

## Week Six

### Conversations with God

# JAMES

#### READ

So here's one of the more unsurprising statements in Scripture:

*For even Jesus' own brothers did not believe in him (John 7:5).*

The statement is unsurprising not just because sibling rivalry is common, but it's unsurprising when considering the claims of Christ. He claimed to be the Son of God—the promised Messiah—divinity. If ever there would be a difficult group to convince of one's divinity, it would be that person's immediate family. This would be a hard sell.

So if the above is one of the more unsurprising statements in Scripture, consider what may be one of the more surprising statements of Scripture:

*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings (James 1:1).*

At first read, the statement is easily forgotten. Clearly, it's the opening of a letter. Some guy named James is writing a letter to a group of people he refers to as the "twelve tribes scattered among the nations." What's so surprising about that? The stunning nature of this letter's opening is that James is one of Jesus' brothers. No, not just a spiritual brother, but biologically speaking, a half-brother, another son from Mary and her then husband, Joseph. James, this brother of Jesus who previously doubted Christ's veracity, now refers to himself as "a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ." That's astounding!

Some of Scripture's most profound insights, particularly in the New Testament, come from letters. Understanding these letters' context moves the reading of these letters from black and white to color. As you read through James this week, you'll be reading a letter considered by many scholars as one of the first, if not the first, New Testament writing to be penned. James writes it, likely from Jerusalem, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations. By "twelve tribes" James is referencing the twelve tribes of Israel, the Jewish nation. So not only do we know who the letter is from, but we also know who the letter is to. As expected if we were to read any letter, knowing who the letter is both from and to gives us a context that brings meaning to the letter itself.

Since this is a letter, our approach to James is to approach it as we would a letter of importance. When we read a letter, we don't first read it in little bits. More commonly, we sit down and read the letter in its entirety. Having read it from beginning to end, we may then go back and read it more slowly and thoughtfully. Our approach to James will be similar. You're encouraged to first read the letter in its entirety and to then read it in smaller segments. The letter is short, so it's not hard to do, and we've designed the daily readings to facilitate this. If the time you've allotted on Day One is not long enough to read James in a single sitting, then feel free to read as far as you can and pick it up

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again later in the day. Do make an effort to read it through in a single day, though. Gaining this context will enrich your experience with James.

## MEMORIZE

As you read through James, insights you gain may relate to one or both of this week's memory passages. If so, consider writing these insights on the Scripture cards to be reminded of them again when you review the memory passages later. How is God speaking to you? What are you hearing? Where are you encouraged? Where are you challenged? Write these thoughts down and talk with God about them as you memorize.

This week's memory verses:

*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says (James 1:22).*

*This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome (1 John 5:3).*

## MEDITATE

One of the more important concepts in hearing God's voice through Scripture is the idea that Scripture interprets Scripture. Consider a brief analogy.

A woman goes to a doctor. The doctor tells her she needs to rest. She follows the doctor's orders, and she feels better, but not entirely. She then goes to another doctor. This doctor tells her she needs exercise. As she drives home, she is confused. One doctor says to rest, and the other tells her to exercise. Which doctor is telling her the truth?

Do the doctors contradict each other? On the surface, maybe, but put the two doctors in the same room, and they will likely agree with each other. Healthy living requires both rest and exercise. On the surface, there is contradiction between the two doctors. Under the surface, the two orders don't contradict but complement. Wisdom and truth are found where the two statements intersect.

Scripture interprets Scripture. A statement from one book of the Bible may appear at odds with a statement in another book of the Bible. Are they truly at odds, or are they working together to bring the full weight of wisdom? Meditating on Scripture will at times mean we dig into Scripture and allow Scripture to interpret Scripture by hearing complementary truths from different authors. James provides a great opportunity for this.

Consider this statement of James:

*Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead (James 2:17).*

Then consider this statement from Paul:

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).*

Do these two statements contradict each other or complement each other? As you meditate, ask God to speak to you, and listen for depth of insight. Listening to the full counsel of Scripture will at times take you away from the passage you started with, but it will profoundly enrich your conversation with God as you move from Scripture to more personalized conversation. When we hear the balance of

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Scripture, we gain insight into the heart of God. Knowing this heart informs our ability to recognize his voice in our lives.

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