

How to use *explore*

Issue 111

The 92 daily readings in this issue of *Explore* are designed to help you understand and apply the Bible as you read it each day.

It's serious!

We suggest that you allow 15 minutes each day to work through the Bible passage with the notes. It should be a meal, not a snack! Readings from other parts of the Bible can throw valuable light on the study passage. These cross-references can be skipped if you are already feeling full up, but will expand your grasp of the Bible. *Explore* uses the NIV2011 Bible translation, but you can also use it with the NIV1984 or ESV translations.

Sometimes a prayer box will encourage you to stop and pray through the lessons—but it is always important to allow time to pray for God's Spirit to bring his word to life, and to shape the way we think and live through it.

We're serious!

All of us who work on *Explore* share a passion for getting the Bible into people's lives.

We fiercely hold to the Bible as God's word—to honour and follow, not to explain away.

1

Find a time you can read the Bible each day

2

Find a place where you can be quiet and think

3

Ask God to help you understand

4

Carefully read through the Bible passage for today

5

Study the verses with *Explore*, taking time to think

6

Pray about what you have read


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Welcome to *explore*

Being a Christian isn't a skill you learn, nor is it a lifestyle choice. It's about having a real relationship with the living God through his Son, Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that this relationship is like a marriage.

It's important to start with this, because it is easy to view the practice of daily Bible reading as a Christian duty, or a hard discipline that is just one more thing to get done in our busy lives.

But the Bible is God speaking to us: opening his mind to us on how he thinks, what he wants for us and what his plans are for the world. And most importantly, it tells us what he has done for us in sending his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. It's the way that the Spirit shows Jesus to us, and changes us as we behold his glory.

Here are a few suggestions for making your time with God more of a joy than a burden:

- 🕒 *Time*: Find a time when you will not be disturbed. Many people have found that the morning is the best time as it sets you up for the day. But whatever works for you is right for you.
- 📖 *Place*: Jesus says that we are not to make a great show of our religion (*see Matthew 6:5-6*), but rather, to pray with the door to our room shut. Some people plan to get to work a few minutes earlier and get their Bible out in an office or some other quiet corner.
- 🙏 *Prayer*: Although *Explore* helps with specific prayer ideas from the passage, do try to develop your own lists to pray through. Use the flap inside the back

cover to help with this. And allow what you read in the Scriptures to shape what you pray for yourself, the world and others.

📖 *Feast*: You can use the “Bible in a year” line at the bottom of each page to help guide you through the entire Scriptures throughout 2025. This year, each day explores a different genre of the Bible. On Sundays, you'll read from a New Testament epistle; on Mondays, from the first five books of the Bible (“the Law”); Tuesdays cover Old Testament history books; Wednesdays enjoy the Psalms and Thursdays Old Testament poetry; Fridays focus on the prophets, and then on Saturdays you'll read through the Gospels. You can find the original version at bible-reading.com/bible-plan/html.

📖 *Share*: As the saying goes, *expression deepens impression*. So try to cultivate the habit of sharing with others what you have learned. Why not join our Facebook group to share your encouragements, questions and prayer requests? Search for *Explore: For your daily walk with God*.

And enjoy it! As you read God's word and God's Spirit works in your mind and your heart, you are going to see Jesus, and appreciate more of his love for you and his promises to you. That's amazing!



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JAMES: The scattered life

Have you ever been far from home, felt a long way from safety and comfort, wished you had more friends around?

In many ways, that's a description of normal Christian experience—both today and in the mid-40s AD when James, the biological half-brother of Jesus himself, wrote the letter we're looking at for the next few weeks.

Claim to fame

Read James 1:1

- ❓ *How does James describe himself?*
- ❓ *Given that James is the Lord Jesus' brother, why is this a little strange?*
- ❓ *What does it teach us about the importance and privilege of being Christ's servant?*
- ❓ *How does James describe the people of God, the "twelve tribes"?*

Scattered: for discipline

Read Lamentations 4:11-16

This section of Jeremiah's lamentation over the destruction of Jerusalem by the army of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon describes the heart-breaking awfulness of the Lord's judgment on his people. They had been exiled from his land so they could see the seriousness of their sin.

- ❓ *How is this judgment summed up (v 16)?*
- ❓ *How would it have felt to be scattered in this way?*

TIME OUT

When we feel far from God and our fellow believers, it's worth asking: is the Lord disciplining me, to bring me back to humble obedience to him? We often blame God when he seems far away, and forget to ask if it's us who have wandered from a daily walk with him!

Scattered: for blessing

Read Acts 8:4; 11:19

- ❓ *What does this scattering achieve?*

The first Christians were scattered among the nations. They suffered greatly—but were also the way that God reached the lost. One day the Lord Jesus will return to gather his people (Mark 13:26-27); but until then, Christians will live a scattered life among the nations of this world, showing and speaking of how wonderful it is to be “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (James 1:1).

And as we read through James' letter, he will show us what solid, real, joyful faith looks like for scattered, suffering people.

Apply

- ❓ *It's better to be a faithful servant of Jesus than a biological brother to him. What ways has he given you to serve him today?*
- ❓ *How are you finding life difficult at the moment as a scattered follower of God? How do you need to pray for God's help?*

Joyful problems?!

Read James 1:2. Then read it again. And if it doesn't sound crazy, rub your eyes, get a coffee and read it again!

Pure joy

James says we can consider the many trials of our lives “pure joy”! He isn't wrong or lying—the Holy Spirit dictated what he wrote. So our God is saying we can find joy in the trials of life. Those are strange words, but words full of hope.

TIME OUT

❓ *Why would it be wonderful to be able to consider the trials you face “pure joy”?*

There is an idea that Christians won't suffer.

❓ *How does verse 2 blow this out of the water?*

James is going to spend his letter addressing the trials that test our faith in Christ. He will talk about suffering, doubt and also the surprising but no less serious trials of riches, power and success.

TIME OUT

❓ *Today, which sort of trial could tug you away from Jesus?*

❓ *Which trial have you seen do the most damage to Christians you have known (maybe yourself)?*

The normal grind of life and the lure of approval from others are more damaging of my trust in Jesus than the suffering I have faced. For others it is the opposite. I need to recognise my trials; and be joyful.

Because...

Read James 1:3-4

❓ *What does the testing of our faith lead to (v 3-4)?*

This “steadfastness” (v 3, ESV) isn't an end in itself. It's not about having a stiff upper lip. It's about keeping going in our faith. It's about experiencing a deep-down joy that simply comes from knowing and serving Jesus today, and knowing that we'll be with him one day (see v 12).

It's about facing the hardest times of our lives and saying, “However awful this trial is, I will still have Jesus. I can still serve Jesus. I will still be with Jesus. And this trial will make me more like Jesus, more mature and complete. It's better to go through this trial than not to.”

If we manage to do that, we'll know pure joy! But this attitude doesn't come naturally to me or to many of us! We need to ask God to give it to us.

Pray

Bring your trials before your loving Father and trust that he's working through them.

Tell him how you are instinctively feeling about your trials. Ask the Lord to help you know and meditate on the “pure joy” of knowing his Son. Ask him to mature you as his child through the difficulties you face.

Wise faith

James wants to help scattered Christians face trials with joy. Can this really be our experience right now, today?

Faithful or doubting?

Read James 1:5

Pray

This is a very clear, simple and wonderful promise. Why not ask our Father for such wisdom now?

Read James 1:6-8

This seems to undo the generosity of verse 5!

- ❓ *What does James describe as the opposite of believing (v 6)?*
- ❓ *What is the result of this (v 7)?*
- ❓ *What kind of person is James outlining (v 8)?*

We need to see with crystal clarity what James means here. Doubt here is opposed to faith. It is the opposite, so that the one who doubts is “double-minded”—torn between a life of faith and a life of doubt. Doubt here is deliberately, rebelliously not fully trusting Jesus—and so not really trusting him at all.

If you sometimes experience doubts, but long to have those doubts replaced by certainty in Christ, you are not the person in James’s sights.

..... **TIME OUT**

Read Mark 9:14-29

This man seems “double-minded”. But when he asks Jesus for help (or in James’s terms, prays for wisdom) he’s answered.

- ❓ *What is the difference here compared to someone who is truly “double-minded” (v 24 is crucial)?*

Apply

Honestly consider your doubts (if you have, or have ever had, them).

- ❓ *Do you long to trust Christ more or are you wilfully playing devil’s advocate against Jesus and against placing unreserved faith in him?*

Humbled and exalted

James wants us to see ourselves in terms of our relationship with God, not our circumstances. That includes our wealth.

Read James 1:9-11

- ❓ *What is the “high position” every Christian enjoys (look back to v 1)? How will this lift up (or “exalt”) a poor Christian?*
- ❓ *What does the rich Christian need to remember? How will this keep them humble?*

Apply

- ❓ *What tempts you to doubt Jesus’ goodness? What steps will you take to respond to these tests with faith?*
- ❓ *Whether rich or poor, how will your faith impact how joyful you are, and where your joy comes from, today?*

Bible in a year: Proverbs 7



Your crown of life

James wants us to stand firm through all the trials of life in this world because he knows a lot is at stake.

Read James 1:12

- ❓ *What will God give to those who persevere in the face of trials?*
- ❓ *How does this motivate us to keep going in hard times?*
- ❓ *How will this enable us to consider trials “pure joy”?*

A great future lies in store for those who trust Jesus to the end. James wants to help us be those people! And he does so by telling us to do two things.

Know the nature of temptation

Read James 1:13-15

- ❓ *What is not happening when you are tempted to sin?*
- ❓ *Where does temptation to sin come from (v 14)?*
- ❓ *Why is it vital to take temptation seriously (v 15)?*

Our desires motivate us, and so tempt us. For instance, I desire to be popular, so I flatter people and end up denying Christ because I care too much about my friends' opinions. Sin kills our love for and relationship with God, and ultimately leads to eternal death in hell instead of the crown of life with him.

Know God's character

Read James 1:16-18

Temptation is our desires telling us that we know what brings us joy—that the best life lies in following our feelings.

- ❓ *What does James say to that (v 16)?*
- ❓ *How will believing verse 17 destroy the power of our desires over us?*

We are the firstfruits of God's new creation (v 18). The firstfruits were the first part of the harvest, that spoke of even more to come.

This means that we can know victory now, by turning away from ourselves and looking to the Father of lights to see the gifts he gives us. And we can know that ultimate victory is guaranteed us, not because of how good we are, but because of who God is—our unchanging, gift-giving, life-promising Father.

Pray

Thank God for who he is. Ask him for wisdom to recognise and resist the temptation of following your desires.

Apply

- ❓ *What temptations will you face today? How will your desires seek to deceive you today?*
- ❓ *When will you most need to remember to obey your Father God to enjoy goodness in life, rather than following your feelings?*

Listen, but don't just listen

Rage flares up in a moment and I snap at my colleague, wife or daughter and shake my fist at the other driver. Afterwards it's so easy to parade the excuses.

Sound familiar? It can seem inevitable. But how often have you lost your rag with someone after listening carefully to them? How about after listening to God?

Shhhh...

Read James 1:19-21

- ❓ *What three things does James tell his "dear brothers" to be?*
- ❓ *How do we avoid getting angry?*
- ❓ *Why is not getting angry important for Christians (v 20)?*
- ❓ *What two things will enable us to live this kind of life (v 21)?*

▼ Apply

- ❓ *When in life do you most need to pause and remember verses 19-20?*

Don't merely listen

In the Bible, the "word" refers to both the message about Jesus and to Jesus himself. We need to bear both in mind as we...

Read James 1:22-25

- ❓ *If we come to the word only to listen, what do we achieve?*
- ❓ *What further step do we need to take?*
- ❓ *Why do you normally look in a mirror? What do you do afterwards if you notice your hair is a disaster zone?!*

- ❓ *So, what use is listening to the Bible, and then not acting on what we've read?*

Verse 25 tells us to look into the "law"—which may not sound like a fun read...

- ❓ *But what two things will it give us, if we read and follow it?*

Freedom from our emotions being directed by circumstances. Joy in the middle of trials. Defining ourselves not by our wealth but by our status as God's children. The blessing of eternal life. Peace instead of anger. Living the life we were designed for. This is what James has already offered us, just in chapter 1! The question is: will we read God's word, close it and forget it—or will we read it, believe it and live it?

▼ Apply

The challenge of James 1:22 is the reason why there are *Apply* sections like this one!

- ❓ *Are there any ways that you currently know what God's word says but refuse to live by it?*
- ❓ *How does verse 25 encourage you to change?*
- ❓ *What could you do to make sure you remember the Bible passage Explore points you to each day? What could you do to make sure you "do what it says" (the Bible, not Explore!)?*

Just deserts

It says something about David's life that we have no idea what episode this psalm refers to. Fleeing from enemies who wanted him dead was his "normal"!

Caught in the crosshairs

Read Psalm 64:1-6

Sometimes we read of David being chased or attacked. Here, he is the target of plots, schemes and plans.

- ❓ *What do we learn about those conspiring to destroy him?*
- ❓ *Why are they not afraid to oppose God's anointed king?*

An eye for an eye

Read Psalm 64:7-10

- ❓ *How is God's justice described in verses 7-8?*
- ❓ *How does it link back to verses 1-6?*

In other words, what is being described here is *perfect justice*. David's enemies are getting exactly what they deserve. The things that they sought to do to David will be done to them. This is not revenge. Nor does God just ignore what has been done. This is justice.

- ❓ *What impact will God's justice have on other people (v 9-10)?*

This is a common theme in the Psalms. When people see justice being done, they fear God and turn away from evil. As Isaiah 26:9 puts it, "When your judgments come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness". Likewise God's people are filled with praise.

TIME OUT

As we read about the life of Jesus in the Gospels, we see this psalm played out on a far greater stage. After Jesus' final arrival in Jerusalem a few days before his death, all the Gospels record the religious leaders plotting his death. They lay traps for him and seek to catch him out in their arguments (see Luke 19:47-48; 20:20; 22:1-6). One can imagine Jesus drawing strength as he prayed through this psalm and took refuge in the Lord, confident that God his Father would one day bring justice.

▼ Apply

- ❓ *How might knowing that God will bring justice help someone who is suffering at the hands of other people today, and who is struggling not to give in to bitterness and a desire for vengeance?*

^ Pray

Praise God that he is the God of justice.

Ask that when you face injustice, you would be able to pray and trust God, rather than becoming angry and seeking revenge.

Pray for those suffering terrible injustice now, that they would be comforted by the example of the Lord Jesus, and the words of psalms like this that promise God's justice.

No mouth, all trousers

James has been talking about how we need to listen to the word—and then we need to do what it says. He's continuing with the same theme here.

Open mouth, closed heart

Read James 1:26

? *Why is this verse a challenge to all of us?*

What we do with our tongues, and what it shows about us, is a theme James will return to in chapter 3.

TIME OUT

Read Luke 12:1-3

Jesus was often at loggerheads with those who considered themselves religious.

? *How do his words here reinforce James 1:26?*

A friend of mine talks about being “all mouth and no trousers”. It’s possible to be like this when it comes to our religious life—and it’s deadly. We con ourselves, we feel religious, proud of our faith. This kind of religion is unattractive to others, and it’s unattractive to God.

Pray

Thank God that he can see, and that he dislikes, religious hypocrisy. Ask him to help you see whether there is any danger of you falling into this trap.

Closed mouth, open heart

I feel pretty bruised by James 1:26! But James has some good news for us.

Read James 1:27

The alternative to a closed heart and flapping tongue is to shut my mouth and open my heart. That is what verse 27 is—an invitation to a life of love and faith.

We’re used to thinking about only loving our family and our friends.

? *But how does James challenge us to have a more radical love in verse 27?*

We find it easy(ish!) to feel full of joy and purity in church on Sundays, but...

? *... how does James challenge us to worship more radically in verse 27?*

Apply


? *What does it look like for you to care for the needy and vulnerable in your church and your community?*

? *In what ways could you pray this week to be freed from the pollution of a rebellious world?*

Remember that great promise in verse 5. If working out how to live verse 27 feels daunting, then go back there—it is a verse I have come to know backwards!

Welcome to our church(?)

By now, you'll be used to the fact that James's letter is never less than challenging! And it is again today—a huge challenge, followed by a wonderful truth.

 *In our culture, where are you welcomed if you have money? Where are you welcomed if you are poor?*

 *What about our churches?*

Sometimes the way we welcome people in our churches is the same as everywhere else in society—money and appearance talk. This is a huge problem in sharing our faith with the poor; and an even bigger problem for our own hearts.

Read James 2:1


 *How does James describe his readers?*


Pray


Thank God that you have a glorious King, Jesus. Thank him that because you believe in him, you are part of his family, with brothers and sisters all over the world.

Free from discriminating

Read James 2:1-4

 *When you came to Jesus, which of the two descriptions in verse 2 were you more like?*


 *Have you ever acted (or felt) like the imaginary church member James “quotes” in verse 3?*


 *When we discriminate, what do we become?*

If we judge, we don't only wrong those we are discriminating against: we also wrong Jesus. He is the true Judge.

Apply


It's easy to act in a verse-3 way without even noticing!


 *What are the ways in which your church could fall into this trap?*

 *In those situations, what would showing no favouritism look like?*


Free from discrimination

Read James 2:5-7


 *Why is verse 5 brilliant (especially if we're not particularly impressive in worldly terms)?*

 *How did the rich and influential people treat Christians (v 6-7)?*

This is how they treated Christ—despite the truth that he is eternally glorious (v 1)!

 *So why was it odd for James's readers to seek favour with these groups?*

Apply

 *Are there people you are in the habit (perhaps currently unnoticed) of looking down on? How will you use verse 5 to change your heart attitudes?*

Pray

Thank God that he doesn't have favourites! Thank him for making you more welcoming of others since you became a Christian.