

A Common-Sense Guide to Studying the Book of James

As you study this book, remember:

1. The Bible study principle of context is a “must” while studying this book. Remembering the maxim, *Context is king* will help you so much as you study. Reading the chapter or book again and again will help you untangle any knots you may find.
2. If you are still struggling to understand James’ thoughts after following the above suggestion, then remember that James’ purpose in writing is to remind his readers that saving faith is a transforming faith that will result in a changed life, goals, purposes, and actions.
3. Often it *appears* that James changes subjects as often as the wind changes in the spring in Kansas, which is a lot! However, that really isn’t the case. James doesn’t necessarily provide all the connecting points for where he’s going, but there is still a ribbon that ties his thoughts to what came previously. Dig out your magnifying glass and get ready for some fun while you do some serious sleuthing! The clues are there, if you’re willing to spend the time hunting for them.
4. James’ tone and teaching style is very similar to his half-brother, Jesus. Neither of them pull any punches, yet it’s helpful to remember that behind every forthright statement is the desire for our growth and God’s glory.
5. Take note of the examples, word pictures, and Old Testament Scripture references James uses to clarify the doctrinal points he makes. There is always a connection in his thinking, even if it is not readily apparent. Keep looking, reading, and praying for understanding.
6. Commentaries are a welcome and wonderful blessing, and I encourage you to make use of the knowledge and insight of these Bible scholars. However, reading a commentary *before* you have studied the passage yourself can lead to confusion.
7. As students of the Bible we want to understand what the author intended his original audience to know. And this process of pulling truth from the passage is called “exegesis.” Some people are tempted to do something called “eisegesis,” which is to read information *into* the text. That is when we take something we know and try to put it back into the text to derive the text’s meaning, though the original audience would never have arrived at that conclusion. One way to guard against this is to ask, “What would the original audience have understood this statement to mean?”