

Book of James Fall Sermon Series/Study 2023

"Let's Get Real!"

September 10 – October 1, 2023

James Study Overview: We will kick off fall worship and Sunday morning classes with a four-week series on the book of James. It will incorporate four weeks of videos, which will be filmed at various sites in Washington D.C. and used in our Sunday morning adult and youth classes. The first week will introduce this picture of "real" faith as seen in James. The second week will speak to the "real" picture of rich and poor, as God sees it. The third week will offer a realistic picture of our words and speech. We will bring it all home in week four, as we speak of the very real possibilities of prayer.

Key Guiding Study Verse: "You must understand this, my dear brothers and sisters, let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger." (James 1:19)

Reveille UMC's Definition of Discipleship: "Discipleship is following Jesus Christ and working together to serve the Kingdom of God."

Course Objectives:

- That we all learn real and applicable ways to make our faith visible to the world in our everyday lives.
- That we honestly and authentically examine ourselves in light of where we are currently and aspire to be.
- That we at Reveille will learn how we can all better live into our church statement of Discipleship: "Discipleship is following Jesus Christ and working together to serve the Kingdom of God."

How:

- We have created a four-week customized church-wide study utilizing original videos, the GPS weekly scripture guide as a user guide, and weekly small group lessons incorporating suggested prayers, scripture reading, and discussion questions.

Course Content:

- **Week 1: September 10** - James 2:14-19 ("A Real Picture of Faith")
- **Week 2: September 17** - James 2:1-13 ("A Real Picture of People")
- **Week 3: September 24** - James 3:1-6 ("A Real Problem - Taming the Tongue")
- **Week 4: October 1** - James 5:13-18 ("The Real Possibilities of Prayer")

Course Videos:

Watch videos from the series: <https://reveilleumc.org/real>

Small Group Leader Guide

Before class each week

- Read the leader guide
- Read the GPS
- Pre-watch the video
- Print out your leader guide to bring to class.

Class opening (15 minutes)

- Ensure you are able to access and show the video, <https://reveilleumc.org/real>
- Lead check-in and prayer concerns to open the class.
- Lead the class in the suggested opening prayer or one of your own.
- (Weeks 2-6): Ask volunteers to share what progress they made in the past week based on any action steps they designed from the previous lesson.

Immediately before showing the video (5 minutes)

- Pass out copies of the participant guides.
- Have volunteers read the scripture for the week's lesson.

Play the video (10 minutes), <https://reveilleumc.org/real>

Discussion after video (20 minutes)

- In leading the discussion, your role is to serve as the group's "discussion facilitator," not the subject matter expert. You do this by trusting in the power of your group to come up with incredible solutions to their problems, the church's problems, and the world's problems through their God-given gifts and insights. You will do this by:
 - Asking the single "anchor question" after the video each week and allowing the class to run with their answers.
 - Listening carefully to their insights, then asking follow-up questions that encourage them to go deeper in their understanding.
 - Encouraging others to add their thoughts to the insight you are currently discussing.
 - Asking the class to design at least one actionable step based on any key insights that will lead to a meaningful change in their lives.

End of Class (10 minutes)

- Give class time to answer the three questions on the participant guide and invite them to share insights with the class.
- End in prayer.

Week One: September 10 (Kickoff Sunday)

“Real Faith Does: A Real Picture of Faith”

Three-Step Discipleship Definition: “Follow Jesus Christ. Work Together. Serve the Kingdom of God.”

Scripture(s) - James 2:14-19

Key Verse - “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Surely that faith cannot save, can it?” (James 2:14)

Focus Point - Get into the business of DOING church, not just TALKING about BEING church.

Lesson Summary: As Christian disciples, it is not enough for us to solely have faith without works. What good is our faith if we don’t put it into everyday practice so others can see the love of God at work? Today’s lesson will challenge us to reflect on where, how, when, and where we can apply our faith into real-world practices. Most importantly, we will discuss why this matters and help us make our faith apparent and real.

Take Home Statement: “Real Faith requires BOTH WORKS and FAITH.”

Class Opening (10-15 minutes) - Check in with one another, share joys and concerns to open up the class.

Opening Prayer: Lord, we thank You for this day that You have made and we thank you for this opportunity to be gathered in Your name. We, as your faithful disciples and stewards, come before You now to learn more about how we can best serve You and our neighbors. Help us to grow in faith and excitement for the incredible plans you have for our church this year - plans to help all people know and experience God’s love and the power of the Holy Spirit. Help us to deepen our relationship with Christ so that with our minds transformed and our spirits renewed, we will be able to apply, share, and model the love and grace of God with the world through the lens of our everyday lives. We lift up these prayers and all the concerns of this group, both spoken and unspoken, in Jesus’s holy name. Amen.

Before showing video (5 minutes):

- Pass out copies of the participant guides.
- Have volunteers read the scripture for the week’s lesson and think about what comes to mind while reading/listening: **James 2:14-19**

Play the video (7 minutes): <https://reveilleumc.org/real>

Anchor Question after Video: What are your initial thoughts about what you heard in the video?

(Allow the class's answers to the anchor question to direct the entire agenda of the discussion time. Let the discussion flow, and ask follow-up questions to guide them into a deeper exploration of their own insights. Then, encourage the class to commit to taking at least one action step based on their insights.)

Follow-Up Questions (For Individual Responses to Anchor Question)

- Why did that jump out at you?
- Can anyone else add their thoughts to this point?
- Where else could we apply this insight to our lives?
- What difference could it make in our lives if we did this?
- What do you wish our church would do with this insight?
- What is an actionable step we could take to help that happen?

Supplemental Questions

1. What thoughts, imagery, or phrases come to mind when you think about James 2:14-19?
 - a. Are there words from the passage that stick out to you? Why?
2. What do you think about Martin Luther's statement about the Book of James being an "Epistle of Straw?" (Point of Reference - Martin Luther felt that Faith didn't require Works and only needed Belief.)
 - a. Agree or Disagree?
 - b. Why or Why Not?
3. Do you believe faith REQUIRES works?
 - a. Why or Why Not?
4. Do you have a notable life experience where you witnessed someone else put their faith in action?
 - a. How did this experience make you feel?
 - b. What did you observe?
5. Do you have a notable life experience where you actively participated and put your faith into action? (ex: mission work, community work, volunteering, random encounter, etc.)
 - a. What did you do?
 - b. How did this experience make you feel?
6. How do you feel when thinking about faith as a construction blueprint? (The design, construction, the building, etc.)
7. Have you ever experienced seasons in your life where you felt more "double-minded" or confused about your faith in God?
 - a. What do you think contributed to your season of double-mindedness? Doubt? Anxiety? Busyness of Life?
8. When thinking about Reville's definition of discipleship, (Following Jesus Christ is working together to serve the Kingdom of God) do you feel like you're living into that statement as best as you can?
 - a. Why or why not?

Closing Remarks: Tell participants that each week, they will have a chance to turn their insights into action steps that can make a transformative difference in their lives. Invite members to write their responses to these three questions on the participant guide.

1. My biggest takeaway from today's lesson was:
2. One action step I want to take this week to put my faith into action is:
3. One action step I believe Reveille could take to better help its members and its community put our faith into action is:

(When the three minutes is up, ask volunteers to share one thing they wrote down.)

Closing Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for this reminder to actively put our faith into practice. Help us to not only be hearers and observers of Your Word, but also seekers and doers of Your Word. As we go into the new week, push us to step beyond our fears and comforts, and provide us with opportunities to better model what it looks like to live our lives every day as your disciples in the world. We ask this in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Week Two: September 17

“A Real Picture of People”

Three-Step Discipleship Definition: “Follow Jesus Christ. Work Together. Serve the Kingdom of God.”

Scripture(s): James 2:1-13

Key Verse: “Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?” (James 2:5)

Focus Point: In life AND death, we are ALL EQUIVALENT in the eyes of God.

Lesson Summary: As Christian disciples, we are all a part of the same body, but each of us has differing functions. We are not all equipped with the same gifts and graces as our neighbors, which at times, can make it hard for us to find commonality and mutuality amongst one another. However, even in light of our differences in circumstances, experiences, perspectives, and more, through Christ, we always have the opportunity to build bridges and extend our hands to uplift others. In today's lesson, we will examine how our faith directly challenges us to care for those who are different from us, whether it be in socioeconomic status, class, race, gender, age, or belief. How can we come together and share in the unique gifts that God graced each of us with?

Take Home Statement: “Real Faith SERVES even those who are DIFFERENT FROM US.”

Class Opening (10-15 minutes) - Check in with one another, share joys and concerns to open up the class. Ask if anyone put their faith into action in any way within the past week.

Opening Prayer: Lord, we thank You again for allowing us to come together in fellowship, study, worship, and service. As we continue to discern who You are shaping us to be and calling us to do, we ask that You help us to learn how to apply our faith into our everyday lives so we can be more like You. Please forgive us in times last week where we fell short and failed to model our lives in light of Your teachings. Be with us as we ask questions, seek understanding, discuss amongst each other, and grow into doers and sharers of Your Good News in the world. We lift up our prayers, joys, and concerns, both spoken and unspoken, in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Immediately before showing video (5 minutes):

- Pass out copies of the participant guides.
- Have volunteers read the scripture for the week's lesson: James 2:1-13
- Play the video (7 minutes): <https://reveilleumc.org/real>

Anchor Question after Video: What are your initial thoughts after watching the video?

(Allow the class's answers to the anchor question to direct the entire agenda of the discussion time. Let the discussion flow, and ask follow-up questions to guide them into a deeper exploration of their own insights. Then, encourage the class to commit to taking at least one action step based on their insights.)

Follow-Up Questions (For Individual Responses to Anchor Question)

- Why did that jump out at you?
- Can anyone else add their thoughts to this point?
- Where else could we apply this insight to our lives?
- What difference could it make in our lives if we did this?
- What do you wish our church would do with this insight?
- What is an actionable step we could take to help that happen?

Supplemental Questions

1. What thoughts, imagery, or phrases come to mind when you think about James 2:1-13?
 - a. Are there words from the passage that stick out to you? Why?
2. When thinking about death, are you filled more with anxiety of its unknown inevitableness or are you filled more with a sense of urgency to live your life to the fullest in light of death? (Can be a both/and answer)
3. Have you ever had an experience where you felt like you were treated as less than in comparison to someone else?
 - a. How did this experience make you feel?
 - b. Did you do anything about it?
4. Let's get real - what is your honest perception of those who are poor? (Think about the city of Richmond.)
 - a. What is your initial response when encountering someone who appears to be financially poor? (Avoidance? Compassion? Sadness? Disgust? Anger?)
5. Do you think you have a high tolerance or low tolerance for those who have differing opinions than you?

- a. Are you comfortable with having your opinions challenged or do you retreat when challenged?
6. Do you find yourself more often being a challenger of opinions or the one having their opinions challenged?
 - a. How do these experiences make you feel?
 - b. How have these experiences shaped your outlook on life?
7. How do you interpret this statement from Tim Keller? (“We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.”)

Closing Remarks: Tell participants that each week, they will have a chance to turn their insights into action steps that can make a transformative difference in their lives. Invite members to write their responses to these three questions on the participant guide.

1. My biggest takeaway from today’s lesson was:
2. One action step I want to take this week to put my faith into action is:
3. One action step I believe Reveille could take to better help its members and its community put our faith into action is:

(When the three minutes are up, ask volunteers to share one thing they wrote down.)

Closing Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for creating us in Your image. We thank You for providing us with minds to think for ourselves and spirits to discern Your call for our lives. In times where we have differences in experiences, perspectives, and opinions, help us to remember that our differences do not have to divide us. Just like the different parts and functions of the church body, guide us in our attempts to learn from one another and to appreciate what everyone brings to the table. Be with us this week as we discern where best to put this understanding into applicable Christian practice. We lift up our prayers to You in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Week Three: September 24

“A Real Problem - Taming the Tongue”

Three-Step Discipleship Definition: “Follow Jesus Christ. Work Together. Serve the Kingdom of God.”

Scripture(s): James 3:1-6

Key Verse: “So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!” (James 3:5)

Focus Point: Walk in God’s Word by WATCHING YOUR WORDS.

Lesson Summary: As Christian disciples, we have all been entrusted with gifts from God. Regardless of whatever gifts those are, once we’ve been entrusted with them, we are ultimately responsible for how we utilize them. As the great Spiderman once said, “With great power comes

great responsibility.” Bearing this in mind, those of us who have been gifted with communication have a responsibility to be mindful of our words, as we know that when they are used recklessly, they have the capacity to cut deeper than any blade. Today’s lesson will challenge us as communicators to reflect on our sense of God-given responsibility and inform us on how we can better use our words to build up others instead of breaking them down.

Take Home Statement: “Real Faith EQUIPS US to be RESPONSIBLE STEWARDS OF OUR WORDS.”

Class Opening (10-15 minutes) - Check in with one another, share joys and concerns to open up the class. Ask if anyone put their faith into action in any way within the past week.

Opening Prayer: Lord, we thank You for helping us all to be present with You and one another today in this class. Thank You for all the ways that You have been helping us to grow more in our faith and guiding us to make our faith visible in the world. Please forgive the times last week where we missed opportunities to share Your Good News with others through our words and actions. Help us to grow more in our capacities to diligently follow Your instructions and in turn, become orators and doers so others can see the transformative power of Your Word at work in us. We lift up our prayers, joys, and concerns, both spoken and unspoken, in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Immediately before showing video (5 minutes):

- Pass out copies of the participant guides.
- Have volunteers read the scripture for the week’s lesson: James 3:1-6
- Play the video (7 minutes) : www.reveilleumc.org/real

Anchor Question after Video: What are your initial thoughts after watching the video?

(Allow the class’s answers to the anchor question to direct the entire agenda of the discussion time. Let the discussion flow, and ask follow-up questions to guide them into a deeper exploration of their own insights. Then, encourage the class to commit to taking at least one action step based on their insights.)

Follow-Up Questions (For Individual Responses to Anchor Question)

- Why did that jump out at you?
- Can anyone else add their thoughts to this point?
- Where else could we apply this insight to our lives?
- What difference could it make in our lives if we did this?
- What do you wish our church would do with this insight?
- What is an actionable step we could take to help that happen?

Supplemental Questions

1. What thoughts, imagery, or phrases come to mind when you think about James 3:1-6?
 - a. What words from the passage stand out to you?

2. What first comes to mind when you hear the verse from Scripture “Quick to Listen, Slow to Speak?” (James 1:19)
3. Can you name a time where you were on the receiving end of harsh words that have been etched into your memory?
 - a. How did this make you feel?
 - b. Did you do anything about it?
4. Can you name a time where you said a harsh word to someone?
 - a. What played into it? Long day at work? High Stress? Extreme Tiredness? Misunderstanding?
 - b. Did you rectify it with the other person?
5. Can you name a time where you were on the receiving end of affirming and positive words that have been etched into your memory?
 - a. How did this make you feel?
6. Do you prefer to RECEIVE affirming words from others or GIVE affirming words to others?

Closing Remarks: Tell participants that each week, they will have a chance to turn their insights into action steps that can make a transformative difference in their lives. Invite members to write their responses to these three questions on the participant guide.

1. My biggest takeaway from today’s lesson was:
2. One action step I want to take this week to put my faith into action is:
3. One action step I believe Reville could take to better help its members and its community put our faith into action is:

(When the three minutes is up, ask volunteers to share one thing they wrote down.)

Closing Prayer: Patient and Loving God, we thank you for providing us with the freedom to verbally communicate our thoughts, opinions, and perspectives with one another. We thank you for the gift of communication, which allows us to be seen, heard, and valued. Please forgive us in times where we don’t always use this gift to speak words of life, affirmation, and compassion to our neighbors. As we enter into this new week, help us to be quick to listen and slow to speak so that Your loving voice and nature can be exemplified through our words and deeds. We ask all of this in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Week Four: October 1

“The Real Possibilities of Prayer”

Three-Step Discipleship Definition: “Follow Jesus Christ. Work Together. Serve the Kingdom of God.”

Scripture(s): James 5:13-18

Key Verse: “The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.” (James 5:16)

Focus Point: Prayer really DOES work.

Lesson Summary: As Christian disciples, God has provided us with a means of communicating through prayer. Through prayer, we can non-judgmentally share our burdens, confess our deepest sins, and cast our anxieties upon our God, who lovingly listens to us. Even when we don't have the words to pray for what we need, God listens to our hearts. This is all because God desires to have a relationship with us and through this desire, Jesus Christ our Lord and the Son of God, was given in our place to die for our sins. As those who have been freed from the debts of sin through this gift of God's grace, we now are presented with the opportunity to continue investing in this relationship. Today's lesson serves as a reminder of the miraculous power of having a relationship with God and through engaging in prayer, we can begin to experience the boundless depths of love, hope, peace, and joy that daily prayer brings to our lives.

Take Home Statement: "Real Faith is BEING GROUNDED in the HOPE that PRAYER WORKS."

Class Opening (10-15 minutes) - Check in with one another, share joys and concerns to open up the class.

Ask if anyone put their faith into action in any way within the past week.

Opening Prayer: Lord, we thank You for all of the ways that You've been shepherding, leading, and guiding us these last four weeks. As we wrap up our time with this study on this day, we ask now that You help us to open our minds and spirits to continue learning how we can best embody Your ever-redeeming love and grace for us. Empower us to make our faith real so that others will know that You are real. We lift up our prayers, joys, and concerns, both spoken and unspoken, in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Immediately before showing video (5 minutes):

- Pass out copies of the participant guides.
- Have volunteers read the scripture for the week's lesson: James 5:13-18
- Play the video (7 minutes) www.reveilleumc.org/real

Anchor Question after Video: What are your initial thoughts after watching the video?

(Allow the class's answers to the anchor question to direct the entire agenda of the discussion time. Let the discussion flow, and ask follow-up questions to guide them into deeper exploration of their own insights. Then, encourage the class to commit to taking at least one action step based on their insights.)

Follow-Up Questions (For Individual Responses to Anchor Question)

- Why did that jump out at you?
- Can anyone else add their thoughts to this point?
- Where else could we apply this insight into our lives?
- What difference could it make in our lives if we did this?

- What do you wish our church would do with this insight?
- What is an actionable step we could take to help that happen?

Supplemental Questions

1. What thoughts, imagery, or phrases come to mind when you think about James 5:13-18?
 - a. What words from the passage stick out to you?
2. Can you remember a time when you prayed for something and you received what you were praying for?
 - a. How did this make you feel?
3. Can you remember a time when you prayed for something and you DID NOT receive what you were praying for?
 - a. How did this make you feel?
 - b. Did you get something else instead?
4. How does prayer make you feel?
 - a. Do you feel uncomfortable? Do you feel better after? Do you continue to worry?
5. Do you feel more comforted when going to a quiet place alone and praying or do you prefer to pray amongst others?
6. How often do you pray?
 - a. Do you believe more in Quantity or Quality when it comes to prayer?
 - b. Do you have a favorite time of day or location preference when praying?

Closing Remarks: Tell participants that each week, they will have a chance to turn their insights into action steps that can make a transformative difference in their lives. Invite members to write their responses to these three questions on the participant guide.

1. My biggest takeaway from today's lesson was:
2. One action step I want to take this week to put my faith into action is:
3. One action step I believe Reveille could take to better help its members and its community put our faith into action is:

(When the three minutes is up, ask volunteers to share one thing they wrote down.)

Closing Prayer: Miraculous and Ever-Present God, we thank You for all the ways that You've provided us with to communicate with You and to be in relationship with You. We thank you for the free gift of prayer, which at times, we don't always actively engage in due to a variety of different factors. When we struggle to find the time or the words to share our burdens and confess our sins, help us to hear Your Voice in ways that we can understand. Help us to remember Your grace, which allows us to be witnesses to the miraculous hopes that only prayer and faith in You can provide. As we conclude this study and enter into our next season, mold us in Your perfect ways so that through our faith, we can transform our "some days" into our everydays. Guide us so that we can turn our faith into action, appreciate our differences, be responsible stewards of our words, and steadfast disciples in prayer. We ask all of this in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.