

A Study of the Book of James: Real Faith Produces Good Works

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves.

Do what it says.

Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

James 1:22-25

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It is written as five one-hour studies and is meant to elicit discussion on how the words
of James affects our lives today.

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A Study of the Book of James: Real Faith Produces Good Works

Leader's Guide—Lesson 1

Opening Prayer

Introduction

1. What do we know about James, the author of this letter?
 - He is not one of the two apostles named James. One was the son of Zebedee and Salome, brother of John, and a fisherman. The other was known as James the Less, son of Alphaeus and Mary.
 - Half brother of Jesus—probably the oldest, along with Joseph, Simon and Judas also known as Jude. (Matthew 13:5; Mark 6:3)
 - Brother of Jude, author of the letter of Jude (Jude 1)
 - An unbeliever at one time (John 7:5, Mark 3:21)
 - Interfered with Jesus' ministry (Matthew 12:46; John 7:3-4; Matthew 13:57) Jesus gave his mother's care to John rather than his brothers. (John 19:25-27)
 - Jesus appeared to him after the resurrection. (Is this possibly when he came to faith?) (1 Corinthians 15:7)
 - Waited for the Holy Spirit to come after the ascension (Acts 1:12-14)
 - Was married and active in the church (1 Corinthians 9:5)
 - Became the leader (Bishop) of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; Galatians 1:18-19; Galatians 2:9)
 - Mid 40's AD: wrote the letter of James at the time of famine in the eastern Mediterranean (possibly the earliest book of the New Testament)
 - 49 AD: Settled issue of circumcision for gentiles in an important Jerusalem Council meeting. (Acts 15)
 - 57 AD: was a counselor for Paul (Acts 21:18)
 - 62 AD: according to Josephus, was stoned to death by the Jewish high priests and Sanhedrin
2. To whom is the letter of James addressed?

1:1—written to the Jewish Christians scattered outside of Jerusalem

Written as a pastor of the “mother” church in Jerusalem, instructing and encouraging them in the face of their difficulties.

3. What are the main points of the letter?

Written to Christians (assumes they know the message of salvation)

Essay on Christian living—attacks phony faith and reinforces faith in action

Chapter 1

Read 1:1-18.

4. How is the outrageous thought of pure joy in the face of trials possible (vs. 2)?

Suffering and trials mature us as our faith is exercised and tested. In physical exercise we hear, “No pain, no gain” and so it is in spiritual trials. As troubles drive us to our knees in prayer, we are forced to look beyond ourselves to God for our help and we see God’s hand as he reaches out with what is needed. As we remember how God helped us in the past, as we see how he has helped others, our faith is strengthened and we become more and more confident in his promises. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 “God’s power is made perfect in weakness...when I am weak, then I am strong.”

5. Perseverance means patient endurance of hardship; persisting in a state or enterprise in spite of difficulties and discouragement. Read Romans 5:3-7, 2 Corinthians 6:3-7 and 2 Peter 1:5-8 for Paul and Peter’s thoughts on perseverance.

Romans 5:3-7: Suffering produces perseverance then character then hope—no despair or depression!

2 Corinthians 6:3-7: Paul persevered no matter what trials he faced. We should be encouraged by his incredible example of patiently enduring hardships. Paul knew that his testimony was in his actions. As we persevere through hard times, we are a witness to unbelievers who are watching our every move.

2 Peter 1:5-8: Peter wants us to work toward having the following qualities in our lives to produce spiritual growth and holy living: goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. These will make our faith productive and effective.

6. What comfort do we see in verse 5?

When repentant sinners are forgiven, they are totally forgiven and there are no accusations. God doesn't hold back as he looks at our lives of sin and we have no reason to feel guilty. Rather, he sees the perfection of his Son. Our sins are gone. His love for that Son, and thus for us, overflows with the help we ask for. In fact, he often gives us much more than we ask for.

7. James says the poor should take pride in their high position (vs. 9). What does he mean by this seeming contradiction?

The poor have often suffered greatly in this life and have not had the opportunity to depend on their own riches to get him through their difficulties. Trusting in God's preservation is more commonplace for him. The rich are more tempted to depend on themselves in the form of their riches and their power, giving them a false sense of security. Wealth also brings special temptations and distractions that point one away from God.

8. Can you give an example from the Bible or from your life of a temptation that progressed to a full-grown sin (vs. 14-15)?

Adam and Eve's temptation in the garden, Judas' betrayal—this most likely led all the way to spiritual death, David with Bathsheba ...

What comfort does vs. 16-18 give us when temptations come into our life?

God allows trials and temptations to come into our lives to draw us closer to him. He never wants his people to choose evil, he wants only good for us who are the crown of his creation. First he gave us physical life and then spiritual life. From this we are confident that he gives us only good and perfect gifts that will never harm us. Satan, on the other hand, uses these temptations to draw us away from God. Thus a spiritual battle exists within us, but we will overcome if we look to God.

Read vs. 19-27.

9. Does anyone want to share a time when you wish you had been "quick to listen" but "slow to speak"? What is "the word planted in you" and how does it save you (vs. 21)?

James asks us to have a willingness to really listen to God, to humbly accept what he has to say, and then to act on what we know to be true. No one learns by talking. And anger gets in the way of hearing and living as God would have us. In fact, anger often grows and consumes our lives, pushing out everything and everyone else. When we listen to God's Word, we will be saved because we are focused entirely on God and his will, not on our desires or our emotions.

Can I, a sinner, really get rid of all moral filth and evil? In my life of sanctification, given to me at my baptism, the Holy Spirit lives and works in my new life. His presence gives me the willpower and ability to walk away from evil and make choices that are God-pleasing. We also know that, when we ask God to forgive our sins and weaknesses, he forgives them fully and will help us fight against Satan and turn from our evil ways.

10. Not only are we to listen to what God says, but also we are to do it. What are three ways James says we can tell the difference between a “Sunday Christian” and a true Christian (vs. 26-27)?

1) We watch what we say, never letting the same mouth that sings God’s praises on Sunday morning also give voice to curses, lies and words that destroy people and disgrace God.

2) We look beyond ourselves and take care of others who need our help (widows and orphans)

3) We live lives that please God and are not polluted by drunkenness, immorality, violence and other things that destroy our relationship with God.

11. What can you do this week to keep “from being polluted by the world”?

Spend more time in my Bible, pray for my spiritual strength, pray for others, turn away from some of the things on TV or some of the office gossip and activities...

Closing Prayer

Next week: James 2: Favoritism Forbidden, and Faith and Deeds

References:

Jeske, Mark A. *People’s Bible Commentary—James, 1,2 Peter, 1,2,3 John, Jude*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2002. 1-21

Concordia Self-Study Bible. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1986. 1896-1897

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Leader's Guide—Chapter 2

Opening Prayer

Read 2:1-13.

12. Why do we usually think favoritism is wrong?

It is the result of evil thoughts (v.4) and selfish motives. It insults people (v.6) and goes against the Biblical definition of love. Favoritism shows a lack of mercy toward others and is sin (v.9).

13. What things do we discriminate against in our church?

Are we nicer to the well-dressed visitor? Do we treat people with visible tattoos the same as everyone else? Do we avoid the chain-smoker because of their smell? These are all examples of sinful favoritism and we are to avoid these judgmental thoughts and actions. We are commanded by God to “love your neighbor as yourself” (v. 8).

14. Do we show favoritism in our homes? Can you think of a Bible story where the parents showed favoritism? Did it go well?

Joseph was Jacob's favorite son and even received a richly ornamented robe from his father because of this favoritism. His brothers were jealous and hated him because of this. Joseph's brothers ended up selling him into slavery and making their father believe Joseph had been killed by a wild animal (Genesis 37:3-33). We must do our very best to not show favoritism in our homes. It is sin and causes disunity in our families.

15. Reread v.12 &13. Is it okay to act how you want and then ask God for forgiveness afterward? Explain.

No, this kind of purposeful, deliberate sin is the opposite of what God wants. God wants us to obey his laws. We are also supposed to show others mercy not judgment. Mercy should always come before judgment (v. 13). The law gives us freedom because we love God and want to obey him. We have the power of the Holy Spirit to help us obey.

Read vs. 14-26.

16. Think of an example when someone's physical needs must be met before their spiritual needs as James indicates in v.16?

When missionaries overseas meet people who don't know Jesus but are starving to death, they have to meet their physical need and feed them first. This could also be the case when you are trying to witness to a homeless person. It is difficult for these people to concentrate on their need for a Savior when they are physically starving. Feeding them and clothing them is a good way of showing them Christ's love. James is saying we need to take care of people's physical needs as well as their spiritual needs.

17. Why are "deeds" so important in a Christian's life?

James says if there are no works then the faith we claim to have is phony, it is mere intellectual knowledge but not true faith. To know there is a God is no great thing—even Satan knows this, but he will not spend eternity in heaven. This head knowledge is not connected to a person's actions or his will and it will do him no good on Judgment Day.

When you have real faith and your life is changed because of the Holy Spirit living in you, you want to live to God in word and deed. James is saying that faith without deeds doesn't do anybody any good; it is useless. He uses two good examples of faith and action working together in the lives of Abraham and Rahab. By faith, Abraham fathered a son even though Sarah was too old to have children (Genesis 15:1-6); by faith he was willing to sacrifice that son on Mt. Moriah even though this didn't "jibe" with God's promise that he would be the father of a huge nation (Gen 22:2ff). Rahab wasn't an Israelite but was brought to faith in some way that we aren't told about. She was not a virtuous woman but rather an ex-prostitute. She readily put her life, and that of her family, at risk to protect the Israelite spies in Jericho. She had complete confidence that God would protect her as she served him (Joshua 2). Her faith must have been extraordinary as it was given special mention in the New Testament here in James, in Hebrews 11:31, and in Matthew in the genealogy of our Savior. Paul sums it up for us in Ephesians 2:10, "We are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Verse 24 is controversial and frequently misunderstood. James is talking to those who have been justified and who are already reconciled and accepted, who have received the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, some err when they conclude that James is saying that we merit forgiveness of sins and grace by good works and that we have access to God by our works, apart from Christ our Redeemer. As is taught in many other places throughout Scripture, James is clearly teaching that works are the fruit of a living, vibrant faith, given to us through grace.

18. Read Revelation 3:15-16. How does this passage relate to this topic?

God does not like it when our actions are lukewarm. Only when we put our faith into action does it please him. He does not want a person to confess Christ with their mouth on Sunday and live how they want the rest of the week. We must strive to commit our mind and heart to Christ not just our mind. When we allow him to change us from the inside out we will truly start living for him in all that we do.

19. Do you feel more led to serve God and live out his will for your life when you are in the Word daily?

Yes, of course we do because we are more in tune with God. When we are constantly in the Word and are seeking God, serving him becomes a pleasure not a chore. Studying God's Word takes our focus off of us and our needs or wants and puts it on God and his will for us.

20. Which is more important to God: What you do for him or your relationship with him?

Now that we have focused so much on works, are they more important than our relationship with God? No. God wants to have an intimate, close relationship with us above everything else. Yes, works are an important part of a Christian's life, but not as important as your relationship with your Father. Think of the example of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42). Martha was busy working for Jesus while Mary was spending time with him and Jesus said that, "Mary has chosen what is better" (v. 42). We should never get too busy doing things for God that we don't have time to spend with God getting to know him better. When this happens, we may begin to do all those things for our own gratification rather than to praise God—so quickly and subtly that motivation can change!

21. If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough proof to find you guilty?

How are you going to live out your faith this week?

Closing Prayer

Next week: James 3: Taming the Tongue and Two Kinds of Wisdom

References:

Jeske, Mark A. People's Bible Commentary—James, 1,2 Peter, 1,2,3 John, Jude. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2002. 22-30

Concordia Self-Study Bible. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1986. 1896-1897

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Leader's Guide—Chapter 3

Opening Prayer

Why is it so hard to be quiet and listen? Maybe because we are busy running households and raising children? Some of us have a job on top of all these other responsibilities. Since we talk all day, is it even possible to watch what we say at any given moment? James tells us in Chapter 3 that as new persons in Christ we will want to control our mouths or they will take over and ruin our lives.

Read 3:1-8.

22. What does James mean in verse 2? Can anyone really be perfect?

Jeske answers this question perfectly on p. 32, "Controlling our mouths...is the key to controlling the whole self. Someone who is careful with words, and thus has learned to exercise self-control, has earned the right to be listened to. He is perfect, not in the sense that he has never sinned, but in the sense that he has achieved an important goal set by God and that control over the rest of his life will fall into place too."

23. Why does James compare the tongue to a powerful, raging forest fire?

The tongue can speak hateful and damaging words that can destroy a relationship. Even if we apologize afterwards, the damage and scars remain. Just like in a forest fire, once the damage is done you cannot reverse it. On the other hand, a controlled fire is good and can be used for warmth. A controlled tongue can be used to encourage and build others up.

24. Why can "no man tame the tongue" (v. 7)?

We are sinful human beings and our words come from our sinful thoughts.

25. If no man can tame the tongue, why should we even try?

We will want to try because we have hope in God to help us. The Holy Spirit gives us strength to overcome evil thoughts that lead to evil words. He can give us the power to use self-control over our

tongues. We also have to put our faith in action and live lives that are pleasing to God. This means using our tongues for good not evil.

26. Read vs. 9-12. As Christians, why is controlling one's tongue especially important?

We don't want to be hypocrites and turn people away from God. We have the huge responsibility to be Christ's light for the world. God is counting on us to show Christ's love to others through our words and actions. We especially want to choose our words wisely when we are sharing the gospel because we can make a difference in a person's life and where they are going for all eternity.

Read vs. 13-18.

27. Compare and contrast the world's definition of wisdom with God's definition?

The world's wisdom is the ability to make good use of knowledge learned and usually means using this to advance our own position. Wisdom is given to us by God and it allows us to discriminate between right and wrong. God gives us wisdom to lead us through our everyday lives and guides us to make good decisions.

28. How can we use spiritual wisdom when it comes to taming our tongues?

We can ask God to teach us when to talk and when not to. When we talk we can ask him to help us choose the words that he would have us use. I often ask God when I pray to put the right words in my mouth. God is faithful and will help us in this area if we ask him to. We can use the same approach to keep negative and critical thoughts out of our minds and focus on positive things (Philippians 4:8). Like how can I encourage and uplift my neighbor today?

How will others know that you have spiritual wisdom?

By your actions, "Who is wise...? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in humility that comes from wisdom." Also v. 17 gives us an example of what wisdom that comes from heaven look like, it "is first of all pure, then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere."

29. How do we become more spiritually wise?

We can ask God for wisdom. We also can read and learn from God's Word, which is packed with wisdom. The more Christ-like we become, the more wisdom and discernment will have in everyday

situations. We will be more sensitive to the Holy Spirit gently guiding us. We ask God to forgive our weaknesses and errors, we ask him to help us turn from those sins and then we try again to use his wisdom in our lives.

30. How are you going to tame your tongue this week?

Closing Prayer

Next week: James 4: Submit yourselves to God and Boasting About Tomorrow

References:

Jeske, Mark A. People's Bible Commentary – James, 1,2 Peter, 1,2,3 John, Jude. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2002. 31-35

Life Application Study Bible. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1988. 1989-1991

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Leader's Guide—Chapter 4

Opening Prayer

Read 4:1-12.

31. What do children fight about and why do they fight?

Children often fight over toys or who gets to be the boss. They do this because they are selfish and want their way.

32. How are our fights with others similar?

We fight with others because we want to be the boss and get our way also. God wants us to submit, put him and others first and keep peace.

33. James mentions three common problems with our prayers in vs. 2 & 3. What are they?

1) We don't ask God for things, 2) we ask for the wrong things, and 3) for the wrong reasons. (Why should God squander his great blessings to gratify our sinful cravings?) When we stay close to God we can better understand his will for our lives. Then we will be able to pray for things that are in his will and we will be asking for the right reasons. We also can be bolder and ask God for what we want, including fulfilling his promises to us. God will be faithful and give us what we need.

34. In what ways are we friends with the world?

We are friends with the world when we adopt or tolerate their morals and ideals. For example, being independent is great, sleeping around is fine, cutting another person down is funny. Many of these ideals and lies are played out for us on TV shows. When we watch this type of TV we become desensitized and start thinking that these sins are not so bad after all. Our culture regards tolerance as a virtue. So from the world's point of view, it is politically incorrect to judge the actions and ideas of others God doesn't mince words about things that are wrong and considers tolerance of a sin as bad as the sin itself. (Rom 1:32)

35. Why is this wrong?

It is wrong to love evil things or good things more than God. For example, sports are good but can take over your life and become your #1 priority. Nothing should ever come before God. We should examine our own lives - what we spend our time and money on, what we think about and what we love, in order to make sure that we are putting God above everything else.

36. What hope does v. 6 give us?

God gives us grace to cover up all our sins including the sin of being friends with the world. When we humble ourselves before God and sincerely repent, he will reassure us that his grace in Christ has covered all our sins.

37. Describe the seven things that James tells us we can do to subdue our selfishness?

1) Submit to God: "To submit to God means to believe his claim that you are accountable to him, to acknowledge him as first in your life, to subordinate your will to his, to open your ears and heart to his Word, to let him steer your choices and decisions, to let him set your limits of right and wrong." (Jeske 39-40)

2) Resist the devil: The devil tempts us by trying to convince us that the ways of the world aren't so bad. When we are in the Word, we are reminded of God's perfect law. We should run away from temptation and pray for God to help us.

3) Come near to God: God wants to have a personal close relationship with us. God will come near to us and will give us joy and peace in all circumstances.

4) Wash your hands: This means to repent of all your sins.

5) Purify your heart: Don't be a Sunday Christian and seek God only when it is convenient. Seek God with all your heart every day, all day. Live out your faith no matter where you are or what you are doing.

6) Grieve, mourn and wail: When we really repent it should affect us emotionally. We have to mean what we are saying when we tell God we are sorry.

7) Humble yourself before the Lord: We should fear the Lord and admit that we are sinful, disobedient people who deserve to go to hell. When we humble ourselves, then God will lift us up because Jesus paid for our sins on the cross to save us from hell.

38. What happens to our attitude when we sinfully judge others?

We put ourselves above the other person and think we are better than them. We think we are “morally superior” (Jeske 41).

39. What should we do instead?

We should pray for others and offer words of encouragement in hard times. Always show love for the other person, no matter what sin is in their life. Try to help them know their Savior better. We are also called to lovingly show people their errors so their relationship with God is restored. (Matthew 18:15-17 and Galatians 6:1.)

40. How does sinfully judging others insult God?

God is the only judge. When we judge others then we are taking his place and acting as if we are above the law. No one is above the law and equal to God.

Read vs. 13-17.

41. Are vs. 13-15 saying it is wrong to have long-term goals?

No, it is wrong to make concrete long-term goals as though God does not exist. In other words, we need to recognize that God is in control of the present and the future. He will decide what REALLY happens in our lives. We can plan ahead, but we should ask God’s guidance in those plans and then hold them loosely and then let God decide what happens.

42. Give some examples of how we can sin by not doing the good that we know we need to do?

It is a sin when God asks us to do something for him and we say no. For example, when we do not love our neighbors, but instead avoid them. This is a constant struggle between the old man and the new man, as Paul tells us in Romans 7:14-24. With Paul, we rejoice that God, through Jesus Christ, comes to our rescue, forgives us for the sins that permeate our life, and helps us do the right thing.

Closing Prayer

Next week: James 5: Warning to Rich Oppressors, Patience in Suffering, and The Prayer of Faith

References:

Jeske, Mark A. People's Bible Commentary – James, 1,2 Peter, 1,2,3 John, Jude. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2002. 37-44

Life Application Study Bible. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1988. 1989-1991

A Study of the Book of James:

Real Faith Produces Good Works

Leader's Guide—Chapter 5

Opening Prayer

Read 5:1-20.

43. In verses 1-6, James warns against hoarding wealth and oppressing others. What is the correct view of money?

Money is a tool that God gives us to serve him. Our money is really his and we simply manage it. When God is first in our lives, then we are more likely not to worship money or material things (1 Timothy 6:9-10).

44. What kind of treasure should we store up?

We should store up treasures in heaven. When we are focused on heavenly things not earthly things, we have the right focus (Matthew 6:19-24). These heavenly treasures are such things as eternal life, peace, contentment, faith.

45. In verse 7, James compares our waiting on the Lord to the farmer waiting on crops. What must we both do while we wait patiently?

The farmer has to care for the crops and water them but is dependent on God to make them grow. We have work to do to further God's Kingdom while we wait. There are people who do not know Jesus as their Savior and need to be told about him. We also, like the farmer, live by faith looking forward to what is yet to come. The farmer waits for his crops and we wait for our Savior. He promises to come back for us and give us a great life in heaven.

46. James wants us to think about prophets who had "patience in the face of suffering" (v. 10.) Can you think of other examples besides Job?

Moses lost his patience and struck the rock, but he did have patience throughout his life with leading God's people. Joseph had patience through all of his many sufferings. He was sold as a slave, accused of adultery and had to forgive his brothers, yet he still served the Lord faithfully throughout his life.

47. James talks about two kinds of “talk” that are not appropriate for Christians. What are they and why are they not God-pleasing?

The first one in v. 9 is grumbling against one another. When we blame and judge others, then we cause bickering among ourselves. “We need encouragement and guidance from our fellow Christians, not verbal abuse and gossip and judgmental criticism” (Jeske 48).

We also should not swear (v. 12). We need to tell the whole truth all the time so that we have a trustworthy reputation. When we use God’s name wrongly in our conversation, this is also considered swearing. Ex. “Oh God”... God wants us to use his name(s) to praise and glorify him, not in frivolous conversation.

48. Prayer is so important. What aspects of prayer is James emphasizing in vs. 13-18?

v. 13 We should go to God first when we are in trouble. Only he can truly help us.

v. 14 & 16 We should pray for the healing of sickness as a group of faithful believers, believing that God has the power to heal us if it is his will.

v. 15 When we ask for forgiveness, we will be forgiven. God will also rid us of the poison of anger and hatred towards others, and the effects it can have on our lives.

v. 16 We are invited to confess our sins to each other so that we can lift each other up in prayer. If a sin is between two people, we should approach each other to ask for forgiveness, taking great care not to gossip.

v. 17 There is great power in prayer. God can do mighty things through our prayers. He is holding back good things waiting for us to ask for them.

49. What is meant by anointing with oil in v. 14?

In Luke 10:34 he hear about the Good Samaritan using oil to dress the wounds on the beaten man. This would have been a very soothing, healing thing given the arid land in which they lived. Today, we may not use oil to anoint a person who is ill but we do reach out with other soothing, healing gestures such as touching, praying with someone, encouraging, visiting, or taking care of physical needs while someone is recuperating.

50. Why is it our duty to gently and lovingly guide someone back to a close relationship with God when they have gone astray?

It is our duty because God commands us to vs. 19 &20. We need to look out for one another, strengthen and encourage each other to follow God till the end of our lives. In Galatians 6:1-2, Paul adds another thought. Neglecting to “restore him gently” may result in our being tempted by the same sin! God uses us to bring his love, care and encouragement to his people—what an awesome thought!

In conclusion, James teaches us what our faith looks like in action on a day-to-day basis. When we read James, it reminds us how God wants us to live. May God bless your efforts to live out your faith daily for his glory.

Closing Prayer

References:

Jeske, Mark A. People’s Bible Commentary—James, 1,2 Peter, 1,2,3 John, Jude. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2002. 44-53

Life Application Study Bible. Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1988. 1989-1991