



AWAKEN TO FAITH

April 11 | Devotionals

Day 1 - Devotion

One of the most interesting things about James is that this guy is the half-brother of Jesus! And if you grew up with siblings, you'd know that brothers and sisters have a tendency to mess with one another. Here's a few examples of unruly sibling rivalry that I recently heard about:

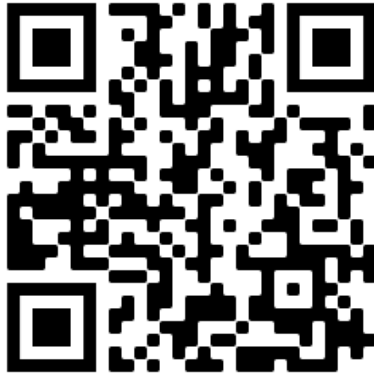
- First, a 9-year-old boy convinced his younger brother to take a huge bite out of an onion. I'll bet that taste stuck around in his mouth for a while.
- Next, a 10-year-old boy put peanut butter in his little sister's ears while she was sleeping. That's not nice...*funny*, perhaps, but not nice!
- Finally, I read of a 6-year-old girl who took some scissors to her 3-year-old brother's hair. Needless to say, mom and dad weren't happy.

I can't even imagine what it was like to have Jesus as a big brother. Talk about growing up in someone else's shadow! What's interesting is that we see early on that James and his other siblings did not believe in Jesus as God's son (**John 7:5**). To them, Jesus was just Jesus.

But we know from Scripture and the history books that, not only was James an early witness to the resurrection of Jesus (**1 Corinthians 15:7**), but that he went on to be a leader in the church in Jerusalem and be martyred for his faith. Do a quick Google search and you'll see that James was thrown from the roof of the temple in Jerusalem and then beaten with clubs to ensure he was dead.

But maybe the best example of his conversion and influence is the letter he wrote.

We'd love for you to take 8 minutes and get acquainted with James and this letter. Take a few moments (if you haven't already) to watch this great overview of the book of James from our friends at Bible Project. *Just scan the QR code below with your phone's camera and click on the link that pops up!*



Questions for reflection:

1. As you watched the overview of James, what stood out to you or challenged you?
2. Is there a specific way you hope studying this letter will shape your faith? Take a moment and write down areas of your spiritual life you'd like to see grow the next 8 weeks.
3. Take 2 minutes and simply be still before God. Slow your breathing, try to clear your mind, and focus your attention on God and what you are thankful for. Express your thanks to Him!

God has great plans for you in this journey. You may already be a Christian and if that's the case, God wants to awaken you more and more every day into His Kingdom reality. If you're not a Christian, God still wants to meet with you, too! We'd encourage you to make every effort to faithfully spend time with Jesus each day. We pray that these devotions increase your faith in God.

Day 2 – James Study Breakdown

Today, we're going to do a brief Bible breakdown of **James 1:1**. In **James 1:1**, James identifies himself as a "Servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." And, as mentioned yesterday, James learned about being a servant by watching his half-brother, Jesus.

Let's take a look at some key words in this verse.

SERVANT

In the original language of this letter (Greek), the word "servant" can also be translated as "slave." In the context of what James is talking about, you might say that a "slave" is, "one who gives himself up to another's will or those whose service is used by Christ in extending and advancing his cause among mankind" (see *BlueLetter Bible's definition on this*).

More than any time in our nation's history, we are highly sensitive to the term "slave" and the effects it's had on the African American community. This particular definition of slave in **James 1:1** differs from our nation's definition because being a slave to God is voluntary. God does not force anyone into slavery. But Scripture does refer to God having ownership or possession of those who choose to trust in him. It's more akin to a servant who swears fealty to his king (which leads us to the next word...)

LORD

When this word was used in James' day, this word meant, "one who has supremacy." Believe it or not, Jesus is referred to as "Lord" over 700 times in the New Testament, whereas he's only referred to as "Savior" 24 times.

Luke 19:10 tells us that Jesus' mission was to "seek and save the lost." So, while his *mission* was one of "Savior," his *position* is one of "Lord." We get to decide if he's going to be our Savior, but Jesus IS Lord. Nothing we do can change that (**see Mark 1:1; Philippians 2:5-11; Romans 1:1-4**)

There's a common theme being developed in **verse 1**. James states twice, once by how he addressed Jesus, and once by how he identifies himself, that he's willfully submitting as a slave to his Lord.

TWELVE TRIBES

If you read James 1 and see "twelve tribes" (NIV) or "dispersion" (ESV) you may be left wondering who those folks even are! Following the stoning of Stephen in **Acts 7**, we read how the Jewish Christians scattered throughout Judea and Samaria (**Acts 8:1**). These dispersed Christians were the target of James' letter and indicates that James had a leadership role in the early church following the resurrection of Jesus. The "twelve" comes from the fact that God's people (Israel) consisted of twelve tribes. James is using that Old Testament language as a sort of metaphor to speak of all of the Christians that have had to leave Jerusalem due to persecution.

Questions for reflection:

1. James identified himself as a slave/servant of God's. What's the natural way you identify yourself in relation to God (child, follower, seeker...)?
2. What feelings or thoughts do you have about being identified as a slave/servant of the Lord? Where do you find yourself resisting that title/role?
3. What does it say about James that he calls himself a slave to his half-brother, Jesus?

4. Spend a few moments in prayer, sharing with God any thoughts: things you're thankful for as our loving father, questions you have for him, or desires you have to grow in your faith as his servant.

Day 3 – Scripture Survey

As we look at **James 1:1** this week, we want to see what the whole story of Scripture has to say about this week's particular topic. Where else in Scripture do we find this same truth? How do other authors of Scripture support or expand on what James shares in this week's particular passage?

Take a moment first to reread **James 1:1**. Maybe even consider reading it in another translation on your Bible app to see different ways it gets rendered.

After you've read through it, take a few moments to slowly read through the passages below. Spend some time reflecting on the questions associated with them.

Read Mark 3:21 and John 7:5. What do these passages tell you about James' relationship with Jesus? What does it say about his relationship with Jesus that he would become a church leader and write this letter? Do you find it hard to trust Jesus like James did? Explain.

Read Philippians 2:3-11. How do these verses compare with James calling himself a "servant of God?"

Read John 13:1-17. What do these verses tell you about what being a servant of God looks like?

Read Philippians 1:1; Romans 1:1; Titus 1:1; Philemon 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1; Jude 1:1. What similarities do you see in the opening of these letters and the opening of James' letter? If you were to pen a letter of your own and you were to send a greeting like one of these, would you use the phrase "servant" to describe your relationship with God? Why or why not? What words would you use?

Day 4 – Story Work

This series is called "Awaken", and if you think about it, we have awakenings all of the time. We may not call them "awakenings" but we all go through "A-ha" moments or paradigm shifts. Typically, when we do, these awakenings happen because new light has been shed on something or because we've internalized something in a deeper way than ever before.

In spiritual terms, an *awakening* is when faith becomes real to you or MORE real to you than before. It's when the spiritual "light bulb" goes off and your belief in God moves from a concept in your mind to something you embrace in your heart.

You have a story of awakening. Maybe for you that looked a lot like James or Paul where Jesus changed everything in your life in an instant. Or maybe you've always had a constant awakening. As you've gotten older, you've had your eyes opened more and more to who Jesus is and how that impacts your life.

Each week throughout this series, we'll be looking at our own stories through the lens of James. This week's focus is on ***faith***.

Reflect on your story using the questions below. Invite God to lead as you look back on how your faith has grown over the course of your life.

1. Write the names of the primary people responsible for introducing you to Jesus.

Day 5 – Hear & Do

Yesterday we remembered our spiritual “awakening.”

James, a self-proclaimed “servant of God,” used his gifts and talents to play a key role in the early church and, through his letter, has helped countless people grow in their faith. What legacy will we leave behind?

God has huge plans for us as his children, in his family, and as a part of his Kingdom. And to see those plans come to fruition might be the next step of our faith journey...to trust God and further become his servant by praying, *“God, I’m indifferent to everything but your will for my life.”*

1. As you look over this week, what words, phrases, Scriptures, etc. have stood out to you? What was the most significant thing? Why?

2. Where else, outside of your devotional time, did you notice these things pop up throughout your week?

3. Take a moment to write down the areas of your life that are natural for you to surrender to God. Take a moment to write down the areas you have trouble relinquishing to God.

4. Now choose one of the areas that are difficult to relinquish and surrender it to God's will. For example, you might pray: "God, I want your will, not mine, in regard to _____ nothing more, nothing less, nothing else."

Make sure you share what you surrendered to God to another trusted believer so that they can be praying for you to continually trust God and be watching for how you see him move.

As we wrap this up week's devotions, can you think of a person who might need to hear your story of awakening? Begin praying now for God to put that person on your heart, and once he reveals them to you, begin praying and looking for opportunities to develop your relationship. God doesn't want our awakening to stay with us. Like James, God wants to use our lives to point people to HIM.