

# PRACTICING the Leap of Faith

*The Book of James*



*May 2026*



# **Practicing the Leap of Faith: The Book of James**

## **Introduction**

What if faith is not simply a leap we take when we first believe, but a practice of "leaping" on a regular basis, as we put our faith into practice? Practicing faith is not about earning salvation. We are saved from sin by grace through faith, not through works. Practicing our faith is living out the teachings of Jesus daily. The book of James emphasizes faith accompanied by action, including taming our tongues, being in community, and praying on all occasions. Through these regular leaps of faith, we become practicing followers of Jesus.

## **How to Use This Guide**

This study guide is developed to be used in multiple ways. First, this guide provides group leaders with content and questions to guide group time. Second, this guide allows individuals to engage in the questions, content, and prayers as a resource for this series. If using this guide as an individual, adapt the questions to individual use.

For group use, the content provided can be adapted for your group. You are welcome to reduce the number of questions that are asked. An important element is accompanying study videos and the "Let's Gain Information" section of each session. These provide content for the group and group facilitator to support the discussion.

Each session is divided into sections to guide engagement with the topic.

➤ *Let's Pray* - We begin and close each session in prayer, using the language God gave us to communicate with God. Use the prayers provided or pray your own words.

➤ *Let's Get Started* – This section provides a way for engagement in the topic in a general way. The questions can be used within the group setting or individually.

➤ *Let's Review* – A review of the action taken in the previous session provides space to consider how we have interacted with the topic from the previous session. There is no “Let's Review” in the first session because no previous content has been presented.

➤ *Let's Gain Information* – The content of each session is provided in this section. The written content exists in the study guide, while supplemental videos with this content are available through Amplify Video. To gain access to the videos, please email [nextsteps@concordunied.org](mailto:nextsteps@concordunied.org).

➤ *Let's Search Scripture* – This section provides the group/individual the opportunity to engage in scripture related to the topic for the session. Discussion questions are provided in this section as well.

➤ *Let's Engage* – This section gives an action for folks to engage in over the upcoming week, related to the topic and scripture.

## **Session 1**

### **Practicing Our Faith**

Week of May 10

#### **Let's Pray**

*Gracious God, we come to you today, seeking your wisdom and grace through the words of the book of James. Open our hearts and minds up to that which you seek to give us. Your grace and love is sufficient. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

#### **Let's Get Started**

Discuss the following in your group or reflect on them individually:

- What does it mean to practice? What is something you practice?
- What do you know about the book of James?

#### **Let's Gain Information**

##### **Leap of Faith**

At times, the phrase “leap of faith” expresses our faith journey, that faith is about jumping into the unknown. The book of James instructs us that faith is about more than taking a leap; it is about practicing our faith. Faith is trusting God, depending on God. As we take the leap into the unknown, we are, on some level, practicing our faith. Practicing our reliance, dependence, and trust in God. The book of James guides us to practice faith through taming our tongue, being in community, and praying. Let's take a leap.

##### **The Basics About the Book of James**

The book of James is found in the New Testament of the Bible, in the section known as the “epistles”. Epistles are letters that appear in the New

Testament. James is viewed as a pastoral letter to Jewish Christians living beyond Jerusalem. The authorship of James is debated between three possibilities, yet the author most often noted or that is most likely is James, the brother of Jesus. This James is not simply the brother of Jesus; he was a leader within the early church, including playing a role in the Jerusalem Council, which is found in Acts 15. The date of authorship has varying theories, though if James, the brother of Jesus, is the author, then the book was likely written in the late 40s AD.

## **Controversies of the Book of James**

The book of James is not without controversy or criticism. In fact, the Reformation leader, Martin Luther, said of the book of James that it was an “epistle of straw”. Luther also had hesitation about including the book of James in his German translation of the Bible. Luther is not the only critic of the book of James. James detractors include those across the generations until the present.

The controversy surrounding the book of James includes two key issues. The first is the lack of Jesus in the book of James. The name “Jesus” appears only twice, in James 1:1 and James 2:1. Yet, as another note, Jesus appears throughout the book of James, including some seeing the book as a practical application of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus’ teaching found in Matthew 5, 6, 7. A second controversy is how James’ words seem to contradict Paul’s theology found in Paul’s letters. Of particular note is Paul’s words about justification through grace, not of our doing, while James writes that “faith without works is dead” seems to counter Paul’s teachings.

## **At the Heart of James**

Despite the controversies of the book of James, it provides practical wisdom for living faithfully in following Jesus. Words associated with the book of James include the following: pastoral, practical, application, and wisdom. It is upon these themes that we prayerfully read and discuss the writings of the book of James.

## **“Faith without works is dead.”**

James 2:26 states the following, *For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.* Is James saying that faith is dependent on works, on our actions? This perspective contradicts Paul’s guidance that we are saved by grace, not works. In fact, this is the place where the controversies with James take root. Let’s take a leap of faith, moving from a perspective that James is saying that we need to practice our faith.

We see the concept of practice in James 1:22, when he states the following, *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.* James goes on to give the analogy of someone looking in a mirror, and when they go away from the mirror, they forget what they look like. He is comparing that to reading scripture and forgetting what it says by not doing it. Practicing our faith is not forgetting what is said in scripture, in Jesus’ teachings and actions, but doing what it says. Examples include Jesus’ instructions in the Sermon on the Mount.

## **Let’s Search Scripture**

Read James 1:19-25.

- Discuss the analogy that James gives with the mirror and not doing what scripture says.
- What are the obstacles to practicing faith?
- Describe a way that you practice faith.

## **Let’s Engage**

Over the next week, we practice our faith:

- Prayerfully consider how you practice your faith as well as opportunities to be more intentional.

## **Closing Prayer**

*Gracious God, we give thanks for our presence and provision, that we do not have to earn your grace. Through faith, we seek to live our lives in a way that demonstrates your grace, not as a way to earn it, but to live it. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

## **Session 2**

### **Practicing Taming the Tongue**

Week of May 20, 2026

#### **Let's Pray**

*Gracious God, we come to this week's content with an open mind, seeking to practice taming our tongue. Truthfully, in many ways, our words cause harm to ourselves and others. Guide us in the way of showing grace through taming our tongue. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

#### **Let's Get Started**

- Share what the following statement means: "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me."
- Share about someone who you believe uses words in a gentle, disciplined, and calm manner.

#### **Let's Review**

In Session 1, we explored

Share anything you are comfortable sharing:

- Share the ways that you observed practicing your faith.

## Let's Gain Information

### The problem is our tongues

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me,” is a saying that does not seem to apply. Our words do hurt, each other and ourselves. Our words include our spoken words, those spoken directly to each other, those shared passively via social media, and our words spoken through gossip. Each of these causes harm.

The author of the book of James speaks about the power of our tongues and the need to tame them. This is taking the leap of faith by practicing taming our tongues.

### Taming Our Tongues

To tame something means to make something manageable. An example is taming a wild horse. Characteristics of tame include the following: gentle, calm, obedient, manageable, disciplined, and trained. When we consider our tongue, are the words we speak gentle, calm, obedient to God, manageable, disciplined, and trained?

The author of James knows the importance of taming our tongues. In fact, James notes the importance of our words in a couple of places. First, James guides, *Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.* (James 1:19) James 3:1-12 also gives specific guidance about taming our tongues.

### The Power of Our Tongue

In James 3:3-4, the author gives two analogies about taming our tongues. The first is comparing our tongues to the bit in the mouth of a horse. James says that through the small mechanism of a bit, the horse obeys. Despite its small nature, the bit can guide the whole horse. Secondly, James uses a rudder on a ship to demonstrate how a rudder, also small in relative size to a ship, that the rudder steers the whole ship. James 3:5 states: *Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts.*

The power of our tongues is significant. Despite its small size, how we use our tongues can have great positive effect on ourselves and others.

Practicing faith through the positive use of our words is an important part of faith. How are we using our tongue positively?

The author of James uses another example of the power of the tongue; despite the small nature of the tongue, great devastation is caused through it as well. James 3:5 describes how a spark can create a large forest fire that creates destruction. Take a moment to consider how quickly a wildfire spreads for a simple spark. Our words do the same when we do not tame them.

### **The Same Tongue Praises and Curses**

*With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. James 3:9*

These words in James 3:9 almost seem like a mic drop moment. With the same mouth that we praise God, we gossip, criticize, justify, manipulate, and the list goes on. The practice of taming our tongue is an awareness of the power and destructiveness of our words, as well as the opportunity to align our words with God.

### **Let's Search Scripture**

Read Matthew 7:16-20.

- How do these words connect to taming our tongue?
- What kind of fruit are we bearing with our words?
- What are ways that we can bear good fruit with our words?

### **Let's Engage**

Over the next week, we practice taming our tongue:

- Be aware of your words. Are you bearing good fruit or bad fruit?
- Identify steps to tame your tongue. Practice these steps.

## **Closing Prayer**

*O Gracious God, you created us with words and free will in how we use them. Create in us a renewed awareness of the power of our words and how to use our words that build up and demonstrate the depths of your grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

**Session 3**  
**Practicing Community**  
**Week of May 24, 2026**  
**Pentecost**

**Let's Pray**

*O Gracious God, we celebrate the birth of your church this week. We celebrate the role of the Holy Spirit in leading generations to follow you. We focus this week on the role of community. Open our ears to hear what it is you have to say to us. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

**Let's Get Started**

- Share an experience you have had being part of a community.
- Discuss what you know about the birth of the early church, including Pentecost.

**Let's Review**

In Session 2, we learned. Share:

- Did you observe your tongue as bearing good fruit or bad fruit?
- Steps you took to tame your tongue and the results of these steps.

## Let's Gain Information

### Pentecost

The birth of the church revolves around a celebration called Pentecost. Pentecost has roots in the Jewish festival of the Feast of the Weeks, which was seven weeks, forty-nine days, plus one day after the Feast of the First Fruits. Leviticus 23:15-16 describes this festival.

We celebrate the birth of the church on Pentecost Sunday, which takes place fifty days after Easter. Acts 2:1-13 describes the experience on Pentecost for the early church. Acts 2:1 states that *they were all gathered together in one place*. Those who were gathered together were the apostles and the followers of Jesus. It is at this point that the Holy Spirit came upon the group through a wind and tongues of fire that rested on each one of them. This is the birth of the church, when the Holy Spirit descended upon them.

### The Early Church

The early church was not an institution or a building; it was a people. The Greek word used for church means assembly. In the true sense of the word, the church is an assembly of followers of Jesus Christ. This is the way it was in the beginning of the church and is still today.

Acts 2:42-46 describes how the early church functioned.

*<sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. <sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

These words are often referenced in describing an Acts 2 church. These words describe community. The following words describe the community:

- Devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching
- To fellowship
- To breaking of bread and prayer
- Sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need
- Broke bread in their home and ate together
- Praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people

The early church practiced community. We too are called to practice community.

### **James and Practicing Community**

Multiple times in the book of James, the author speaks to “my dear brothers and sisters”. This demonstrates community. James is speaking to a group of persons who are part of community. Within this community, James gives guidance about how to practice community.

James notes a couple of examples of practicing community. First, James guides that the community is to look after orphans and widows. Second, James says that special attention is not be given to those who have more. He says that the poor are dishonored. James repeats the word of Leviticus 19:18 and the words found in the Gospels about loving our neighbor. It is in loving our neighbor that we practice community. When asked the greatest commandment, Jesus responded to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself. This is how we practice community.

### **Let's Search Scripture**

Read James 1:27-2:13. Discuss the following:

- How do we care for orphans and widows in your current community? What are ways we can do so more effectively?
- How do we regard those who have more and those who are poor? How is this important to practicing community?

- How are we loving our neighbor as ourselves?

## **Let's Engage**

Over the next week, we practice community:

- Identify those who are orphaned, widowed, or poor within our community of faith. Pray about ways we can be supportive of orphans, widows, and the poor.
- Observe how you love your neighbor as yourself this week.

## **Closing Prayer**

*O Gracious God, may we be aware of the needs of others around us. Grant us wisdom and willingness to love our neighbor out of your love for us. Make us aware of our thinking that prevents us from beginning to practice community. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

## Session 4

### Practicing Prayer Week of May 31, 2026

#### Let's Pray

*O Gracious God, we come to you this week seeking guidance on practicing prayer. We all know that we need to pray. Use the words of the book of James and our conversations to support our practice of prayer. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

#### Let's Get Started

- Who is someone that you consider a prayer warrior? Do you consider yourself someone who prays?
- How did you learn to pray? What are the ways you currently pray?

#### Let's Review

In Session 3, we discussed how to practice community through the lens of the early church and the words of the book of James.

Share:

- Ways you identified that we can support orphans, widows, and the poor more effectively. What would be a next step in doing so?
- How did you love your neighbor as yourself this past week?

## **Let's Gain Information**

### **Prayer as a Practice**

Prayer seems so obvious as a practice. Prayer, or talking with God, is modeled in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Jesus is noted multiple times as withdrawing to pray and give thanks to God. Praying is fundamental to practicing our faith. The book of James agrees.

### **Four Words**

James 4:8a states simply, *Come near to God*. In these four words, we find the heart of prayer, coming near to God. Prayer is the language that God gave us to communicate with Him, through talking and listening. We often consider prayer as talking to God, but it is also being still and listening to God. This is how we come near to God, through prayer, being with, talking, and listening.

### **Praying Through the Lens of James**

James 5 details specific ways that we can pray for those in trouble, those who are happy, and those who are sick. James also notes that the prayer of a person who is aligned with God is both powerful and effective. As we consider the power and effectiveness of prayer, James' words remind us of the significance of prayer.

Prayer can seem so obvious that at times we come to pray without focus or intentionality. James words help to guide our practice of praying.

### **Faith Without Works Is Dead**

As we conclude our study of James, we return to James 2:17, *Faith without works is dead*. We view these words not as a way to salvation, our saving is God's through His grace and our faith. Our faith includes practicing taming our tongue, providing for others through community, and praying. It is through these practices that we take the guidance of James to live our faith, to do more than leap, but practice.

## Let's Search Scripture

Read James 5:13-18. Discuss the following:

- According to James:
  - How do we pray for someone who is in trouble?
  - How do we pray if someone is happy?
  - How do we pray if someone is sick?
- Share how we are currently praying in these ways as practicing our faith.

## Let's Engage

During this week, we practice prayer:

- Practice coming near to God.
- Practice praying for the troubled, the happy, and the sick.

We conclude Session 4—and this series—with prayer:

*O Gracious God, we give thanks for Your word, that leads, comforts, and challenges. May our journey through the book of James not stop with the end of this series, but continue as we seek to practice loving you and loving others. In Jesus' name. Amen.*