

A black and white photograph of an open book resting on a wooden surface. The book is open to a page with text, and the pages are slightly aged. The background is a blurred, light-colored surface, possibly a wall or a large window. The overall mood is quiet and contemplative.

**JAMES
DEVOTIONAL**

By Pastor Phil Emerson

NAME: _____

OUR DISCIPLESHIP FLOW

At Emmanuel Church, we are passionate about living out the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and make it our goal to see His Kingdom come in our lives and the world in which we live. We recognise that in Biblical times, a disciple was someone who followed a teacher or rabbi, not simply to gain head knowledge to pass an examination, but to be fully immersed in the life of the rabbi, and *learn his ways*, so that they in turn could replicate this to the world around them. As Christians, we are now those who have been invited to 'follow' Jesus and all of His ways, and we therefore call ourselves His disciples.

"This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did." 1 John 2:5,6

We therefore want to take seriously the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples and also commit to an ongoing journey of teaching and discipleship together.

We all have differing personalities and learning styles. At Emmanuel, we recognise this diversity within the church body and therefore desire to support and journey together as we relate with God and each other in some of the following environments:

- **Public (20+)**

In the Bible, we see Jesus seeking to make disciples as He engaged with larger numbers of people, e.g., His interaction with the crowds (Matthew 4:25; Luke 14:25), and the 72 (Luke 10:1-24).

At Emmanuel, we want to use each of our **larger gathered environments** as an opportunity to make disciples, e.g., **Sunday services, Friday Youth/Kids'** environments, **men's/women's** gatherings.

- **Social (10-15)**

Jesus demonstrated the necessity for **smaller accountable relationships** as an essential part of the life of a disciple. He did this by teaching and doing life with his twelve disciples (e.g., Matthew 10).

At Emmanuel, small accountable relationships are offered through:

Lifegroup 12s

These are **gatherings of 10-15 people** who meet bi-weekly in homes or around specific interests, e.g., crafts, football.

- **Personal (2-5)**

As well as having smaller accountable relationships amongst His twelve friends, Jesus also seemed to go to even deeper levels of trust with three in particular – Peter, James and John (Matthew 17; Mark 9). At Emmanuel, we seek to do this through:

Lifegroup 3s

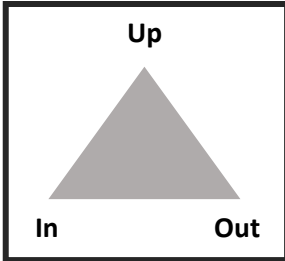
These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate the process... **disciples making disciples!**

- **Intimate (1-1)**

Jesus regularly withdrew to spend time alone with the Father. This is the ultimate goal of discipleship, that each member of our church family would increasingly spend time alone with the Father and grow in devotion and desire to see the Kingdom come.

A TOOL TO USE

As stated previously, 1 John 2:6 makes it clear that for those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus, our goal should be to daily *walk in the ways of Jesus*, our Rabbi. As we examine the New Testament we see that Jesus lived His life based on three relationships: **Up** – with His Father; **In** – with His chosen followers; **Out** – with the hurting world around Him. This is illustrated in the following triangle:



Jesus *taught* and *modelled* out to His disciples how to live into each of these areas in life.

Up

Jesus frequently left the disciples to spend personal time with the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). He taught them the significance of prayer, and how to pray and communicate with the Father (Luke 11:1-13). When comparisons with one another or insecurities presented themselves, He spoke into it in love and challenged them into a greater depth of living (Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5).

In

Jesus had significant relationships with others in which He intentionally invested (12s and 3s). When He went to engage with the Father He brought the three with Him (Matthew 17:1). He taught them and modelled out the significance of Sabbath and rhythms of rest (Mark 6:31). He demonstrated with His life the significance of generosity and sacrificial love for others (John 13:1-17).

Out

Jesus personally lived a life that engaged with the crowds and the broken world around Him. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:1-4), fed the poor (Mark 6:30-44), and cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-34). But with the people who were closest to Him, He challenged them to do the same (Mark 6:37), and when they took risks themselves He critiqued and gave honest feedback to call out more for them (Luke 10:17-20).

As we spend time alone or together in this devotional, we want to help and encourage you to engage in each of these ways – UP, IN, and OUT.

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

First

If you haven't already done so, please take a second to fill in your name on the inside of the front cover. There'll be a lot of identical books floating around, and we don't want yours to get lost.

Prepare

Get ready for each session by spending some time to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. The Bible is a written word (logos), which becomes a living word (rhema) as the Holy Spirit breathes upon it and speaks directly to our lives through it.

Commit

Commit to the journey. Discipleship is not a commitment to a moment, but to a lifetime journey. As you personally commit to journeying with God daily, commit to others by sharing what you are learning (possibly in Lifegroup 12s or 3s), and in this way encouraging one another in what God is saying.

Reflect & Respond

Each day, as you spend personal time with God, we encourage you to ask the following two questions:

- 1) What is God saying to me?
- 2) What am I going to do about it?

This is how we become doers and not just hearers of what God is saying.

INTRODUCTION TO JAMES

What a smashing little book. It was penned by James the Just (not to be confused with James the apostle), brother of Jude and stepbrother of Jesus. It is probably one of the earliest written in our New Testament. Many scholars set the timing of this book just after Stephen was martyred (Acts 7). Persecution was on the rise and the structure of the early church was still relatively small, so James puts quill to parchment to encourage the Jewish people to hold on.

The massive topic in this book is the practicalities of the Christian faith, James exhorting believers to act justly and make sure they balance out faith and action. Living faith out is what makes the real difference, not mere chat about it. When James eventually decided to follow Jesus, he followed with great devotion as one of the early leaders in the church in Jerusalem.

History tells us that James was such a man of prayer that his knees had large and thick calluses making them look like the knees of a camel. History also says that James was martyred in Jerusalem by being pushed from the high point of the temple. The fall did not kill him and he was beaten to death on the ground, even as he prayed for his attackers.

If ever there was a 'DO IT' book in the Bible, this one tops it for me! A barn load of confrontation and challenge awaits you on these pages, so you'd better make your coffee/tea strong as the brother of the Lord Himself encourages you to become a doer of the Word and not only a hearer.

Brace yourself for this one! You know the drill ... Bible, pen, journal, and your cuppa!

Love you all,
Phil

Live

It is interesting to note that in verse 2 James doesn't say 'if' trouble comes your way but 'when'. Trouble is the very thing God often uses to test our faith. This proves that faith is important and precious because only precious things are tested so thoroughly. I love this nugget from Spurgeon: "*Faith is as vital to salvation as the heart is vital to the body: hence the javelins of the enemy are mainly aimed at this essential grace.*"

Trials test but do not *produce* faith. So, what does? Romans 10:17 tells us, "*so then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.*" Faith is built in us supernaturally as we hear, understand, and trust in God's Word. The older I get the more I realise how important it is to become a student of God's Word. It is like bread to us and is actually more important than our natural food.

I love verse 18, "*He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all He created.*" The Word of God gives birth. James points out that those he is addressing, himself included, were firstfruits of the gospel. We find proof in this verse that this book is addressed to *early* Jewish Christians. The Gospel went to the Jews first and not until Acts 10 do we see it move into the Gentiles.

I also love how James gives us wisdom in teaching us to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. My very wise mum used to tell me, "Son, you've got two ears and one mouth for a reason. Listen twice as much as you talk!" She taught me this little rhyme when I was a boy and it has stayed with me: "A wise old owl sat on an oak. The more he saw, the less he spoke. The less he spoke, the more he heard. Now wasn't that a wise old bird!"

Pray

Father, thank You, a million times over, for showing me more of Jesus, for revealing more of the riches of the gospel, and for freeing me more fully from the fake things that aren't truth at all. As I seek to make more of Jesus, I trust You to make me more like Jesus. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I love how James sets out three big things in this chapter. Firstly, he challenges our commitment to our faith. Secondly, he challenges our actions. Thirdly, he challenges our faith and action ratio. He is saying that one without the other is null and void. We do well to remember that James wrote in an age filled with prejudice based on class, ethnicity, nationality, and religious background. In the ancient world, people were routinely and permanently categorised because they were Jew or Gentile, slave or free, rich or poor, Greek or barbarian, or whatever else in the mix. The unity and openness of the early church was shocking to the ancient world, but this unity didn't come automatically. As this command from James shows, the apostles had to *teach* the early church to never hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ with partiality.

James goes on to tell us that works *must* accompany a genuine faith. Genuine faith is always connected with regeneration, becoming a new creation in Jesus according to 2 Corinthians 5:17. If there is no evidence of this new life, then there was no genuine, saving faith. As Charles Spurgeon is reported to have said, "*The grace that does not change my life will not save my soul.*" James says in verse 21 to remember how Abraham was shown to be right with God through his actions. True faith always results in good actions. And just in case we may be led to think that James' teaching conflicts with Paul's in Romans 3:28, a deeper look reveals that they actually perfect each other. Works will not save anyone but the true manifestation of genuine repentance and faith in Christ will result in an outworking of such. Let's thank God for securing our freedom by sending Jesus to die in our place. Perfection can only be found in one place and that place is in Christ. His approval and forgiveness are all that really matter, and He has already given that to us in all fullness in Jesus.

Pray

Father, deliver me from lack of good hard grind in the kingdom. Laziness will not build or proclaim Your kingdom, so give me fresh fervour and rigor as I step into new-found strength in You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

In the Jewish culture in which James was writing, teaching was valued very highly. James challenges those who teach to be careful how they live. In the church, it is easy to take the position of teacher lightly without considering its cost in terms of accountability. Jesus warned in Luke 12:48, *“To whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much have been committed, of him they will ask the more.”*

If the tongue is like a bit in the mouth of a horse or the rudder on a ship, it begs the question, who or what holds the reigns and the rudder? Some people have no hand on the reigns or rudder and therefore they say whatever comes into their mind. Others direct their tongue from their emotions or from aspects of their carnal nature. James points us towards the Spirit of God working in us; *He* directs our hands on the reigns and rudder of our tongue. I have already mentioned in previous writings how my mum taught me that we have two ears and only one mouth, so we should practise listening twice as much as we talk.

Whether from weariness in well doing, exhaustion of difficult relationships or unguarded moments of carelessness, we are all weak and we need God. We need Him to help us make redemptive choices today and every day, hence James reminds us that true wisdom comes from God alone. We can all choose to celebrate the abundant life God so freely gives us. Every day, sometimes every hour, we have life and death choices set before us. Satan intends to steal, kill, and destroy us, but God gives limitless mercy, abounding grace, and abundant life to each of us. The very fact that we often pause between these two choices underscores our weakness and vulnerability and how much we need Him as we seek to control our most unruly body part – our tongue. So, let’s set high goals and be driven by the power and Spirit of God in speech and in wisdom.

Pray

Father, life and death is found in the power of the tongue. That is pretty serious stuff. You’ve reminded me today that the tongue can set my whole life on fire. Wisdom in my speech is my quest today. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I read a disturbing article some time ago about church splits. It said that less than 2% happen over theology or doctrine. The writer's point was that over 98% happen over personalities, moral issues, and disagreements. The problem lies in the fact that when we don't get what we want, we tend to fight or huff until we do. James is saying that rather than grab at all we want, why not lay it down and by prayer see what God really wants. I love what G.C. Morgan's commentary has to say on this: *"Almost all who have such a critical and contentious attitude claim they are prompted and supported by the Spirit of God. James makes it clear that this contentious manner comes from your desires. It is self-evident that the Spirit of God does not create desire which issues in envying."* You are tempted to fulfil a sinful desire because you think or hope that it may be satisfied, but it will never be satisfied. The reason these destructive desires exist among Christians is because they do not ask God for their needs. James reminds us here of the great power of prayer and how one may live unnecessarily as a spiritual pauper simply because they do not pray.

After dealing with the problem of the lack of prayer, James then addresses the problem of how we sometimes, in prayer, ask for all the wrong reasons. We must remember that the purpose of prayer is not to persuade a reluctant God to do what we want. The purpose of prayer is to align our will with His and, in partnership with Him, to ask Him to accomplish His will on this earth. This is what Jesus was teaching in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6. He told us to pray, *"Your [God's] will be done on earth as in heaven."*

I love how James lays out the fivefold way of drawing close to God in verses 7-10. Humble yourself, resist the devil, purify your hearts, be sorry for your sin, and (interestingly, he finishes how he began) humble yourself before the Lord.

Pray

Father, my loudest cry today rings with the disciples of old, *"Lord, teach us to pray,"* and with another in Scripture who said, *"Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!"* In Jesus' strong name Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

One commentator says about this chapter, “*James isn’t devaluing the rich but rather riches.*” I never thought of it like that before. James’ point is that if we put our dependence solely on riches, they are not going to endure when Jesus returns. Some people beat up those who have done well and succeeded financially. I really don’t like this attitude. That is not what is going on here; rather, James was emphasising the need for complete dependence on God. He rebuked those who were most likely to live independently from God, those who placed all emphasis on their wealth. In that day, that kind of person withheld the wages of their labourers and lived indulgently without regard for others, just like Jesus’ story about the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). They bullied and lorded over people from their position of power.

James then leads into the power of patience and endurance, using the analogy of the farmer who must wait for his crop to grow. I love how he concludes his wee book with the power of prayer and the unity of elders coming together to lay on hands, anoint with oil, and pray. He says the earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. It doesn’t get much better than that.

I said in my introduction to this book you were in for some challenge. I truly hope and pray you have taken this as a step up in all you do, both spiritually and practically. One of my earliest verses to memorise as a boy was verse 8 in this chapter. I quote from the Authorised Version, “*Be ye also ready, establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.*” We used to sing it in Sunday school, and I still sing it. The soon return of Jesus requires that we have established hearts that are rooted in Jesus. May this be our prayer as we finish the little book of James, to have established hearts transfixed on Jesus, our Author and Finisher!

Pray

Father, one day I will be made perfect in love all because of Your finished work on my behalf. That day has never been more attractive and alluring. May Your love continue to drive out all the fears still lurking around the chambers of my heart. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

