

The Epistle of James

Introduction



Every Fall semester at Calvin, it is our joy to study God’s Word as a community. In the past we have studied the book of Philippians, selected Psalms, the Sermon on the Mount, and Exodus. These Bible studies have happened on campus and off campus; in churches around North America and with groups around the world. We have found that studying God’s Word as a community grows us together in unity and in living our faith. Calvin College Campus Ministries loves bringing this study to the campus every year, and we are encouraged by the way people near and far are using it.

This year, we study the book of James. It’s a book that’s concerned with how people understand faith in the midst of trouble. It helps us look at Jesus and God’s law; it helps us consider how faith is worked out; and it’s a book aimed at helping people grow spiritually.

For help with this study, we will be using a commentary by George Stulac. He introduces the book of James this way: “It should be our joy to read and to teach the epistle of James as a message of redemption. The problem is that James does not seem to fit readily enough our concept of redemption. We describe our redemption as ‘salvation by grace alone,’ and James writes so much about deeds!”¹

James does write a lot about good works, but instead of arguing against salvation by faith he is proclaiming what faith lived out looks like. James feels no need to spell out justification through faith because he understands and assumes the grace of God as the source of salvation.

So, he writes about faith as a fundamental basis for prayer. He writes about faith as the starting point toward the goal of becoming “mature and complete” (in James 1:3-4). And James is pointing out that there is a progression: from faith (the starting point for being a Christ-follower), to deeds (obedience because of faith), and growing into maturity (the goal).

Growing into maturity is something we hope to do here at Calvin. We do that in community – through worship, through studying God’s word, in the classroom, and in the places we live. Our hope is that we can encourage you in this growth and empower you to live out our faith.

In Campus Ministries, we have adopted a mission statement that reflects our hope and vision for the Calvin community – “Daily in the Word. Radical Kingdom Living.” The Campus Wide Bible Study fits this mission statement well. We hope to encourage you to be daily in the Word of God – living with it and sharing it in community. And we hope that by the Word and the Holy Spirit, our faith might be strengthened and made visible in radical Kingdom living.

As we strive to follow Jesus, take some encouragement and a few challenges from the book of James this Fall. We hope you grow with your group. We hope you can see Jesus through this study; and we hope that you can live daily in the word, radically for the Kingdom of God.

So, as we study, join in conversation. Bring your Bible, bring your questions, and bring your moments of joy. Pray together, talk together, and do something about the things you talk about.

¹ Stulac, George M. 2010. *James*. IVP Academic.