

THE BOOK OF
JAMES

A BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Vince Miller

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VINCE MILLER



EQUIP PRESS

Colorado Springs

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HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

VIDEOS FOR THIS HANDBOOK

As you navigate this handbook, you will discover that the lessons are designed for use with online videos. These videos are viewable with a membership at our website: **www.beresolute.org**. You can use the videos for individual growth or with a group. Each lesson corresponds with the video of the same title. The best part is Vince Miller has structured the videos to provide relevant content for reflection and discussion so that you don't need hours to prepare. He does the work for you. Just push *play* on the video, and then reference this handbook.

THE METHOD

We believe in providing you with a full-scale game plan for growth. We are not just giving you content, but a *method* that has been field-tested with hundreds of thousands. While choosing the material is essential, we believe our step-by-step process is one of the best for producing a spiritual change. We have tested the components in each session and how they link

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together within a series or group of series that complement ongoing growth. Our goal is to produce life change. In each lesson, you will notice clear goals and outcomes, purposeful reflection and discussion questions, a rich study of God's Word, and practical application with actionable steps to be taken. While we know you need content, we hope our commitment to this method deepens their relationship with Christ and with one another.

THERE IS MORE IN THIS SERIES

Remember, once you finish this series there are many others that follow it and build upon it. Don't do just one series, do them all!

HOW TO LEAD A GROUP

ONE | GATHER YOUR TEAM

Assembling a team is critical. A team should include a pair of leaders who become the “*On-Site Hosts*” for the experience. We believe working in pairs is by far the most practical approach. Remember, every pilot needs a wingman.

TWO | RECRUIT PARTICIPANTS

Don't stress: whether you recruit half a dozen or a hundred, the content will be useful. We have found the best recruiting success comes from finding people who are hungry to grow spiritually. While the content is suitable for any believer of any age, the best recruit is the one who wants to be there, someone who hungers for the Word of God, and occasionally some food as well!

THREE | MAKE SURE EACH PARTICIPANT HAS A HANDBOOK

Our guides may be purchased in the online store: www.beresolute.org. These are your guides for taking notes, guiding

a dialogue in your group, and recording outcomes at the end of every lesson. Handbooks also include other materials for additional development. You will want one for each lesson series.

FOUR | ONLINE RESOURCES FOR LEADERS

If you have purchased online video access with your membership, you can view all the material. You will be able to listen to audio recaps, watch the videos, read the full transcripts, and even review past lessons. There are also training articles and videos online to help you lead your group.

FIVE | MORE MATERIAL & VINCE MILLER

At Resolute, we are not just providing content. We are inviting you to an experience. Here are other tools you can utilize.

- Need a devotional? Read the Daily Devotional: www.beresolute.org/mdd
- Need prayer? Vince Miller will personally pray for you: www.beresolute.org
- Need a speaker? Invite Vince Miller to speak: beresolute.org/vince-miller
- Need help as a leader? Contact Vince Miller directly at vince@beresolute.org

It is our goal to partner with you and your ministry. We want to resource you with tools that compliment your development as a follower and a leader.

SIX | CONNECT SOCIALLY

We would love to have you join our social networks. Head to our home page and connect with us on Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook.

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ABOUT VINCE MILLER

Vince Miller was born in Vallejo, California, and grew up on the West Coast. At twenty, he made a profession of faith while in college and felt a strong, sudden call to work in full-time ministry. After college and graduate school, he invested two decades working with notable ministries like Young Life, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, the local church, and in senior interim roles. He currently lives in St. Paul, Minnesota, with his wife Christina and their three teenage children.

In March 2014, he founded Resolute out of his passion for discipleship and leadership development of men. This passion was born out of his personal need for growth. Vince turned everywhere to find a man who would mentor, disciple, and develop him throughout his spiritual life. He often received two answers from well-meaning Christian leaders: *either they did not know what to do in a mentoring relationship, or they simply did not have the time to do it.* Vince learned that he was not alone. Many Christian men were seeking this type of mentorship relationship. Therefore, he felt compelled to build an organization that would focus on two things: ensuring that

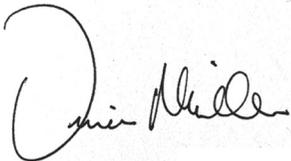
men who want to be discipled have the opportunity and that they have real tools to disciple other men.

Vince is an authentic and transparent leader who loves to communicate with men and has a deep passion for God's Word. He has authored several books, and he is the primary content creator of all Resolute content and training materials.

A PERSONAL NOTE FROM VINCE

I pray this experience will benefit your life and your spiritual journey. I hope you will do three things as you engage. First, that you will be receptive to the Word of God. I love that we dig into the Bible each time we meet. At Resolute, the Bible is not an afterthought. It is the means of discovering God and transformation. Second, lean into the community of this experience. Build friendships, share transparently, and have conversations that go beyond the superficial. Third, apply what you have learned. Take an action item with you every week, knowing that one small step weekly leads to success over a lifetime.

Keep moving forward,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Vince Miller". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "V".

INTRODUCTION

James's letter is not written to people living in ease, peace, and comfort. It's quite the opposite. From the first words it challenges a reader. It was a letter intended for believers with a Jewish background dispersed into house churches across the countryside. They were believers who were living in poverty and persecution. However, it doesn't have that soft edge you think it would have to a struggling people. Instead, it coaches and challenges a reader to rise to the call of the present challenges.

The letter is written by a man named James. James was the brother of Jesus—or half-brother, that is. Mary, the virgin mother of Jesus, was given a child by God. She was engaged to a man named Joseph. After Jesus was born Mary and Joseph consummated their marriage and gave birth to at least six other children, the exact number we don't know. There were at least four other sons (Joseph, James, Jude, and Simon) and at least two daughters. But not a lot more is known about this family.

In reading Acts chapters 12 & 15, which is the history book of the New Testament, we discover that after Jesus' life, death, and

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resurrection, James became a leader in the church in Jerusalem along with Peter and the disciples of Jesus. Most of James's ministry focused on Jews who became Christ-followers. James was a leader in the first Christian community, and there were two challenges this community encountered. First, there was a great famine during this time, which affected commerce and increased national poverty. Second, the Jewish converts to Christianity faced a lot of persecution for their new faith by Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. It's in the face of these challenges that James writes a letter to Jewish believers across the Empire.

This letter is a challenging letter and one that will push us to new limits in our faith. In this series, we are going to work through James chapter by chapter. The five sessions and five chapters will address these topics:

- Chapter One: Two Tests of Conviction
- Chapter Two: Living A Consistent Life
- Chapter Three: From Foolish to Wise Talk
- Chapter Four: New Desires Result in New Actions
- Chapter Five: Three Action of Great Followers

I want to encourage you to read through the letter of James in one sitting. You will be able to follow along in this study guide. It also has some daily devotionals that will give you something to reflect on daily. You'll see some opening and closing discussion questions in your handbooks for group discussion that will help you dig into the topic a little more. So grab a Bible, a journal, your handbook, and let's dig into chapter one of this letter from James.

TWO TESTS OF CONVICTION

OPENING QUESTIONS

- Are there certain prerequisites to applying for your current job?
- What do these prerequisites teach you and why are they important?
- What are common tests for Christians today?
- How do they prove we are followers of Christ?

CHAPTER 1

I cannot tell you how many times I have experienced a conviction in my life. Most of these feelings (or moments of conviction) are very private to me. They are moments in which I experience a fragment of thought about an attitude or an action in my life. And in these moments, it seems I hear an almost audible voice that says something of this nature:

“You need to change _____.”

“You’ve put _____ off too long.”

“You cannot go on living, acting, and feeling _____.”

I don't think I am the only one who has ever heard these voices of conviction. But most of the time when I hear these voices I live in the regret, guilt, and shame of the conviction rather than taking action on them. I allow these useful feelings of regret and guilt to become the only action that follows my conviction, and therefore I *do* nothing to act. I reflect on the issue and consider the work that needs to be done to rectify it, but it overwhelms me, so I do nothing. This is a wrong response to the voice of conviction. I call this the *conviction gap*, the gap between feeling conviction and acting with conviction.

I believe a lot of Christians live stuck in this gap. We feel convicted by our sin, shortcomings, hurts, and hang-ups but feel perplexed about taking the next step. Because we are either confused about taking the next step or see how challenging that next will be—we remain satisfied with only the guilt and shame of the conviction gap. Therefore, we live in perpetual regret, shame, and guilt, privately telling ourselves we are not good enough and live stuck in the penance of an unchanged life.

It does not have to be this way: you can live with real conviction. There are two tests James says the Christian must endure to close this gap. James addresses them both in chapter one. They are the test of **trials** and the test of **integrity**, and he hammers both of them home.

FIRST | THE TEST OF TRIALS

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

JAMES 1:2-4

When it comes to trials, I don't think about joy, but James has a much different view of trials. He sees them with unique insight. He sees a unique opportunity. Like an entrepreneur searching for that new vision, or an inventor looking for that new product, or that musician looks for that next great song, he as a teacher perceives a unique opportunity in every trial. It makes way for a character trait that makes Christians strong and complete—steadfastness.

James's perspective on the challenges of life is essential. This is because James perceives something spiritually beneficial in the pain that life brings. He perceives a spiritual reality and, therefore, a spiritual benefit. This viewpoint brings spiritual optimism about challenges. But let's make sure and differentiate this from human optimism. Human optimism is different. It claims to look at something negative and redefine it as positive from a natural perspective. It means to muster a positive outlook on a negative circumstance, hoping that

the power of positive thinking will change how we feel, and eventually change the event itself.

However, the joy that James is talking about is much different. It's a joy that is certain. A joy accomplished in Christ. A certain defeat of sin and eternal damnation is accomplished by God's hand, which gives us indescribable joy even during a trial. Therefore, while we may feel or look defeated by circumstances in this life (even things like poverty or persecution) we walk tall, knowing that God has won the victory. We live sure of this reality and not just hoping for it or ignoring it like human optimism attempts to do. We place our faith in something certain, which results in the joyful embrace of trials, and thus we gladly endure in *steadfastness*. And this is not hopeful thinking, positive thinking, or wishful thinking—this is steadfast certainty based on a spiritual reality.

This is the kind of joy and confidence I believe all want. Yet, at times it is hard to come by, especially when life presses in on us.

For example, try telling someone to “*count it joy*” in job loss, marital failure, health challenges, and catastrophic sin, and tell me how that works out. This is the last thing we want to hear. When we encounter trials like this, all we see is the present challenge and the present pain. In these moments it feels like our life is coming undone. Sometimes the pain of this undoing is more real than our faith. We have all encountered this moment, this collision between trials and our faith. When this happens, we start to say things like this to ourselves:

TWO TESTS OF CONVICTION

“God, I beg you to please take this trial from me.”

“God, why did you let this happen to me?”

In moments like this, I have seen great followers with great faith wane and become fragile and weak. What we were once so confident about in faith becomes brittle. But James suggests something entirely different. That this is the moment of greatest opportunity, for where **the leap of faith is great there’s opportunity for greater faith**. What we so easily believed during good times now gives us this remarkable opportunity. It’s in moments of trial we need to remember that Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection do not change just because we have encountered a trial. And trials may actually bring us closer to his sufferings; they should not drive us farther away from God, but closer to him.

Now our foe would like nothing more than for us to give up on faith in God—but this is not the response of great followers of great faith. Instead, they are *steadfast*. They preach to themselves in the trial because of the benefit on the other side of it. They say things like Job said when he lost everything, including his family, possessions, and cattle.

*Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head
and fell on the ground and worshiped. And he said,
“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall
I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away;
blessed be the name of the Lord.”*

JOB 1:20-21

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A Christian's joy in trials does not mean that we do not mourn or feel sadness in a trial, but rather that we see every trial twice. Once with our physical eyes and the second time with our spiritual eyes. And when our human desires inform us about a natural and physical reality, we must preach back to it a supernatural and spiritual truth—one that is *steadfast*. And the best part is that in these moments the steadfast follower receives a blessing. Listen to what James promises a little later in this chapter:

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

JAMES 1:12

Notice that while we endure with joy, there is also a certain reality and blessing that comes from it. This blessing is only available for those who remain steadfast in the test, for those who see the trials all the way to the end. Actually, the blessings are numerous, but one is the promise that God gives us about what's on the other side of the trial. The other side of the trial presents us with many opportunities and a great witness to the crown of life God has promised.

SECOND | THE TEST OF INTEGRITY

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.

JAMES 1:22-24

No one strives to live a life of self-deception. But what's interesting is that many Christian's do. We live in a conscious state of self-deception when we **know what we need to do** and then **fail to do it**. This was a major concern of Jesus, and an emphasis in many of his teachings. Yet the required activity is pretty basic. It requires only two things: first, exposure to the truth of God's Word. Second, an action that follows which is done from a pure motivation. That's it. Nothing more.

But as happens in life, there is a lot that can happen in the delay between hearing something and acting on it. In the delay we sometimes:

- *We fail to listen.*
- *We fail to comprehend as we listen.*
- *We listen and yet can be confused about what action to take.*
- *We listen but never take the needed action.*

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Each of us is guilty of some type of failure to connect our hearing and action. But the imagery James uses to describe this lack of integrity, or integration is quite vivid. When we fail to act, he describes this as looking at something familiar, like yourself in a mirror, and then forgetting what you look like. It's preposterous and unthinkable example. But yet again, James states there is a blessing for the one who lives a life of integrity:

But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

JAMES 1:25

This time, the blessing is in the act of doing. And why? Because the perfect law, God's Word, is right and righteous every time. Therefore the action will be right and righteous. But it must be done! And notice the two small points James makes about how to increase and build our integrity in this perfect law.

ONE | ASSUME GOD'S WORD IS PERFECT

He challenges us to be "*one who looks into the perfect law.*" We need to be looking into the perfect law—God's Word.

I cannot emphasize this enough: **God's Word is the last word on all things for Christians.** This means we should be consulting the Bible regularly with every issue and every challenge we encounter. We must be in the book daily.

TWO | REDUCE THE DELAY BETWEEN HEARING AND ACTING

Second, I would decrease the time between hearing and acting. Just get better at doing things, if not everything, immediately. You know, sometimes hesitation gives way to sin. So take those hesitations off the table.

This simple rule of reducing the delay has increased spiritual momentum in my life. The reason being is that I am looking for the connection between a spiritual conviction and what I need to do to act with conviction. And thus, increasing my integration in the test of my integrity. It's actually easy to do—and easy *not* to do.

This is where we began today. We started with trying to find a way to close the conviction gap. We can do so with these two tests—the tests of **trials** and **integrity**. We do it by remaining steadfast and integrating our hearing and doing as followers of God.

So here is your call to action: I want you to choose one point from this lesson and act on it. Live with greater conviction by:

- Remaining steadfast in a trial you are currently facing.
- Investing time integrating your hearing and doing more quickly.

But do me a favor: don't do nothing! Pass the tests and let God be great in you today.

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What's a trial you've had to endure lately?
- How are you handling this?
- What could you do to improve how you are handling this?
- What is God teaching you through it?