



# RESOURCES

'WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?'



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"The purpose of discipleship is to be with Jesus, to become like Jesus, to live as Jesus did"

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# WEEK 1

## LOVE ENDURES

What's love got to do with it? Everything. Love is at the centre of the gospel, that we are loved by God and called by Him to love others. But what has this love got to do with our everyday living? James compels us to outwork this love practically in our lives, describing an integrated life that demonstrates love in the face of trials and challenges, a wholehearted devotion to God, in word, thought and deed.

### OVERVIEW

James wrote to an early church community that faced persecution, poverty and hardship as a normal part of life, providing them nuggets of wisdom in a structure more like the book of Proverbs than any other letter of the New Testament. Rather than being defeated by challenges James urges his readers to consider them a pure joy, that these trials of faith are an opportunity to trust in God and develop perseverance. Without perseverance, James' wise words are just that – words. This week, we'll reflect on James 1:1-12, which urges us to develop our perseverance, turn to God's provision and come to maturity through challenges.

### ICE-BREAKER

The aim of this ice-breaker is to help the group hear more of each other's stories. Divide the group into twos and threes. Ask each small group to reflect on these prompts and share their experiences:

- Can you recall a time in your life when you've been forced into a challenging situation you didn't think you could endure?
- How did you get through it? Did you retreat from it, or did you push through?
- What does the word 'perseverance' mean to you?
- What emotions does it bring to your heart?

### REFLECT

When a boss or friend drops a task or hard request on us out of the blue, is our immediate response to consider the long-term benefits of the challenge? Do we joyfully recognise that this is an opportunity to build up our endurance and grow our faith? Possibly not.

Yet this is how James opens his letter to the churches of the first century. Read James 1:1-4 and reflect on the following points in your small groups:

- James reminds his readers that a test of faith produces endurance, perseverance, sticking-power. Consider this in light of your own experience of a 'test of faith'. Do we really know this when we begin a time of trial and testing? Does this only become obvious afterwards?
- James advises that we must let perseverance 'finish its work' in us, that we can be mature and complete. What does this maturing process look like for you? Do you find it an easy one?

Take some time to feed back to each other as a whole group.

As servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, we may often find ourselves hoping our faith would make the trials of life disappear, that Jesus would pop a fence around us to keep out the messy, tricky bits of life. But no, says James, these trials of faith are vital to seeing us develop perseverance – and it is through our experience of perseverance that we will reach full maturity.

# WEEK 1

## LOVE ENDURES

### REFLECT

James goes on to give examples of trials, pointing out how those of us who have Jesus as Lord might turn each of these challenges on their heads. Read James 1:5-11 and reflect on the following points in your small groups:

- Verses 5-8 invite us to ask our Father for all things, rather than being 'double-minded' and doubting that God would give us our requests. James is extending Jesus' own repeated teaching (see Matthew 7:6-8; Mark 11:24; John 15:7). When praying through a trial of faith, how much time do you give God to act? Do you ask Him to answer within your own timetable, and change the prayer if He's 'late' – or do you endure?
- Verses 9-11 extend the Kingdom teachings of Jesus, that the first shall be last and the last shall be first (Matthew 19:30; Mark 10:31; Luke 13:30). These trials – of living in humble circumstances or seeing riches fade – are to be endured to see maturity come about. Do they feel like 'pure joy' to you?

Take some time to feed back to each other as a whole group.

Pause for a moment before entering a time of response – even five minutes – asking for the Spirit to draw you into God's love and guide a final reflection on what you've all discussed. What does God wish to say to you, about your trials, your challenges, your joyful response?

### RESPOND

After this pause, ask someone to read James 1:12 to the group – two or three times, with a moment of silence between each reading, to prayerfully consider our response to this verse.

After this, give space to think, write notes or discuss – whatever fits your group best – how are we to respond to James' instruction?

- What does perseverance under trial look like for you on a daily, weekly and annual basis
- How can you consider these trials of many kinds a 'pure joy'? What practice can we develop that will remind us of the maturity, the completing work that we will be undergoing during these trials?
- When we stand firm in the trials of life, Jesus promises us a crown of life. What daily practice could you adopt that reminds you of this promise, that Jesus wishes to honour and celebrate you, placing a crown upon your head?

Take some time to feed back to each other as a whole group, inviting people if they would like to share their response.

We may be led into our own unique response, but if anyone is searching for some practices to help nurture a new attitude of perseverance, recommend some of the following (or any that have worked for you):

# WEEK 1

## LOVE ENDURES

### RESPOND

- Put a reminder in your diary to start your week reflecting James 1:2-4. Consider the challenges and trials you are set to experience, make room for those new ones that might crop up, and place all of them before God, that He would help you consider them 'pure joy'.
- If you have a rhythm of worship and prayer in your week, look to bring your 'trials of many kinds' to mind in the midst of worship. Worship over these trials of faith, with an expectation that they will produce perseverance that will impact so much more of our lives.
- Consider writing a prayer diary for those things you are asking God for, to encourage an attitude of perseverance and expectation, that we would not be 'double-minded' and unstable in our requests but give God time to act.

### RECEIVE

Finish your time together in prayer using the words of verse 5 to guide you:

'If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.' Lay hands on each other, to intercede and to listen, offering words, scripture and pictures that will encourage and build up faith. Consider closing the time with a prayer:

Heavenly Father, give us wisdom to embrace our trials as an opportunity to build our faith.

Lord Jesus, we love you. Walk with us in our trials, teach us of your enduring love.

Holy Spirit, guide us in all things. Bring us to maturity in our faith.

Amen.

# WEEK 2

## LOVE LISTENS

### OVERVIEW

It's through listening and acting on the word of God that we demonstrate our love for God and find true freedom. But it's also through listening that we demonstrate love towards others. This week we'll look at James' teaching on the humility of listening, by which we give dignity to others, the same dignity God shows us as the One who is always listening to us.

### ICE-BREAKER

To start this session, we're going to actively encourage each other to have a rant (with some boundaries!).

Split your group into pairs. Person A is invited to express their frustration or passion on a subject they feel strongly on (e.g. companies that ignore global warming, slow walkers, people not queuing for the bus) for one minute. Person B is to listen for:

- What they care about
- What they value
- What's important to them

When person A has finished, person B must feedback what they heard using sentence structures such as: 'you care about... you value... this is topic is important to you because...' Person A can then reflect on this with person B to see if this is a true reflection of things. You should then swap ranting/listening roles and repeat.

This ice-breaker helps introduce the theme that our anger alone doesn't get us anywhere, that we should be quick to listen to others to demonstrate our love for God and each other.

### REFLECT

Are you a good listener? Today's passage from James focuses on listening in two ways: to those around us and to the word of God, applying what we hear to our actions.

Split into small groups to read James 1:19-21 and reflect on the following points:

- This the only time in the New Testament we are ever told to do something quickly, to listen! Think about the people you encountered today, the challenges you encountered at work or home or school. If you were to categorise your responses to these moments as 'quick' or 'slow', how would things stack up?
- James suggests that if we are quick to speak and quick to become angry, we will fuel an anger that will never produce the righteousness God is looking to grow in us. What difference would you notice in your life if you were to spend more time listening?
- A vital step to demonstrating the love and righteousness to each other that James is encouraging is to get rid of 'spoiled virtue' and 'wickedness' and instead, 'let our gardener, God, landscape you with the Word, making a salvation-garden of your life' (v21 Message translation). What thoughts come to mind when you think of the word being 'planted' in you? Has God been doing some weeding in recent weeks? Has He highlighted any obstacles we have created that are preventing new growth?

Much of James' letter seeks to move the Christian communities he is writing to from simply thinking and talking to listening and doing. Love listens, and then does something in response.



## WEEK 2

# LOVE LISTENS

Read James 1:22-25 and reflect on the following points:

- Verse 22 is a vital cornerstone in the teaching that James builds the rest of his letter on. The word of God is not there just to be listened to; it must be lived, turned into actions. We must make room for the word of God in our hearts, to be transformed by it as it moves from thinking to doing. Discuss, what does this look like for you?
- James loves to use analogies when unpacking his message to his readers (recall 1:6-7 from last week's Love Endures study). What does his use of this 'face in a mirror' passage stir for you?
- James emphasises that we aren't merely to 'look' into God's law, but to 'do' it. Do you find it easy to recall the freedom of God's 'perfect counsel' throughout your day, to put it into action rather than just think about it?

Pause for a moment before entering a time of response – even five minutes – asking for the Spirit to draw you into God's love and guide a final reflection on what you've all discussed. What does God wish to say to you about your listening? What new growth does He want for the word planted within you? Where do we forget the freedom of His perfect law?

### RESPOND

After this pause, ask someone to read James 1:22 to the group – two or three times, with a moment of silence between each reading, to prayerfully consider our response to this verse. Give space to think, write notes or discuss – whatever fits your group best – how are we to respond to James' instruction?

- What could you change in your day to ensure that you are quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry?
- What patterns and habits could we form to ensure we are helping ourselves to abide in God's perfect counsel?
- Think back to those responses we established in our Love Endures session – if we are to become better listeners and doers, we must take encouragement in James' words to seek endurance. Our response to James' teaching isn't about ticking boxes and jumping through hoops, it's a shift that will take endurance. How can our response to this week's passage complement this?

Some people in the group may like respond with accountability – supporting and encouraging one or two others to not merely listen to the word but to allow it to become action. Note that accountability should be entered in love; you aren't to become 'spiritual police' for each other, but rather cheer each other on with prayer and love. How might you keep one another accountable to becoming better listeners and doers of God's word?

### RECEIVE

A beautiful, vital way we can move from 'listening' to 'doing' is through our worship and prayer – a response that sees us move toward God to receive blessing and love from Him.

Consider closing your meeting with a time of worship that praises God's love and righteousness – if you would like help finding sheet music or practical resources, please email [connectgroups@htb.org](mailto:connectgroups@htb.org)

Perhaps you would like to pray through Psalm 145, asking people to read a verse each.

# WEEK 3

## LOVE ACTS

### OVERVIEW

What is faith? How can you be sure you have it?

Faith is an ongoing theme through the New Testament and yet in the Old Testament faith, belief, faithfulness, or faithful are only mentioned 35 times. Why? In the Old Testament faith was less about an intellectual decision and more about moving in the direction of God's promise. There were signs that told anyone who encountered the Hebrews that they were trusting in God. For example, circumcision was an act that was largely unique to Hebrew culture at the time; how the ancient Hebrew people cared for foreign tribespeople, widows and orphans were all acts that showed the surrounding nations, this people group are trusting in someone or something over and above their daily circumstance. As we continue to look at what James has to say about faith, hold this question in your mind: What is it you DO that makes you stand out as someone who trusts in something or someone more than those in earthy power above you.

### ICE-BREAKER

Imagine you are packing for a trip. The difference with this trip is you are going somewhere unknown with 25 random strangers. What three things would you make sure you pack?

- How many people took things that would encourage community?
- How many items were for solo activities?
- Did anyone prepare to share their items?

### REFLECT

Read James 2:14-26

At the time of the Reformation (when the Protestant movement split from the Catholic Church) there was an argument over what SAVES you and gets your name written into the book of life, mentioned in the Book of Revelation as the 'guest list' for eternal life. Some said, 'Well just believing you are saved is enough', whereas others said 'No, you need to prove you are saved with the kind of life you live'. If you drew your name on a line going from 'belief' to 'proof' where would you put yourself in your understanding of that argument?

Look back over the reading. Where does James want us to place ourselves?

James wants us to know, that when we give our lives to Jesus, his works and his will for our lives, that then must result in a change of living. A bank robber who becomes a Christian would be advised to give up robbing banks! Is it the act of ceasing to rob banks that saves him? Of course not (apart from an even longer jail sentence!), however when we are saved by Jesus we commit to pursuing his will for our lives which is towards a life of freedom and blessing, definitely not to be found in robbing banks.

The book of James probably began as a sermon in a house church. As we read it in our community groups, there should be an awkward feeling in the room. He is employing emotive language and extremes to get his point across, it should disturb us into action.



## WEEK 3

# LOVE ACTS

He paints a sublime picture of Jewish history, where patriarchs like Abraham, the father of the faith, shows us what faith in action looks like, but he also mentions Rahab, a matriarch who despite her awful circumstances could still put her faith into action. It is simply too easy to justify why we can't display our faith in the work place, in our neighbourhoods, in our families. However, James believes that the matter is simply too urgent to worry about reputation, risk or reward.

In small groups, reflect: How does this section of James' epistle make you feel? What does it make you think? What do you want to do because of this passage?

### RESPOND

Some say they just don't feel 'called' to this kind of Christian life and the Christian journey is one of a more personal faith than a public thing. However, this is a very modern way of thinking. In the days of the bible, people became followers of Jesus and households got baptised, communities gathered round to see the impact of Jesus in their lives and were drawn to who this is that changes people so dramatically. Hear these challenging words from Co-Founder of the Salvation Army, William Booth:

"Not called!" did you say? 'Not heard the call,' I think you should say.

Put your ear down to the Bible, and hear Him bid you go and pull sinners out of the fire of sin. Put your ear down to the burdened, agonised heart of humanity, and listen to its pitiful wail for help. Go stand by the gates of hell, and hear the damned entreat you to go to their father's house and bid their brothers and sisters and servants and masters not to come there. Then look Christ in the face — whose mercy you have professed to obey — and tell Him whether you will join heart and soul and body and circumstances in the march to publish His mercy to the world."

This quote, alongside James' passage, offers up some stern challenges. Discuss in small groups; what is your response to these challenges? What loving acts do all of your discussions encourage you towards? What is it you do that makes you stand out as someone who trusts in something or someone more than those in earthy power above you?

### RECEIVE

None of the bible writers suggest we ever do this alone; we need the same Spirit that helped Jesus to see with compassion, to reign in our own lives. Spend time waiting on the Holy Spirit to fill you with peace, to share compassion with the people in your lives. Pray this Fransiscan prayer slowly and meditatively to end:

May God bless you with a restless discomfort about easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that you may seek truth boldly and love deep within your heart.

May God bless you with holy anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may tirelessly work for justice, freedom, and peace among all people. May God bless you with the gift of tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, or the loss of all that they cherish, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and transform their pain into joy. May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you really can make a difference in this world, so that you are able, with God's grace, to do what others claim cannot be done.

# WEEK 4

## LOVE SPEAKS

### OVERVIEW

As we continue wrestling with the book of James in our series 'What's Love Got To Do With It?' we come to one of its most well-known passages, James 3:1-12 'Taming the Tongue.'

The need to acknowledge the power of our words is as relevant as ever; we're surrounded by an increasingly polarised and sensationalist media, we scroll through social media platforms that unwittingly encourage comparison, controversy and conflict under the pretence of connectedness. What does it look like to tame our tongues in 2020?

### ICE-BREAKER

Two truths and one lie:

Take it in turns to list two facts about yourself that are true and one that is not. Everybody else then needs to try and guess which is the incorrect fact. See if you can make the untrue fact as believable as possible. The aim of this ice-breaker is partly to discover new things about each other, whilst also introducing the idea that what we say to people impacts their view of the world.

### REFLECT

Depending on how you work best, either split into small groups or stay as one big group as we reflect on this passage.

Read aloud James 3:1-12

- What are the initial, immediate thoughts to the passage?
- Ask someone to read it again but this time as you listen and read, try to pick out any particularly positive attributes of the tongue.
  - Apart from the acknowledgement that we can use our tongues to praise God in vs 9-10, the passage takes the form of a stark warning about the dangers of our words. In some areas the language is extreme, v6 "It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell." v8 "It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison."
  - As we approach this passage seeking to learn how 'Love Speaks,' it is clear this text is less a lesson in how to speak loving words, but to recognise the capacity of our words to be unloving.

The dangers that are discussed can be separated into 4 categories - let's go through each in turn.

1. The tongue is very powerful - James 3:3-6

- Vs3-6 use powerful analogies to explain the power of the tongue despite its proportionally small size.
  - Are there any of these analogies that particularly resonate with you?
  - When have you witnessed or experienced the power of the tongue?
  - Would you agree with the degree of influence and power that James gives our words in these verses?

## WEEK 4

# LOVE SPEAKS

2. The tongue is humanly untameable James 3:7-8

- The Passion Translation intensifies the language of these verses powerfully:

"For every wild animal on earth including birds, creeping reptiles, and creatures of the sea and land have all been overpowered and tamed by humans, but the tongue is not able to be tamed. It's a fickle, unrestrained evil that spews out words full of toxic poison!"

- James' point here is crystal clear - we are unable to tame our tongue in our own strength.
  - Do you agree with this?
  - What situations do you find it hardest to control your words?  
How do you speak loving, not unloving, words in these moments?  
Have you ever asked for and depended on God in times like these? What difference did it make?

3. Our tongues are inconsistent - James 3:9-12

- James notes the contradiction that "Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing" (v10), expanding on this with more analogies that explain the implausibility of these inconsistencies. "You're not going to dip into a polluted mud hole and get a cup of clear, cool water, are you?" (V12 MSG)
- The passage implies that we find praising God relatively easy, but that we disavow that praise in our words towards those made in his image.
  - How does this make us feel? Do we think this reality is fair?
- Ultimately what James leads us to is that our words can express how we truly feel in our hearts about someone or something. This is a reality that Jesus was also very clear about -
  - Matt 15:11 "What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them."
  - Matt 12:34 "For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart."

When our hearts are full of worry, stress, anger, guilt, we often find it overflows through our words and temperament. There is a beautiful promise on the other side of this however, that when our hearts are full of peace and joy the overflow from our mouths will be love.

- Have you found this to be the case in your experience?
- What are the negative things that can occupy your heart?
- What are the practices or disciplines that you find best fill your heart with God's joy and peace?

## WEEK 4

# LOVE SPEAKS

### RESPOND

The overriding point made by James in this passage is that even the smallest, most insignificant words can have huge consequences. It is therefore very important that we give time and space for all to reflect on where damage has been done to them by words spoken over them by others, and where damage has been caused by our own words.

Encourage people to share times when they have received or given words that have caused hurt and harm. Ensure that the atmosphere is one of attentiveness, authenticity and love; whether the person sharing has been the one who has caused harm or has been harmed.

### RECEIVE

It may be, for some, that real healing needs to take place, whether it is for the wounds caused by words or the guilt from being the one that has spoken them. If this is the case, and it is appropriate in the group setting or smaller groups, then as much time as possible should be spent praying for these individuals.

To finish, reflect together on people they know who need words of love, joy, peace and encouragement spoken over them. Encourage people to, if appropriate, send an encouraging and affirming text message to one or two people.

# WEEK 5

## LOVE PRAYS

### OVERVIEW

We have seen that the book of James is very practical. It finishes not with more tips or metaphors but with a call to prayer. Prayer is at the heart of everything we do as Christians. It is not a last resort but our first move - involving and inviting God into every aspect and circumstance of life. James wants us to know the power of prayer in the face of trouble to bring about solutions, in the face of sickness to bring about healing, and in the face of our mistakes to bring about forgiveness.

### ICE-BREAKER

'Spoiler Alert': Ask everyone in the group to split into pairs and think of the best ending to a book, film or TV show they've encountered. There might be a twist or a big reveal that made it special, or an excellent cliff hanger. Once they've got one in mind, they must describe it from end to the start. When finished, the other person must guess what they think was being described. It's then the turn of the other to describe their own choice. Afterwards, reflect on the experience of starting at the end to 'Tell a story'.

This ice-breaker aims to help us get to know each other a little more through our favourite stories and to consider the importance of endings: the end of James is vital for helping the rest of his teaching come to completion.

### REFLECT

Break into groups to read James 5:13-18. What are your immediate responses to this passage? What feelings does it stir?

- Verses 13-14: Take a moment to reflect – when you were last in trouble or feeling happy, what was the first thing you did? Or the second? Or even the third? We may well have prayed or praised in response, but was it the first thing on our mind?
- James encourages a singular response to life's ups and downs: if we're in trouble, turn to God; if we're happy, turn to God. Do we find this attitude easy to put into practice?

As James has emphasised throughout his letter to early churches, we may claim to have faith that prayer and praise changes things, but unless we put our faith into action, it is a dead thing (James 2:17). Be encouraged then, that our prayer and praise turns our faith into an action that we can prioritise above all other responses.

- Verses 14-16: Prayer is not always an exclusive, private thing, but also an essential part of the community of church. James encourages us to recognise the importance of praying with others. Do you easily turn to others for healing and confession?
- If you would like to seek prayer with those experienced in praying for healing, please do not hesitate to come forward at the end of your Sunday service. For further support, email [prayer@htb.org](mailto:prayer@htb.org)

Prayerful confession with others is an important, fruitful practice – so long as we practice it safely and appropriately. We confess together as a church whenever we receive Communion. Take time to reflect; do you have anyone you are accountable to, with whom prayer and confession would be beneficial? If you have any questions on this, please don't hesitate to reach out to the Discipleship Team on [connectgroups@htb.org](mailto:connectgroups@htb.org)

## WEEK 5

# LOVE PRAYS

- Verses 17-18: James calls the early church to pray audacious prayers, reminding them of the story of Elijah (a righteous-yet-normal human) and his prayer for rain. If you'd like to read it, you can find it in 1 Kings 18:41-19:8. What would it look like for you to pray audaciously? What's the biggest prayer you've prayed this year?
- Sometimes our prayers and commands for healing don't meet with an immediate answer. Take time to reflect on your experience of this. Has it caused you to stop praying, or put a limit on your faith?

Pause for a moment before entering a time of response, asking for the Spirit to draw you into God's love and guide a final reflection on all you've discussed. What does God wish to remind you about love, prayer and praise? What limits might you have set in disappointment or confusion? Have you stopped praying for something you feel is too big to see God change?

### RESPOND

James concludes his letter with a call to make prayer and praise the first move in every aspect and circumstance of life. Sometimes prayer and praise are a joy, that we turn to with ease. In other seasons it can feel like a battle. In this moment of response, we would encourage you to give time for your group to think back over the past weeks and the responses they suggested.

Discuss:

- Have you found fruit in your responses? Have you given praise for it?
- Are you enduring through the new challenges they might be creating for you?
- How does this week's passage impact our responses?

You may also like to share some HTB Prayer Resources with your group – to go deeper, try something new or pick up a practice they've put down:

HTB Prayer Resources - <https://www.htb.org/prayer-resources>

Mike Pilavachi, Prayer Training: How to Pray for People Without Being Weird - <https://vimeo.com/385980673/c333cc349f>

Prayer Collectives: For those who are passionate about pursuing Jesus, praying for His kingdom to come. For more details, email [prayer@htb.org](mailto:prayer@htb.org)

### RECEIVE

'Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy? You should sing praises.'

This evening's study may have brought about discussion of troubles, sickness, forgiveness and praise. We receive all our needs from a loving Father, who gives generously (James 1:5) so long as we are asking with the right motives (James 4:3).

You may wish to prepare your core team in advance, to be ready to pray with individuals in the group in response to what comes up during the evening, and worship together. Pray for each other, with confidence in the Lord, that our prayers can be powerful and effective.