

Small Group Guide

FAITH WORKS: FAITH LASTS

The Church at Brook Hills, Dr. David Platt

October 18, 2009

James 4:13-5:20

This guide is designed to help you facilitate discussion with your Small Group. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering and owning the truths of God's Word. There may be questions you do not want to use, and there may be instances when you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on their relationship with God. Your role is to facilitate this experience, not complete the discussion guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool rather than a rigid teaching task list.

Connect . . .

Use one or both of the following options to introduce the discussion time to follow.

Option 1

Invite learners to discuss a time when they noticed an injustice or unfair situation that seemed to go on and on. What eventually happened? Was the situation resolved? Was justice done? Was the guilty party punished or rebuked? Was it immediate or did it take time?

Explain that today we will see we can trust God's justice. His justice is perfect and nothing escapes his notice. This should give us hope and confidence if we are his faithful.

Option 2

Invite learners to discuss a time when their lives were suddenly changed, for the good or for the worse, or just completely different. What happened? What was their reaction? What did they learn? How has that situation changed their outlook on life? How did they see God's hand in the matter?

Explain that today we will see that our lives are fleeting and uncertain. God is sovereign over our lives, activities, and accomplishments.

Review the Message . . .

FAITH LASTS

James 4:13-5:20

Faith that Perseveres...

- Is humble before the sovereignty of God.
 - We can become so consumed with the material realm...
 - That we become blind to spiritual realities.
 - God is sovereign over our life and our death...
 - And over our activities and our accomplishments .

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Discussion . . .

- Enlist a learner(s) to read James 4:13–16.
- How does James describe our lives? (v. 15)
- How does James describe godless planning? (see v. 16)
- Who is sovereign over our lives? How does James say this should influence our speech?

Application . . .

- How do we sometimes get wrapped up in the material realm? If our lives are a mist, how should that influence our attitudes and actions?
- How can we rightly give spiritual realities the precedence they deserve in our lives? How can we make choices that enable our lives to count for the glory of God? Is all planning for the future wrong? Why or why not?
- How can we move from self-sufficiency to God dependency?
- How should God's sovereignty humble us? Comfort us? Affect what we say and how we say it?
- How should the two truths of God's sovereignty and the uncertainties of life in this world affect our decisions about finances? About our lives at work (careers/business decisions/planning)? About our family (relations to spouse, children, parents)? About our involvement in the life of the church body (worship, missions, service)?

- **Is obedient to the will of God.**

- **Sins of commission: doing what God has said not to do.**
- **Sins of omission: disregarding what God has said to do.**

Discussion . . .

- Enlist a learner to read James 4:17.
- What kind of sin is James discussing? Explain the difference between sins of commission and sins of omission?
- Are these two kinds of sin equally serious?

Application . . .

- Think about examples of sins of commission and sins of omission. Which are more prevalent in our lives?
- How is ignoring the needs of the lost and the poor a sin?
- What does the Bible say about caring for the poor? (start with Matthew 25:31–46.)

- **Is confident in the justice of God.**

- **He is coming to judge the sinful.**
 - **For hoarding wealth...**
 - **Their treasures on earth would bring about their torment in eternity.**
 - **For cheating workers...**
 - **Their possessions were accumulating while people were dying.**

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- For living in self-indulgence ...
 - They were overfed and unconcerned.
- For condemning men...
 - Their oppression of others would lead to their own damnation.
- He is coming to deliver the faithful.

Discussion . . .

- Enlist a learner to read James 5:1–6.
- Remind the group of the context of this passage. Jesus is coming again soon to judge all people. See verses 1, 3, 7, 8, 9.
- Remind the group that the passage is most likely discussing nonbelievers, warning of coming judgment. But Dr. Platt also gave a second emphasis: a warning to believers not to fall in the same traps.
- What four things does James condemn these people for doing?
- What things will testify against these people in judgment?
- How does verse 4 comfort the oppressed?

Application . . .

- Read Luke 12:13–21. How do these words of Jesus serve as a warning to believers and nonbelievers alike?
- How can we fall prey to the temptation to hoard riches? How can we be shaped into the culture's mind-set—either living like material things will last forever or using up material things solely for our own pleasures (eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die)? How can we live differently?
- Read Ezekiel 16:49. How are being overfed and unconcerned connected to arrogance? How are these sins against God, as well as other people?
- How do the sins of greed and gluttony affect others, especially the poor? How is the greedy person affected by his own sin?
- How should the imminent return of Jesus affect our attitude toward material things?
- How can the fact that God hears our cries give us hope in the midst of trial, temptation, and persecution?

- **Is patient in suffering.**
 - Like a farmer... waiting for the harvest.
 - Trusting in God with what you cannot control.
 - Honoring God with what you can control.
 - Like a prophet... speaking the truth.
 - Like Job... hoping in God's purpose.

- **Is trustworthy in speech.**

Discussion . . .

- Enlist a learner to read James 5:7–11.
- Discuss the three examples James gives of patience and perseverance.

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- How does a good farmer display godly patience? Is godly patience passive?
- How were the prophets patient?
- How does the end of verse 11 give us hope in suffering?
- Read James 5:12.

Application . . .

- How can we learn to leave the things we cannot control in God's hands?
- How can we be patient, yet active at the same time?
- How can hope in God's compassion and mercy help us avoid complaining?
- Is there any area in our lives where our speech is unreliable? (at work, at home, with our children, with our friends)

• Is prayerful in sorrow.

- **Pray when you are hurting.**
- **Pray when you are happy.**
- **Pray with the sick.**
 - **Is the oil medicinal?**
 - **Is the oil sacramental?**
 - **The oil is symbolic.**
- **Pray with the church.**
- **Confess your sins to each other.**
 - **Sin directly causes some sickness.**
 - **Sin indirectly causes all sickness.**
- **Intercede on behalf of each other.**
 - **The secret to power and effectiveness in prayer...**
 - **Make your wants God's wants.**
 - **Ask for whatever you want.**

Discussion . . .

- Enlist a learner to read James 5:13–18.
- When should we pray? Whom should we pray with? Whom should we pray for?
- How are praise and prayer related?
- How is prayer the key to patience in sorrow or hurting of any kind?
- How does sin indirectly cause all sickness? How can sin directly cause some sickness? (See 1 Corinthians 11:30)
- How can confession of sins lead to healing in our lives?
- Look at 1 Kings 17 and 18. Elijah prayed according to God's Word. How can we pray according to God's Word?
- If someone is not healed, should we necessarily attribute it to a lack of faith? Read 2 Corinthians 12:7–10, where Paul speaks of the thorn in his flesh.

Application . . .

- How can small groups live out these verses? Discuss specific ways your small group

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- can pray for one another.
- Why would James charge us to confess our sins to one another? How can small groups facilitate church members confessing their sins to one another?
 - How can we make God's wants our wants? What kinds of prayer requests do we know God will answer?
 - Is it wrong to pray for someone to be healed? Why or why not? Do we know that person will be healed? How can we pray for them in ways we know God will honor?
- **Is loving toward sinners.**
 - **Earthly restoration...**
 - **Saves souls.**
 - **Covers sins.**
 - **Eternal security...**
 - **Eternal security is always a certainty.**
 - **Eternal security is accomplished through community.**

Discussion . . .

- Enlist a learner to read James 5:19–20.
- What do these verses teach about the importance of being part of a church body?
- How is eternal security accomplished through community?

Application . . .

- How can the church bring back those who are wandering away from the truth? How is this loving?

Faith that Works...

- **Is only possible by the gracious Gospel of Christ.**
- **Is played out in the context of the body of Christ.**
- **Is ultimately aimed toward great glory to Christ.**

Application . . .

- Christ died for us, so we will live for His glory in the context of His body. Take some time to reflect on what Christ has done for us and how that should change our lives.