James the Movie

Cast:

Gene and Roger, film reviewers

Floor Manager

Four actors who play multiple roles:

Alan

Bill

Clark

Dana *(female)*

Props: *two swivel chairs, clapboard, pointing stick*

Setting: Gene *and* ***Roger*** *are in swivel chairs on stage right. They speak directly to the audience.*

Gene: Good evening and welcome to our weekly movie review show, *In the Bible.*

Roger: Tonight we'll be taking a look at the spicy, energetic, and sometimes shocking Book of James.

Gene: Shocking is right, Roger. Theologians through the centuries have marveled at the implications of the tiny epistle.

Roger: Of course, Gene, you can’t forget the practical message of James. He had much to say to his readers.

Gene: Maybe a little too much.

Roger: What do you mean by that?

Gene: Don’t you think James was a little hard on those early believers?

Roger: Hard? You’re out of your mind! James is no harder than any of the other early biblical teachers.

Gene: We could argue about this all night—let’s roll the clip from the first chapter.

Roger: O.K., Gene. In this scene, the book opens as James discusses the joy of trials and difficulty of *doing.*

Gene: If you look beyond some of the truly wacky illustrations and a few cinematic flaws, the message rings loud and clear.

Roger: Let’s watch.

Floor Manager: *(with a clapboard, very loud*) James, chapter 1, verse 2, Take 1—Roll-um!

Lights up on actors.

Alan: Consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds.

Three people line up as if to race. These people are sluggish and reluctant.

Bill: Oh, brother, not another race!

Clark: Come on, Coach!

Dana: My legs, my aching legs!

Alan joins the line, bouncy and enthusiastic.

Alan: Another trial, praise the Lord! *(to audience)* For you to know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

Bill: I don’t think I have a chance.

Dana: My right ankle is weak. I'm sure it's going to twist, if I give this race my all.

Clark: Why didn't I take up chess?

Alan: With God's help, I will be victorious. I can do all things through Christ. He is my strength!

Bill: Who is this guy?

Alan: *(to audience)* For most of us, trials are not simply athletic events. Trials are found mostly in the main event—life itself.

Each speaks to God.

Bill: Another baby! We're going to have another baby!!

Clark: This is the third time my brakes have gone out! *(in desperation)* God, where are you?

Dana: God, I wanted to be the head cheerleader. Now I'll never get a date. My life is over!

Alan: God, thank You for allowing me to face difficulty. I'm

learning so much. Thank You for making me adequate for all situations I'll face.

Break to next scene.

Bill: If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

Alan goes to Dana.

Alan: If I were you, I would sell now. The house is kind of new, and interest rates are really low. It would be an easy sell.

Clark goes to Dana.

Clark: Don't sell; wait 'til the market settles down. You'd be a fool to sell now.

Alan to Clark.

Alan: You're crazy. If she sells now, the chances are she'll be able to move into a bigger house for much less.

Clark: That's the most absurd thing I've ever heard: "don't

sell”!

Alan: Sell!

Clark: Don’t sell!

Sandwiching Dana.

Alan: Sell!

Clark: Don’t sell!!

Bill: Wait! If anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask of God.

Alan, Clark, and Dana: God?!

Bill: But when he asks, let him believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. Let no such man think he shall receive anything from the Lord. For he is hesitating, unreliable, and uncertain about everything he does.

Dana: I guess I’ll sell. No, I’d better wait. Maybe I should leave. No, I’d better not. Can I just stay here while I think about it?

Clark: No, you can’t. *(showing watch to Dana)* Look what time it is, and we’re only on verse 8.

Break to next scene.

Alan: *(to audience)* Let the person in humble circumstances glory in his elevation. Wesley Grey—where are you?

Bill: Here I am.

Alan: Well done, Wesley. You cleaned the floor of your church every week. And when someone was in trouble, you were always the first one to volunteer your time and effort. Your spirit of helpfulness and forgiveness endured throughout your entire life. Receive your reward.

Bill (Wesley) is handed an imaginary crown that seems very large.

Bill: Lord, there must be some mistake. I don’t deserve this crown. I was the church janitor. I was never elected a deacon. I figured I’d be sweeping up around here, too.

Alan: Wesley, receive the fruits of your labor.

Bill (Wesley) receives his reward as he falls to his knees.

Alan: *(to audience)* And the rich in being humbled should glory, because, like a flower, he will pass away. *(to players)* Anthony Klein—where are you?

Clark: *(as Anthony)* Oh, no need in going over all those great achievements of mine. I realize that my work as chairman of the committee on committees was indispensable, and, of course, my wealth added a certain, uh . . . prestige to the church, and . . . well . . . the reward shall be sufficient enough.

Clark (Anthony) holds out his hands as if to receive a huge crown. Alan hands him an imaginary key ring.

Alan: Those are the keys to Wesley Grey's kingdom car. Drive him to his mansion, will you?

Break from the scene.

Dana: The sun comes up and parches the grass.

Bill: Its flower falls off,

Clark: and its beauty fades.

Alan: Even so, will the rich man die in the midst of his pursuits?

Dana: Blessed is the man who is patient under trial and stands up under temptation. Let no one say, when he is tempted,

Bill: "The Lord tempted me!"

Dana: He, Himself, tempts no one.

Break to next scene.

Bill: *(walks to a chair and sits down)* Honey, I'm home. *(picks up imaginary book, speaks to himself)* Oh, great. Maybe I'll have time to catch up on my Bible readings. New Year's resolutions never come easy.

Alan walks in limping, hunched, and evil-looking. He is a demon, preparing to snatch a victory from the Christian. His voice also is evil-sounding. He sneaks up behind Bill.

Alan: TV-TV-TV!

Bill: *(pause)* I think I'll watch some TV.

Bill walks up to Clark, who is squatting down in the form of a TV. Bill turns Clark "on" and Clark plays a preacher on TV.

Alan: No!!! *(He hides his face from the TV screen and then chants.)* MTV! MTV! MTV!

Bill: I don't think I want to hear Billy Graham again. I think I'll watch some . . . *(a thinking pause)* MTV.

Alan (Demon) grimaces and rubs his hands with delight. Bill changes channels, and Clark is transformed into a close-up of a rock star. Scene closes to a freeze at the sound of Dana's voice.

Dana: Every person is tempted when he is drawn away, baited, and enticed by his own evil desire!

Break freeze.

Alan: For every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

Dana: Every good and perfect gift?

Clark: (*in a moment of discovery)* Hey, that's right! For God so loved the world that he gave!

Alan: Exactly!

Bill: Hold on.

Dana: And the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace.

Bill: Hold it! *(angrily)* Now this is a play about James. How are we going to get through the first chapter if you keep jumping from John, to Galatians, to who knows what next?! *(others are stunned)* Now where are we?

All three surround him.

Alan: Let everyone be quick to hear,

Clark: slow to speak,

Alan, Clark and Dana: slow to anger!

Bill: *(sheepishly*) Sorry!

Break to next scene.

Dana: Okay, guys, it's time to start class. Many of you may be wondering, "Why should I do push-ups?" Well, we at the American Push-up School believe that there is no better way to tone . . .

Others: *(enthusiastically)* Tone!!

Dana: Strengthen!

Others: Strengthen!!

Dana: And develop good biceps and pectoral muscles. Now last week we saw those wonderful videos, *Push-ups—Not Just an Ice Cream Bar*, and *Jane Fonda's Push-up-a-cise*. The week before that we looked at several push-up charts, and we even read from the *Push-up Handbook*. And today, we shall begin doing push-ups. Well, actually, you will do some. I have an important meeting to attend. We are having a push-up teachers convention in Atlanta, and my plane leaves in 15 minutes. I'm sure you can survive without me. *(She exits from the scene.)*

Bill: I think I've bruised my thumb from writing all these push-up notes. I'd better wait to do push-ups. See you guys later! *(He exits from the scene.)*

Alan: I missed the videos last week. I think it would be wise for me . . .

Clark: I know—

Alan: Well, I'll see you next week!

Clark: *(He speaks as he does push-ups.)* Prove yourselves doers of the word and not hearers only. *(jumps up)* But one who obeys the work, not having become a forgetful hearer, but a diligent doer—*(flexes a bicep)* he shall be blessed!

Lights off actors.

Floor Manger: O.K.! That's a take!

Roger: As far as the direction and force of the message, I definitely give it a thumbs up.

Gene: It's controversial and risky. I can see where some pastors would shy away from James.

Roger: But, Gene, over 50 percent of all Baptists are nonresident members. The modern church is in need of a message on "doing."

Gene: You're right, Roger. Thumbs up for me, too.

Roger: We now have a special treat here at *In the Bible.* A rare visit with the director of this production . . . a cinematic celebrity in his own right, (*Name of the Drama Director).*

Gene: Thanks for stopping by.

Director: Sure.

Roger: Let's get right to the point. What is the directorial responsibility to the homiletical and yet hyperpractical motivation of a canonized treatise written by the brother of piosity incarnate?

Director: *(confused)* Say what?

Gene: I think what Roger means is that this is a tough assignment for a tough director. Do you have—well, let's say—the right stuff?

Director: Well, yes—I . . .

Roger: Thanks, Mr. (Director's Name).

Director: But . . .

Gene: Let’s take a peek into chapter 2.

Roger: In this chapter, James deals with faith and partiality.

Lights on actors.

Dana: My brothers, don’t hold your faith in Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.

At this point, Clark acts the part of the rich man; Alan, the poor man; and Bill, the pastor.

Clark: For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes . . .

Alan: *(in country accent)* and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes,

Dana: and you *(pointing to Bill)* pay special attention to the rich one saying:

Bill: You sit right here next to our associate pastor. Have you met our financial chairman? He’s leading our “Together We Spend” program.

Dana: . . . and you say to the poor man, who possibly doesn’t look or smell like your average deacon . . .

Bill: Oh yes, we have a special and important duty for you. We want you to be chairman of the terrorism committee. There have been several terrorist threats within the United States, even some in Texas. What we want you to do is stay outside near the parking lot and look out for anyone who looks suspicious.

Dana: If you really keep the royal law found in the Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right, but if you show favoritism, you sin.

Clark: *(getting down on all fours)* For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at one point . . .

Bill walks across the stage, not looking down, not watching where he is going. He then stumbles over Clark.

Bill: Whoa! *(stumbling)*

Dana, Clark and Alan: . . . is guilty of stumbling over the whole law.

Dana, Clark and Alan fall to the ground. All actors freeze.

Lights up on Gene and Roger.

Gene: Wait! Freeze that shot—right there.

Roger: What's the problem, Gene?

Gene: Let's rewind that scene a little.

All the actors reverse their action to the place where the dialogue begins just as if they were on video.

Clark: For whoever keeps the whole law and stumbles at one point . . .

Bill: Whoa!!

Dana, Clark, and Alan: . . . is guilty of stumbling over the whole law. *(Actors freeze.)*

Gene: Well, What about that!

Roger: What about it, Gene?

Gene: That's quite a revolutionary statement.

Roger: Oh yes, the underlying meaning is definitely one of grace.

Gene: That's what I wanted to emphasize. We can't be self-righteous. We can't say we're better than others, because all of us have sinned. And sin—

Roger: Is sin. But by God's grace we are victors. This scene also shows the athletic ability of the actors. Let's watch that last bit of action in slow motion. And notice the symbolism in action, each actor representing a law as it crashes to the ground.

Actors fall down in slow motion.

Gene: A great scene!

Roger: A great moment!

Gene and Roger: Thumbs up!!

Lights down on Gene and Roger.

Break to next scene.

In this next scene, Alan narrates the action as the actors mime the illustrations. Alan takes on the character of an old schoolmaster with a pointing stick.

Alan: When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal.

Dana: *(on Bill's back)* Hi-ho, Silver, away!!

Alan: Or take ships as an example. They are so large and are driven by strong winds, yet they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the captain wants to go.

Actors with body movement create a ship using one of their feet as a rudder. Clark is the captain.

Clark: Thar she blows!

Alan: Likewise the tongue *(actors stick out their tongues as Alan points to them with pointer)* is a small part but boasts great things.

Break to next scene.

Dana: *(to Alan)* We only had four people come to church visitation. The pastor was really sad.

Alan: *(to Bill)* We only had a few people at church visitation. The pastor was grieving.

Bill: *(to Clark)* The pastor is leaving!

Clark: *(yelling it to everyone)* Hey, the pastor is leaving!

Dana: You're kidding!! Where did you hear that?

Clark: Oh, from a very good source, I assure you. It's strange, I saw him the other day. He seemed happy. His secretary had just finished the church bulletin. She's been sick all week. The pastor said he missed her hard work.

Dana: *(to Alan)* The pastor's secretary is back. The pastor said He missed her.

Bill: The pastor kissed her. *(to himself, then to Alan)* The pastor kissed the secretary?

Alan: Where did you hear that?

Bill: From a very reliable source, I assure you.

Actors freeze.

Dana: The tongue is a small part of the body.

All: But it makes great boasts.

Clark. The tongue is a fire.

Bill: It has the potential to create a world of evil.

Dana: It corrupts the whole person.

Alan: It sets the whole course of his life on fire. But the wisdom that comes from above is first

Dana: pure,

Alan: then

Clark: peace loving,

Bill: considerate,

Dana: submissive,

Clark: full of mercy

Alan: and

All: good fruit.

Actors freeze.

Lights up on Roger and Gene.

Floor Manager: That's a take! *(He brings out a water cooler and a sponge. Actors sit down, rest, and recuperate.)*

Roger: Chapters 2 and 3 of James. How about it, Gene, do you feel the modern interpretation is accurate to the biblical context?

Gene: Well, Roger, I'm a little confused and disappointed.

Roger: Why?

Gene: Well, the editing is a little shoddy, don't you think? I mean, the cinematographer even filmed the water breaks!

The actors look at the critics and then jump back into place and freeze, away from the acting area.)

Roger: Yeah, that's more like it! Overall the message of the tongue hits a little close to home.

Gene: Sure does, Roger. The message seems to be cut out of slander, backbiting, and vain words.

Roger: Submit to God.

Gene: And be full of His wisdom.

Roger: *(jokingly)* Maybe we should become movie actors. *(They both laugh.)*

Gene: But our jobs would be in danger at the *Sunday School Sun* and the *Christian Tribune.*

Roger: And the Christian movie critic market is really tight right now.

Gene: So, back to the show, the last segment. Chapters 4 and 5 deal with the boasting of believers and the servanthood of suffering. Here are a few scenes from James 4 and 5.

Floor Manager: James 4 and 5. Take 1. Roll 'um.

Break to next scene.

Alan: What causes quarrels among you?

Dana: *(as a child)* I want your doll!

Clark: *(as a teen)* I want a car like his!

Bill: *(as an adult)* I want your job!

Alan: Don't they come from desires within you?

Dana, Clark, and Bill: Yes.

Alan: You do not have because you do not ask of God.

Each speaks to God.

Dana: I want her doll.

Clark: Can I have a car just like his?

Bill: Lord, let me be an executive in this company.

Bill, Dana, and Clark freeze.

Alan: When you ask God, you do not receive because you ask with wrong motives that you can spend what you get on your own pleasures.

Bill, Dana, and Clark break their freeze.

Bill: Submit yourselves to God.

Dana: Resist the devil,

Clark: and he will flee.

All: Submit to God.

Dana: Now listen to those hypocrites who say,

Clark: *(in a preachy voice)* Next year the ministry of our church will explode. We shall send missionaries to Indonesia and build the largest racquetball arena in the south.

Dana: *(to Clark)* You don't even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life?

Clark: Why, how dare you question my life? I am one of the premier evangelists of the city, maybe even the state!

Bill: You are a mist that appears a little while and then vanishes.

All: Submit yourselves to God.

Alan: Instead, you should say, "If it is the Lord's will, I shall do this or that . . ."

Break to next scene.

Bill: Now listen, rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you.

Dana: Over 900 million people live on less than $75 a year.

Bill: Now listen, rich people, who have hoarded your wealth in the last days.

Clark: Now listen, rich people, who turned away from Bangladesh, Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia. You sing a song to feed them and leave.

Bill: You have lived in luxury and self-indulgence.

Alan: Poverty brings illiteracy, disease, and brain damage.

Bill: Now listen, you have condemned and murdered innocent people who were not opposing you.

All: Now listen!!

Pause, then break.

Alan: Be patient, brothers, until the Lord comes.

Dana: He is like a farmer who waits for land to yield its valuable crop.

Bill: You, too, be patient; stand firm because the Lord's coming is near.

Clark: Don't grumble against others or you will be judged.

All: The judge is standing at the door.

Alan: *(pointing to the side)* Hey, would somebody get that door?

Actors freeze.

Floor Manager: That's a take!

Gene: Well, that's the Book of James.

Roger: I wonder if we could ask the actors some questions.

Gene: Roger! That's a film!!

Roger: I know. But they were so convincing! Let me give it a try. Hey!! Can you hear me?

The actors look at each other.

Clark: Yes, sir?

Roger: Could we ask you a few questions?

Dana: That's highly unusual.

Clark: Give him a break.

Alan: Yeah, go ahead.

Roger: These are just a few practical questions that you didn't cover. First of all, what should I do if I'm in trouble?

The actors confer.

Clark: Pray.

Roger: What should I do if I'm happy?

Bill: In that case you should . . . sing a song . . . yeah, that's it . . . and, uh, praise the Lord.

Roger: Well, I'm not that much of a singer, but I'll give it a try. Do you have any questions, Gene?

Gene: Sure. Who could pass up an opportunity to actually talk to a film! My question is, what should we do if we are sick?

Actors confer with each other again.

Dana: We believe you should call on the people of your church. Let them anoint you with oil. Your faith will heal you.

Bill: We might also remind you about what we said earlier about not presuming on God's sovereignty.

Clark: Right.

Alan: Remember how Elijah prayed? He prayed that it wouldn't rain, and it didn't. Then he prayed that it would rain, and it did! A five-star performance, if you ask me.

Clark: But that's another film altogether.

Roger: Well, thanks guys. And that's our show this week. Definitely a thumbs up book for me.

Gene: Me, too, Roger.

Roger: So that's it, folks, until the next time. We'll see you *In the Bible.*

Gene and Roger walk off the stage, shaking hands and quietly talking to each other.

Bill: Do you think they'll actually read James?

Clark: I don't know.

Bill: I think most people avoid James. It's too radical for them.

Dana: And too convicting.

Alan: We're just a film, but you know, Christians are a lot like us.

Clark: What do you mean?

Alan: Well, we're not worth much when we're not projected by the light.

Dana: Hey, that's kind of profound.

Bill: OK, guys, let's get off this wall and back into our can. We've got that film festival in Chicago in 10 hours.

Dana: You know, I wish James were here to see us.

Alan: Oh, I think he’s watching.

Dana: Good night . . . Jimmy!