

'THE FAITH WORK-OUT'

(Working Out the Grace that God has Worked Within You)

Summer Study in James

Spiritual Fitness

As new year begins, we often take a more critical look in the mirror and face the truth that we don't like the looks of that person staring back at us. Where did that extra weight come from?! The mirror must have a flaw of some kind that makes you look wider than you really are! My clothes must have shrunk in the washing last laundry day! After a few days of denial, depression and delay smart people come to the conclusion that we simply must get rid of that other person we are wearing or begin shopping at the tent and awning store for a whole new wardrobe. It is just a fact for most people that from time to time they let things slip regarding their physical health and lifestyle. It isn't a surprise that it happens – life gets complicated and busy once in a while and we just get sloppy about taking care of this body God has given us. Then when a change in the schedule or life's demands happens we are alerted to get back on track and into shape.

The same thing is true spiritually – we can let the condition of our soul and spirit slip, we get sloppy with devotions, ministry involvement and church attendance – before we know it we are out of shape spiritually, our faith droops like flab and our walk with the Lord turns into a sluggish waddle. It's time to get back in shape spiritually and the 'Faith Work-Out' of James is a good quick way to restore faith muscle to you and the body of Christ in general.

'The Faith Work-Out' instructor, James has explained how the program of turning 'spiritual flab' into 'faith muscle' will change the life of any committed follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. 5 brief chapters focus on the main trouble spots of the believer and the body of Christ collectively:

- Chapter One:** Using Tests & Trials to Develop Your Faith & Inner Strength
- Chapter Two:** Using Good Works to Tune Your Heart and Tone Your Faith
- Chapter Three:** Detoxing the Tongue / Change 'Junk Food' into Good 'Fruit'
- Chapter Four:** Detoxing the Heart / Exchange 'Haughtiness' With 'Holiness'
- Chapter Five:** Using Faith as a Disciplined Lifestyle to Build Up 'HIS Body'

At the beginning of our Christian life God gives us 'faith' (*Ephesians 2:8-9*). As we grow up in grace through Bible study, prayer, worship and fellowship our faith grows to new levels of trust (*Romans 1:17*). And as we mature in the faith over time the very life of Christ developing in us begins to surface in all we think, do and say: "...*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God Who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure*" (*Philippians 2:12b-13*). The letter of James to the first generation of Christians is like a basic course on how to build up your own faith and how to walk in that faith every day regardless of the tests, trials and disappointments that may come your way. As in the early days of the church when James wrote this letter, we, the Christians of the end of the Church Age need to stay in spiritual shape to finish this last lap of the Christian era with a powerful faith that will be winning when Jesus returns any day now (*Revelation 22:12-14*).

Meet the Author

("James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ...")

James is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Jacob. In the Old Testament Jacob was the next to the eldest son of Isaac (*Genesis 25*) whose name meant 'to supplant' (to take the place of by underhanded means). Like Jacob in the OT James of the New Testament had negative beginnings toward his elder brother, Jesus but by the grace of God became a man of faith and servant of the Most High God. Although there are four men with the name of James in the New Testament, there are good reasons to believe that "***James, the Lord's brother***" (*Galatians 1:19*) is the best candidate for author of this letter bearing his name. According to Scripture Mary and Joseph gave birth to at least 4 other sons and 2 daughters after the birth of Jesus, with James being the next eldest son (*Mark 6:3*). Only after the rise of the 'perpetual virginity of Mary' myth by Roman Catholicism did contradictory interpretations occur. But prior to that and since where the Bible is faithfully interpreted by non-Catholics, it is obvious that the siblings of the Savior grew up not believing Him to be the promised Messiah from God (*Matthew 12:46-47, John 7:5*). However, following the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, His next younger brother, James, received a physical appearance of Christ (*1 Corinthians 15:7*) sometime during the Lord's 40-day ministry prior to His ascension. It is quite likely that James was instrumental, along with Mary of course, in leading the rest of the family to saving faith in the Lord Jesus just prior to Pentecost (*Acts 1:14*).

The appearance to James was very important in regard to the role James would fulfill in the first generation of the Church Age. While the original apostles took the gospel out to new regions in obedience to **Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:19-20 and Acts 1:8**, the church in Jerusalem was privileged to have James as the recognized leader and patriarch of the faith in the early days of Christianity (*Galatians 2:9 / James' name first in the list of 'pillars'*). The wisdom and authority of James is clearly seen in the 'Jerusalem Council' (AD 49) meeting where he presided, then summarized the arguments, proposed the conclusion and oversaw composition of the letter about 'what it takes to be saved' (*Acts 15:13-22*). James is believed to have been very 'Jewish' in his interpretation and application of gospel truth. This is largely because of his rather 'legalistic' request of apostle Paul in **Acts 21:17-25** and tradition. His love for God's law and righteousness earned him the name 'James The Just'. According to the historian Josephus, James was martyred in Jerusalem around AD 62.

The other 'James' mentioned in the New Testament do not merit serious attention: 1) the apostle James (brother of John the apostle) was martyred in AD 44 which is before the book could have been written; 2) the other apostle James called 'James the Less' fails to meet the criteria for author as well as James the Lord's brother; and James, the father of Jude (*Luke 6:16 & Acts 1:13*) carries no serious biblical or historical merit for consideration.

Meet the Recipients

("...to the twelve tribes... My brethren...")

The very first verse of the letter reveals that James' letter was written during the earliest days of the Church Age. The recipients are all Jewish ('the twelve tribes') which could only have been true prior to the promulgation of the gospel beyond Palestine. The reason for the letter is to encourage believers who have had to escape the persecution of the Church in Palestine following the martyrdom of Stephen (*Acts 7 / AD 31-34*), or more likely following the persecution under Herod Agrippa I when the apostle James, the brother of John, was martyred (*Acts 12 / AD 44*). It is also clearly an early composition from James' frequent usage of Jewish terms throughout the letter / 'assembly' (a Hebrew word 'synagogue' is used for the believers' gathering place (2:2), frequent usage of the term 'brethren' in a rather ethnic connotation and nearly 40 allusions to the OT.

These persecuted Christians were suffering terribly as they were dispersed from the holy land throughout the first 40 years of the Church Age (AD 30 – 70). In AD 68 or 69 the writer of Hebrews recollected: *"...recall the former days in which after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward" (Hebrews 10:32-35)*. Undoubtedly, James' letter helped these believers 'keep the faith' during those difficult days. James' letter continues to be a great stabilizing portion of God's Word for followers of the Lord Jesus throughout the Church Age until He comes: *"Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord ... Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (James 5:7-8)*.

'Hello! You're Hurting? Rejoice!'

James 1:1-8 / Introduction

- (vs. 2-4) Remember a past trial or difficulty in your life. In what ways did God give you strength to face that situation? How did the situation help the relationship between you and God?
- (v 5) How can you gain wisdom as you go through difficulties?
- (vs. 5-8) How important is prayer when the hard times come? How helpful is it to have others praying with you about the problem? How do you deal with doubts?

Discuss what kinds of difficulties (you don't have to be specific if you don't want to) are you facing right now, or a friend of yours is facing, that needs patience, wisdom and prayer until the trouble passes?

What are some aspects of your faith you hope will be strengthened through trials God allows to come?