CD includes a PowerPoint slide, poster, and a flyer. You can add your group's information to all of the promotional material.

The CD also provides in-class worksheets. Each in-class worksheet has a fill-in-the-blank outline that follows the corresponding outline in this leader's guide.

The CD also offers supplemental case studies. Each case study can be used as an in-class review, as material for a midweek Bible study, or as an e-mail attachment to your learners. E-mailing the case studies to your learners will emphasize living out the truth in daily life. You may want to enlist a learner to handle collecting e-mail addresses and e-mailing the case studies each week.

You will also find two supplemental application ideas on the CD. Use these ideas as handouts at the end of the appropriate lessons or as e-mail attachments. Both ideas could form the basis for class projects. Read through the ideas before you begin teaching this course so you can plan ahead how you will use them.

In addition, the CD includes a printable verse card for each lesson's key verse or verses. Blank verse cards are also included so you can enter different or additional verses for your learners to memorize. For your convenience, the verse cards are set for printing on Avery business cards. Use the Avery product number 8869 to avoid cutting apart the verse cards. You can find Avery business cards at avery.com. You could also simply print the verse cards on heavy paper and cut them apart using a paper cutter. Or you could e-mail the verse cards to your learners and have them print and cut their own.

LESSON 1

The Author and the Epistle

Scripture Focus

James overview

Key Verse

"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?" (James 2:14).

Overview

The character of the man harmonized with the content of the book. James's life exemplified his devotion to Jesus Christ. The subjects he addressed in the epistle relate to practical living. James's material is extremely helpful for living out Christ in the arena of life.

Topic

Integrity

Theme

God expects us to practice what we believe and teach.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will identify and pray about the topics in James in which he or she struggles to practice faith.

Outline

I. The Apostle
   A. His identity
   B. His integrity
   C. His impartiality
   D. His incorruptibility
II. The Epistle
   A. The target audience
   B. The themes

Materials

- **RBP transparencies 1 and 2**
- **Lesson 1 case study from resource CD**
- **James 2:14 verse card from resource CD**
- **Automobil owner's manual**

Getting Started

Teacher Descriptions

Ask: What kind of teacher would you want to teach you how to handle your money? to teach you to cook? to teach you how to raise your children?

Discuss: Why is it important for teachers to "practice what they preach"? (Questions 1, 2)

The book of James is packed with practical information addressed to the "twelve tribes which are scattered abroad." Though the epistle is general as to its audience, it is relevant and specific. You will see that the writer practiced what he taught.

The Owner's Manual

Display an automobile owner's manual. **Ask:** What are some of the ways an owner's manual is helpful in operating the vehicle?

The book of James focuses on practical information for daily living as a believer in Jesus Christ. God has bought us with a price, and James reads like His instructions to us for daily operation in this world.

Searching the Scriptures

I. The Apostle

The date of the epistle is not much debated. Evidence indicates it is one of the earliest, if not the earliest of the books of the New Testament. James was probably written between AD 48 and 50. A good discussion about the writer, however, is common.

ASK: From what you know about the book of James, why do you think God made it one of the first New Testament books He inspired for the early church? (Question 3)

A. His identity

The epistle is named for the writer identified in verse 1.

READ: James 1:1.

The writer referred to himself as "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." Nothing further is said about his credentials or about his relationship with his intended readers.

ASK: What might this lack of mentioning credentials suggest about the relationship between the writer and the readers? (Question 4)

There are several possibilities for the writer of the book of James. James, a son of Zebedee and brother of John, was one of the first to follow Jesus (Mark 1:19). However, Herod beheaded James early in the church's development in Jerusalem (Acts 12:1, 2). James's death, occurring relatively soon after the death of Stephen, makes it impossible for him to be the writer.

Another disciple of Jesus was also named James. In the Gospels' lists of disciples, his name appears near the end (Mark 3:16–19). And in those lists he is identified as "James, the son of Alphaeus." Mark, in his account of the crucifixion, referred to Mary, the mother of "James the Less." This Mary was the wife of Cleopas, also known as Alphaeus; therefore, James the Less is the "son of Alphaeus." James's obscurity in the missionary enterprise of those early years and the lack of reference to him in any leadership position would argue against his being the writer.

Matthew recorded that James was the name of one of Jesus' half-brothers (Matt. 13:55). Since James's name occurs first, he was likely the firstborn of Mary and Joseph's children.

James was an unbeliever during the days of Jesus's earthly ministry (John 7:5). In fact, though Mary understood the uniqueness and mission of her Son (John 2), Jesus' half-brothers, including James, believed Him to be "beside himself" (Mark 3:10). They thought He was out of his mind, or insane.

ASK: How might the familiarity between Jesus and His half-brothers have been a hindrance to their believing in Him as the Christ? (Question 5)

READ: 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4, 7. **DISCUSS:** How do you think James was affected by his personal encounter with the resurrected Jesus? (Question 6)

James's meeting with Jesus was apparently a transforming experience in James's life, for he was soon numbered among the apostles and emerged as a leader in the church of Jerusalem (Gal. 1:19; Acts 15:13). Thus the most probable writer is James, the half-brother of Jesus.

ASK: How might being the half-brother of Jesus have influenced James as he wrote his book? (Question 7)

B. His integrity

James is one of those unsung heroes of the New Testament. While Peter and Paul were, under the Spirit's direction, "making the headlines," James ministered consistently and humbly behind the scenes.

DISCUSS: What are some of the "claims to fame" James could have made to legitimately establish his credentials? (Question 8)

James began his epistle, referring to himself as a servant. The term is doulos, which means "bondslave." Although he was numbered with the apostles, he did not refer to himself as such. Here is a man whose life was marked by humility. He valued his ministry, not his title. The One he once thought mad was now his Savior and Master.

In addition, James made no reference to being a blood relative of Jesus. He was not a "name dropper." For James, the joy of exalting and extolling the Son of God was not to be diluted or polluted by selfish interests or claims.

Not only was James a humble man; he was a committed man. James 1:1 declares his commitment to Jesus Christ. It also reveals his commitment to his people. Many New Testament scholars believe the "twelve tribes" is a reference to those scattered by the persecution that erupted in Jerusalem after the death of Stephen (Acts 8:1–4). If so, James was writing to people he knew and loved. He had pastored them in Jerusalem, prayed for them in their dispersion, and now was writing to them with a shepherd's concern.

Finally, extra-Biblical information that gives us a spiritual X-ray of James's heart testifies to his integrity. He earned the name "Old Camel Knees" because his knees were calloused, apparently from long hours spent in prayer. Kneeling on the stone floor of the temple or in his residence, James spent long hours before the throne of grace. In light of James's selflessness, it is probable that he, like Jesus, prayed mostly for those the Lord had put under his charge rather than for himself. When some were scattered to regions beyond Jerusalem, his burden for them increased all the more. When the ones who remained in Jerusalem were ravaged by poverty and hunger (2 Cor. 8), he would pray for their needs to be met. When matters of spiritual concern arose, he would seek the mind of God (Acts 15).

ASK: Are your prayer requests weighted toward the Lord's working for the benefit of others or for the benefit of yourself? (Question 9)

The ancient historian Eusebius recorded the testimony of Hegisippus about James.

"[He] used to enter alone into the temple and be found kneeling and praying for forgiveness for the people, so that his knees grew hard like a camel's because of his constant worship of God, kneeling and asking forgiveness for the people. So from his excessive righteousness he was called James the Just." [Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, p. 171]

C. His impartiality

James's most prominent role, other than writing the epistle, was his involvement in the Jerusalem Council. This meeting, which occurred approximately 20 years after the death and resurrection of Christ, concerned one important agenda item: the place of the Mosaic law as a rule of life for Gentile Christians. The nature of the discussion in Acts 15, as well as Paul's stern letter to the Galatians, makes it clear that the Jewish Christians were struggling with the authority of the law in their own lives.

James's role at the council was one of moderator or president. He carefully listened to the evidence, allowed for debate, then summed up the matter and stated his verdict in Acts 15:13–21.

"The speech is Judaic in tone, brief, wise, conciliatory and convincing, and was listened to in tense silence. . . . In giving his judgment James speaks for the

whole Church, and his verdict is masterly in conception and expression. . . . He recognised that the Jews had a claim as well as the Gentiles, and that it would not be fair to give everything to either the one or the other, and so he proposes a middle course." [Scroggie, W. Graham. The Unfolding Drama of Redemption, Vol. II, p. 340]

James had already chided his readers about showing partiality and favoritism in this epistle, written prior to the Jerusalem Council. James's life was marked by a ready acceptance of all individuals who knew Christ as Savior, whether they were Jew or Gentile, rich or poor. Genuine faith breaks down ethnic and economic barriers. All in Christ are members of the same family and should readily be accepted as such.

DISCUSS: What are some personal preferences we might impose on other people in order to have a basis to make spiritual judgments? What can we learn from James in this regard? (Questions 10, 11)

D. His incorruptibility

James died a martyr's death, as all the other apostles except John. He refused to recant his faith even though he knew it would cost him his life.

Josephus, a respected Jewish historian, reported that James was stoned to death under the orders of Albinus, successor to Festus [Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews. Chicago: Thompson & Thomas, 1902. Book XX, Chapter IX, p. 494]. Others report that James was thrown from the pinnacle of the temple by those angered at his teaching.

"According to a canonical tradition,. . . [he] was cruelly martyred by the Scribes and Pharisees. Finding him at the southeast angle of the temple wall, where the pinnacle of the temple stood, his foes cast him down into the valley. . . . He fell near the workshop of the fullers who carried on their trade there, and they, finding him there still alive, beat him to death with their clubs." [Lockyer, Herbert. All the Apostles of the Bible. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972, p. 251]

READ: James 5:10, 11. **ASK:** How do you see James' incorruptibility expressed in these verses? (Question 12)

II. The Epistle

James's letter is often called "The Proverbs of the New Testament." This title is based on the practical nature of the epistle and the exhortation to integrate the truth of Scripture with the demands of living in the world. The radical change Jesus made in James's life was a change he desired for all the believers he loved.

The Holy Spirit has employed James's heartfelt words and personal burden to challenge generations of believers throughout church history to "show their faith."

A. The target audience

As noted earlier, James addressed his audience as "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad." A number of attempts have been made to identify the "twelve tribes." James could have been addressing Christians in many places who had converted from Judaism during the nearly fifteen years since Christ's crucifixion.

Another possibility is the believers who converted to Christ on the Day of Pentecost. These were Jews who had gathered in Jerusalem from districts and regions throughout the empire for the special celebration (Acts 2).

The most popular interpretation among conservative scholars, however, is that the "twelve tribes" were believers of Jerusalem who were scattered abroad as mentioned in Acts 8.

READ: Acts 8:1–4. **ASK:** How did God turn the persecution of the Jerusalem church to a good outcome? (Question 13)

Luke noted that everyone from Jerusalem fled, "except the apostles." The last count of the church's size in the beginning verses of Acts 4 was about 5,000 men. If Luke were counting heads of households, the church had experienced incredible growth in a very short time. That would make the flight of those in Acts 8 an incredible number of "instant missionaries."

James's letter, beginning with a reference to trials and difficulties, would strike home to the hearts of those who had suffered for their faith. They had been forced to leave all they knew and loved to preserve their lives and protect their families. Luke related the good news that they went "every where preaching the Word!" (Acts 8:4). The term translated "preaching" is the term from which we get our term "evangelism." Everywhere they went they announced the good news of Jesus Christ. James wrote to them to keep on, to stay true, to hang in there, and to do right.

DISCUSS: Describe the thought processes of these severely persecuted believers who chose to proclaim the word boldly in their new home areas? (Question 14)

B. The themes

The letter addressed several themes, with the first chapter serving as an introduction to all that will follow, from "words" to "worldliness."

BIBLE STUDY: Have small groups browse the book of James to identify main themes and suggest a key verse for the epistle. When groups are ready, ask each to share its ideas. Draw learners' attention to the chapter titles for lessons 2–13 in the Table of Contents of their student books or read them from the front of this leader's guide. Encourage students to memorize these titles as easy-to-remember themes for the book of James.

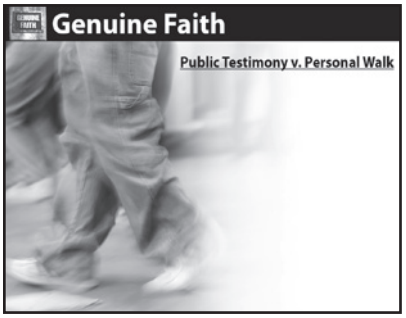
The book of James has no apparent systematic treatment of the themes, as many of Paul's letters do. The book does not have a sermon-like structure as Hebrews does. The organization of the content reflects a pastor writing a letter to people he dearly loved. As he wrote, under the superintendence of the Spirit, he wrote from his heart.

The epistle begins with a treatment of subjects that relate to the personal walk of faith, confronting the reality of trials and temptations. James warned of bitterness against God. He challenged believers to be doers of the Word.

DISCUSS: What does it take to be a doer of the Word and not only a hearer? (Question 15)

The second part of the book discusses subjects that involve the public testimony of one's faith. James gave instruction regarding proper treatment of others, both saved and unsaved. He emphasized that speech as well as actions give witness to the genuineness of faith.

TRANSPARENCY: Display transparency 2. **DISCUSS:** How should the public testimony of one's faith relate to that person's personal walk of faith? (Question 16) (Record learners' answers on the transparency.)



The third part of the book involves a strong confrontation of sin in the lives of the readers. The influence of the world system in their disposition and decisions is glaring. The book concludes with a strong warning that failure to repent of willful sin may lead to a premature death at the disciplining hand of God.

ASK: Why should we describe a premature death at the hand of God as discipline and not punishment? (Question 17)

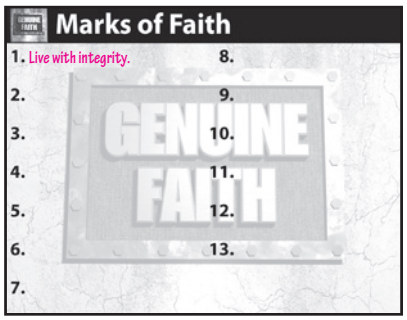
This New Testament "book of Proverbs" challenges the Christian to a life of wisdom rather than folly. Digestion of the material and integration of its principles will show themselves in a transformed walk. "Pure religion" will be public, not just private. The obedient Christian will practice what he learns.

Making It Personal

Theme Challenge

Challenge students to look through the book themes again and to mark any areas in which they struggle to practice the faith they believe. Suggest they make the areas they marked a matter of prayer for the next twelve weeks, paying special attention when those areas are studied in detail. Encourage students to be regular in studying the book of James this quarter, individually and corporately. (Questions 18, 19)

Use the case study for lesson 1 as desired.



Prayer

Close class time thanking God for this practical book and asking for wisdom to learn from it.

Review Transparency

Use transparency 1 to review the Mark of Faith for this lesson: Live with integrity.

Memory Verse

Distribute copies of the James 2:14 verse card from the resource CD. Encourage the learners to memorize the verse.