

# Letter of James

## Readers' Theater Readings

By Ralph F. Wilson

If you're studying the Letter of James with a group or as a preaching series, you might enjoy using these Readers' Theater Readings. They are scripted, usually for three readers, and can be read with little preparation except for an initial practice run-through. In general, Reader 1 usually has the theme parts and Readers 2 and 3 are supportive, so the strongest reader should be given the Reader 1 part.

The readings are based on the New International Version (NIV) Bible, © 1973, 1978, 1983 by the International Bible Society. In addition to the NIV text, I have repeated key phrases, and sometimes included synonyms or contemporary thoughts to amplify and emphasize the key points. I know this may offend some people, though that is not my intent. I have a great reverence for scripture.

My goal has been that when the group or congregation hears the scripture read in this way the main points will stick, and they will be better prepared for the sermon or Bible study.

These readings are ready to use. You are free to print three (and in a few cases four) copies of the reading on your printer. Highlight each reader with a yellow highlighter so the readers don't get confused about when their part comes.

Here are some of the ways you can use these readings.

- Family devotions (including each family member)
- Table readings before dinner
- Small group studies
- Replacing a responsive reading in a worship service

I've used these readings in my church and found them a very effective way to involve others of all ages in the service, and to help our people understand the meaning of the text in preparation for the sermon. Use them in whatever way you see fit.

I first learned about this approach to scripture reading from Barry Liesch, *People in the Presence of God: Models and Directions for Worship* (Zondervan, 1988).

1. James 1:1-8, 12-18
2. James 1:18-27
3. James 2:1-13
4. James 2:14-26
5. James 3:1-18
6. James 4:1-12
7. James 4:13-5:12
8. James 5:13-20

**1. James 1:1-8, 12-18**

READER 1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

READER 2 To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations:

READER 3 Greetings.

READER 1 Consider it pure joy

READER 2 Pure joy

READER 3 Pure JOY

READER 1 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,

READER 2 Because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

READER 3 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

READER 1 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God,

READER 2 If you need help

READER 3 If you lack wisdom

READER 2 Ask God

READER 3 Ask GOD

READER 1 who gives generously to all without finding fault,

READER 2 generously to all without finding fault

READER 3 and it will be given to him.

READER 1 But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt,

READER 2 Believe

READER 3 Not doubt

READER 2 Because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

READER 1 That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

READER 2	Double-minded
READER 3	Unstable
READER 2	Uncommitted
READER 3	Hasn't sorted out his priorities carefully.
READER 2	That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.
READER 1	Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test,
READER 2	Stood the test
READER 3	He will receive the crown of life
READER 2	Crown of life
READER 3	God's life
READER 2	Eternal life
READER 3	That God has promised to those who love him.
READER 1	When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me."
READER 2	God made me do it.
READER 3	I can't help myself.
READER 1	For God cannot be tempted by evil,
READER 2	Nor does he tempt anyone;
READER 1	But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire,
READER 2	By his own priorities
READER 3	His own longings
READER 2	His own desires
READER 3	His unsundered desires
READER 2	He is dragged away and enticed.
READER 1	Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin;

READER 2           And sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

READER 1           Don't be deceived, my dear brothers.

READER 2           Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father  
of the heavenly lights,

READER 3           Who does not change like shifting shadows.

READER 1           He chose to give us birth

READER 2           To give us new life

READER 3           To cause us to be born again

READER 1           through the word of truth,

READER 2           That we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

**2. James 1:18-27**

READER 2            He chose to give us birth

READER 3            He chose to give us birth

READER 2            He chose to give us birth through the word of truth,

READER 1            That we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

READER 2            Firstfruits

READER 3            First of the harvest

READER 2            First of the season's harvest of all creation.

READER 1            My dear brothers, take note of this:

READER 3            Listen up!

READER 1            Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,

READER 2            Quick to listen,

READER 3            Slow to speak

READER 2            Slow to become angry,

READER 1            For man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent

READER 2            And humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

READER 3            The Word

READER 1            Planted in you

READER 2            Which can save you.

READER 1            Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves.

READER 2            Do what it says.

READER 3            Do what it says.

READER 1            Do not merely listen to the word,

READER 2            And so deceive yourselves.

ALL Do what it says.

READER 1 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says

READER 2 is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror

READER 3 and, after looking at himself, goes away

READER 2 and immediately forgets what he looks like.

READER 1 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom,

READER 2 Into the perfect law

READER 3 The freedom-giving law

READER 2 and continues to do this,

READER 3 not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—

READER 2 he will be blessed in what he does.

READER 1 If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue,

READER 2 His tongue

READER 1 he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.

READER 2 He deceives himself

READER 3 and his religion is worthless.

READER 1 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this:

READER 2 to look after orphans and widows in their distress

READER 3 and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

READER 2 to look after those who are needy

READER 3 and can't give back to us

READER 1 and to keep oneself from being polluted

READER 2 seduced

READER 3 corrupted

READER 2           addicted to  
READER 1           the world  
READER 2           this society that is far from God  
READER 3           this society that so desperately needs God  
READER 1           and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

### 3. James 2:1-13

- READER 1            My brothers,
- READER 2            My brothers,
- READER 1            as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ,
- READER 3            as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ,
- READER 1            don't show favoritism.
- READERS 2 & 3       don't show favoritism.
- READER 1            Don't play favorites.
- READER 2            Don't discriminate on the basis of a person's wealth
- READER 3            Or position
- READER 1            Or social standing
- READER 2            Or how a person might be able to help you ...
- READER 3            Achieve your own goals for your advancement.
- READER 1            My brothers,
- READER 2            as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ,
- READER 3            don't show favoritism.
- READER 1            Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in.
- READER 2            If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you,"
- READER 3            But say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet,"
- READER 2            Have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?
- READER 1            Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?
- READER 2            But you have insulted the poor.



- READER 3           Is it not the rich who are exploiting you?
- READER 2           Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?
- READER 3           Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?
- READER 1           Listen, my dear brothers:
- READER 2           Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world
- READER 3           poor in the eyes of the world
- READER 1           to be rich in faith
- READERS 2 & 3      rich in faith
- READER 1           and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?
- READER 2           Become heirs of the promised kingdom?
- READER 1           If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right.
- READER 2           The Royal Law
- READER 3           The King's Law
- READER 1           The law of the King of kings and the Lord of lords.
- READER 2           The Royal Law.
- READER 3           The law of love
- READER 2           Your obligation to love your neighbor as yourself
- READER 3           As yourself.
- READER 1           But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.
- READER 2           For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.
- READER 3           For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder."
- READER 2           If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

READER 1            Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom,

READER 2            The law that gives freedom

READER 3            The law that liberates

READER 2            The law of liberty

READER 1            Because judgment without mercy

READER 2            Judgment without grace

READER 3            Unremitting judgment

READER 1            will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful.

READERS 2 & 3      Mercy triumphs over judgment!

READER 1            The Royal Law

READER 2            The law of love

READER 3            Is a merciful law

READER 1            A law that loves one's neighbor first

READER 2            That cares about one's neighbor.

READER 1            Rich or poor,

READER 2            New believer or established in the faith.

READER 3            Struggling or solid

READER 2            Encouraged or down in the dumps

READER 1            The law of love is a merciful law

READER 2            A Royal Law

READER 3            A law of the King.

READER 1            My brothers,

READER 2            My brothers,

READER 1            as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ,

READER 3            as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ,

READER 1            Christ the King

ALL                    Don't show FAVORITISM!

**4. James 2:14-26**

- READER 1           What good is it, my brothers?
- READER 2           What good is it, my brothers?
- READER 3           It's no good at all!
- READER 1           If a man claims to have faith but has no deeds?
- READER 2           Can such faith save him?
- READER 3           Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food.
- READER 2           If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?
- READER 1           In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.
- READER 2           Faith by itself
- READER 3           Bare faith
- READER 2           Unconnected to life
- READER 3           Unhooked from action
- READER 2           Mere religious belief
- READER 1           Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.
- READER 2           Dead
- READER 3           Dead
- READER 2           Deadly.
- READER 1           But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."
- READER 2           Show me your faith without deeds,
- READER 3           And I will show you my faith by what I do.
- READER 1           You believe that there is one God. Good!
- READER 2           Even the demons believe that – and shudder.
- READER 3           Even the demons believe that – and tremble in fear.

- READER 1            You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?
- READER 2            Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?
- READER 3            You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.
- READER 2            And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend.
- READER 3            You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.
- READER 1            In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?
- READER 2            As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.
- READER 3            As a tree without fruit is useless, so faith without deeds is dead.
- READER 1            As Christian belief without a thoroughly Christian lifestyle is a mockery, so faith without deeds is dead.
- READER 2            Faith without deeds is dead faith.
- READER 3            Faith without deeds is dead.
- READER 2            Faith without deeds is deadly.
- READER 3            Let your faith be in health and prosper.
- READER 1            By your obedience to Christ, let your faith live!

## 5. James 3:1-18

- READER 1        Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.
- READER 2        Judged more strictly.
- READER 1        We all stumble in many ways.
- READER 2        We all stumble
- READER 3        In many ways
- READER 1        If anyone is never at fault in what he says,
- READER 2        Never at fault in his words
- READER 3        In his speaking
- READER 1        He is a perfect man,
- READER 3        Able to keep his whole body in check.
- READER 1        When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal.
- READER 2        Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go.
- READER 3        Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts.
- READER 1        Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.
- READER 2        The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body.
- READER 1        It corrupts the whole person,
- READER 2        Sets the whole course of his life on fire,
- READER 3        And is itself set on fire by hell.
- READER 1        All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man,
- READER 2        But no man can tame the tongue.
- READER 3        It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

READER 2           With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father,  
READER 3           And with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness.  
READER 1           Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing.  
READER 2           My brothers, this should not be.  
READER 1           Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?  
READER 2           My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs?  
READER 3           Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.  
READER 1           Who is wise and understanding among you?  
READER 2           Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes  
                          from wisdom.  
READER 1           But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts  
READER 2           Bitter envy!  
READER 3           Selfish ambition!  
READER 1           Do not boast about it or deny the truth.  
READER 2           Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven  
READER 3           But is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.  
READER 1           Earthly  
READER 2           Unspiritual  
READER 3           Of the devil.  
READER 1           For where you have envy and selfish ambition,  
READER 2           There you find disorder and every evil practice.  
READER 1           But the wisdom that comes from heaven  
READER 3           But the wisdom that comes from heaven  
READER 1           Is first of all pure;  
READER 2           Then peace-loving,

READER 3        Considerate,  
READER 2        Submissive,  
READER 1        Full of mercy and good fruit  
READER 2        Full of mercy and good fruit  
READER 3        Full of mercy and good fruit  
READER 1        Impartial and sincere.  
READER 2        Impartial.  
READER 3        Sincere.  
READER 1        Peacemakers who sow in peace  
READER 2        Peacemakers who sow in peace  
READER 3        Peacemakers who sow in peace  
READER 1        Raise a harvest of righteousness  
READER 2        A harvest  
READER 3        Of righteousness  
ALL              Amen.



## 6. James 4:1-12

- READER 1        What causes fights and quarrels among you?
- READER 2        Fights and quarrels
- READER 3        Quarrels and fights
- READER 1        Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?
- READER 2        Desires
- READER 3        Battling within you
- READER 1        You want something but don't get it.
- READER 2        I want it!
- READER 3        I WANT it!
- READER 1        You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want.
- READER 2        You quarrel and fight.
- READER 1        You do not have, because you do not ask God.
- READER 2        You do not have
- READER 3        because you do not ask
- READER 2        Ask who?
- READER 3        Ask God
- READER 1        And when you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.
- READER 2        Wrong motives
- READER 3        To spend it on your pleasures.
- READER 2        Desires
- READER 3        Battling within you
- READER 1        You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God?
- READER 2        You are like unfaithful husbands

- READER 3 Like unfaithful wives
- READER 1 Don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God?
- READER 2 Friendship with the world.
- READER 3 Friendship with the self-centered world order
- READER 2 Friendship with the world attitude that insists on its independence from God
- READER 3 Is hatred toward God.
- READER 2 You flirt with the world
- READER 3 You dance with the world
- READER 1 Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.
- READER 2 Friend of the world
- READER 3 Enemy of God
- READER 1 Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely?
- READER 2 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says:
- READER 3 "God opposes the proud  
but gives grace to the humble."
- READER 1 Submit yourselves, then, to God.
- READER 2 Submit yourselves then ...
- READER 3 To God
- READER 1 Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.
- READER 2 Come near to God and he will come near to you.
- READER 1 Wash your hands, you sinners,
- READER 2 And purify your hearts, you double-minded.
- READER 1 Grieve, mourn and wail.
- READER 2 Change your laughter to mourning
- READER 3 And your joy to gloom.

READER 2       Humble yourselves before the Lord,

READER 3       And he will lift you up.

READER 2       Humble yourselves before the Lord,

READER 3       And he will lift you up.

READER 1       Brothers, do not slander one another.

READER 2       Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it.

READER 3       When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it.

READER 1       There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy.

READER 2       But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?

## 7. James 4:13-5:12

- READER 1        Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money."
- READER 3        Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.
- READER 1        What is your life?
- READER 1        You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.
- READER 2        A mist
- READER 3        A cloud
- READER 2        That vanishes
- READER 3        With the heat of the sun.
- READER 1        Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."
- READER 2        God willing ...
- READER 3        The Lord willing ...
- READER 2        We'll live
- READER 3        And do this or that
- READER 2        As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.
- READER 1        Now listen, you rich people,
- READER 2        Weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you.
- READER 1        Your wealth has rotted
- READER 2        And moths have eaten your clothes.
- READER 3        Your gold and silver are corroded.
- READER 2        Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire.
- READER 1        You have hoarded wealth in the last days.
- READER 2        Hoarded wealth.

- READER 3           Accumulated wealth and not shared it
- READER 1           Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you.
- READER 2           The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.
- READER 3           You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence.
- READER 2           You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.
- READER 3           You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.
- READER 1           Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming.
- READER 2           Be patient!
- READER 3           Hang on!
- READER 2           Persevere!
- READER 1           Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming.
- READER 2           Until the Lord's coming.
- READER 3           Until He comes.
- READER 1           See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop
- READER 2           And how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains.
- READER 1           You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.
- READER 2           You too
- READER 3           You too
- READER 1           Be patient and stand firm
- READER 3           Be patient and stand firm
- READER 2           Because the Lord's coming is near.
- READER 3           Because the Lord's coming is near.
- READER 1           Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged.
- READER 3           The Judge is standing at the door!

- READER 2 Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.
- READER 1 As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered.
- READER 2 Those who have persevered are blessed.
- READER 3 Blessed by God.
- READER 1 You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about.
- READER 3 The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.
- READER 2 Compassion and mercy.
- READER 3 Mercy and compassion.
- READER 1 Above all, my brothers, do not swear – not by heaven or by earth or by anything else.
- READER 2 Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned.
- READER 3 Let your "Yes" mean yes
- READER 2 Let your "No" mean no.
- READER 1 And persevere!
- READER 2 Be patient and stand firm.
- READER 3 Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming.
- READER 2 Until the Lord's coming.
- ALL UNTIL HE COMES!

**8. James 5:13-20**

- READER 1        Is any one of you in trouble?
- READER 2        He should pray.
- READER 3        Are you in trouble?
- READER 2        You should pray.
- READER 1        Is anyone happy?
- READER 2        Are you happy?
- READER 1        Let him sing songs of praise.
- READER 3        Yes, praise the Lord your God in joyous song!
- READER 1        Is any one of you sick?
- READER 2        Are you sick?
- READER 3        He should call the elders of the church
- READER 2        Those who are spiritually mature in your congregation,
- READER 1        To pray over him
- READER 2        Yes, pray over you, just like Jesus and his disciples did for those who were sick.
- READER 1        And anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.
- READER 3        Holy anointing oil,
- READER 2        A symbol of the Holy Spirit's power upon you.
- READER 1        Anoint you in the name of the Lord.
- READER 2        In Jesus' name.
- READER 3        In Jesus powerful and holy name.
- READER 1        And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well;
- READER 2        That prayer of faith will heal you.
- READER 1        The Lord will raise him up.
- READER 3        The Lord will raise you up, too.

READER 2        If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.

READER 1        If you've sinned,

READER 2        Strayed,

READER 3        Fallen away from the Lord,

READER 1        You'll be forgiven.

READER 2        Forgiven.

READER 3        Cleansed and pardoned.

READER 2        And made whole.

READER 1        Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

READER 2        Me? Confess my sins to you?

READER 3        Yes, to the spiritually mature.

READER 1        Confess your sins

READER 2        And pray for each other

READER 3        So that you may be healed.

READER 1        The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

READER 2        The prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

READER 3        Your prayer, O righteous man, will have powerful effects!

READER 1        Elijah was a man just like us.

READER 2        Just like us?

READER 3        Yes, flesh and blood,

READER 2        Yes, weak sometimes, but strong in God.

READER 1        He prayed earnestly that it would not rain,

READER 2        And it did not rain on the land for three and a half years.

READER 3        Again he prayed,



READER 1           And the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

READER 2           Your prayer, O righteous man,

READER 3           O man like Elijah the prophet,

READER 1           Will have great power in its effects

READER 2           Since you serve the same powerful God,

READER 3           The same prayer-answering God.

READER 1           My brothers,

READER 2           And sisters.

READER 3           Yes, brothers and sisters,

READER 1           If one of you should wander from the truth

READER 2           And someone should bring him back,

READER 1           Remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save  
him from death

READER 3           Will save his soul from death

READER 2           Saved from destruction.

READER 3           And cover over a multitude of sins.

READER 1           Yes, when you bring back a sinner to the Lord,

READER 2           The Lord will save his soul from death,

READER 3           And cover over

READER 2           Forgive

READER 3           Pardon

READER 2           A multitude of sins.

READER 1           Confession

READER 2           Prayer

READER 3           Healing

READER 2            Forgiveness!

READER 3            From a multitude of sins!

All                    Hallelujah!