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The epistle of James has been one of the most misunderstood books of the Bible. In the Leipzig Debate of 1519, Roman Catholic scholar Johann Eck used it to challenge Martin Luther’s view of justification by faith alone, insisting that works needed to be added to the equation.

Luther, in response, eventually denied the epistle’s inspired authorship, mainly on the mistaken claim that it taught justification by works. In the introduction to his 1522 German translation of the New Testament, Luther indicated his preference for books like John, 1 John, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and 1 Peter, which reveal Christ and teach “everything that is needful and blessed . . . to know.”

His preface to the book of James was even more negative. Luther called it “really an epistle of straw” because it had “nothing of the nature of the gospel about it.” Although Luther never removed it from the canon of Scripture, he separated it from what he considered the core of the canon.

Luther’s emphasis on Paul’s epistles, especially Romans and Galatians, and his rejection of James for anything more than devotional value, has influenced a large segment of Christian thinking through the centuries.

Who was James anyway? Was he a legalist, combating Paul’s idea of justification by faith by teaching that justification is really by works? Or was he simply providing a slightly different perspective on the subject, similar to the several perspectives on the teachings of Jesus that we find in the Gospels? The answer is, clearly, the latter.

An “Epistle of Straw”?

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Not all of the Reformers shared Luther’s low opinion of James. No less a luminary than Melanchthon, Luther’s closest associate, believed that the writings of Paul and James were not in conflict.

James had a firsthand knowledge of Jesus. In fact, his epistle of all the epistles may very well be the earliest Christian writing in existence, and, of all the epistles, reflects most closely the teachings of Jesus that we find in the Gospels. As in the parables of Jesus, imagery from agriculture and the world of finance are abundant. Other important themes include wisdom, prayer, and above all, faith.

James is unique in other ways, too, thereby opening a window for us into some of the struggles that the earliest Christian congregations faced. With envy, jealousy, and worldliness creeping into the fold, there seems to have been societal and cultural pressures that pitted wealthier Christians against poor ones. We also see the great controversy being played out as James attacks counterfeit forms of wisdom and faith.

Most important for Seventh-day Adventists, the epistle of James exudes confidence in the return of Jesus; it also provides crucial perspectives on the law, the judgment, and the Second Coming. Elijah is even presented as a model for us to emulate. This has special relevance for us, as Seventh-day Adventists, who are entrusted with preparing the way for Christ’s second advent.

Thus, in some ways, our journey this quarter spans the entire Christian era, as it includes some of the earliest preaching, as well as special insights for these last days.

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How to Use This Teachers Edition

Get Motivated to Explore, Apply, and Create

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, apply, and create. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the Natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Apply); and

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in “The Lesson in Brief” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the Natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

**Step 1—Motivate:** Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

**Step 2—Explore:** Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

**Step 3—Apply:** Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in Step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

**Step 4—Create:** Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: John 7:2–5; 1 Cor. 15:5–7; James 1:3; 2:5; 1 Pet. 2:9, 10; Matt. 7:24–27.

Memory Text: “‘You are My friends if you do whatever I command you’” (John 15:14, NKJV).

We, today, are a long way from the early days of the Christian church, both time wise and culturally. Thus, we have little idea of what it was like to belong to the fledgling Christian movement at a time when many congregations met in homes, and most believers were Jews persecuted by their fellow Israelites. The letter of James gives us one of the earliest glimpses of Jewish Christianity before it disappeared in the fog of Jewish-Christian controversies and before the marginalization of the Jews by the predominantly Gentile church of the second century and beyond.

Unlike many of the epistles, it does not seem that some crisis or urgent need in a local church impelled James to write this epistle. Rather, it is written to the broader Christian community “scattered abroad” (James 1:1).

Before we dive into his letter, however, this week we want to try to learn what we can about the author himself. Some of the questions we’ll address are: Who was James? What was his background? What had been his relationship to Jesus? And what position did he hold in the church?

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 4.
James, the Brother of Jesus

The author of this letter must have been well known in the church because there is no more specific information in this letter as to who he is other than what we find in James 1:1: “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.”

Thus, we can narrow down the options of his identity pretty quickly. Four people in the New Testament are named James: there are two of the twelve disciples (Mark 3:17, 18); there is the father of Judas (another of the Twelve but not Judas Iscariot, Luke 6:16, NKJV) and one of Jesus’ brothers (Mark 6:3). Of these four, only the brother of Jesus lived long enough and was prominent enough in the church to have penned such a letter. Thus, we believe that it was James, the brother of Jesus, who authored this New Testament book.

As a carpenter’s son (Matt. 13:55), James would have had more educational opportunities than would a common peasant. His letter is among the best examples of literary Greek in the New Testament. Its rich vocabulary, rhetorical flair, and command of the Old Testament are surpassed only by Hebrews. Because his name appears first in the list of Jesus’ brothers, James was probably the oldest son. However, the fact that Jesus entrusted the care of His mother to John, the beloved disciple (John 19:26, 27), suggests that His brothers were not Mary’s own children but the sons of Joseph by a previous marriage.

In the context of Jesus’ ministry, read this verse: “When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, ‘He is out of his mind’ ” (Mark 3:21, NIV; see also John 7:2–5). What do these texts tell us about how Jesus had been perceived by His own family? What lessons can we draw from them for ourselves, if indeed at times we find ourselves misunderstood by those whom we love?

“It was a false conception of the Messiah’s work, and a lack of faith in the divine character of Jesus, that had led His brothers to urge Him to present Himself publicly to the people at the Feast of Tabernacles.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, pp. 485, 486.
James, the Believer

Read 1 Corinthians 15:5–7 and Acts 1:14. What do they tell us about the changes that happened to James?

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Jesus appeared to many after His resurrection, including Peter and the Twelve (minus Judas Iscariot). Then he appeared to more than five hundred people at one time. James, apparently, wasn’t at this meeting with the five hundred; Jesus appeared to him separately, and that appearance must have been special, because it is specifically noted. Whatever happened at that meeting, the Bible doesn’t say. It must have made a big impact on him, though, for James did become a faithful follower of Jesus and an influential leader in the church.


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James quickly became a leading figure in the Jerusalem church. After his rescue from prison by the angel (A.D. 44), Peter wanted James to know what had happened to him (Acts 12:17). Five years later, James presided at, and announced the decision of, the Jerusalem Council. Paul mentions him first, before Peter and John, in his listing of the “pillars” in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9). Several years after this event (A.D. 58), when Paul brought the collection for the poor in Jerusalem from the various churches, the delegates from each church in turn laid the offerings at the feet of James (see Ellen G. White, Sketches From the Life of Paul, pp. 208, 209).

James appears to have been held in high esteem for many decades after the death of the apostles. In fact, so many legends developed about his piety that he is remembered as “James the Just.” Thus, despite starting out in great doubt about Jesus, James ended up being a spiritual giant in the early church.
James and the Gospel

Unfortunately, perhaps because of Luther’s influence, many Christians have been unable to see the important message James’s epistle contains. Without diminishing the contribution Luther made for the church of his day, we must remember that “the Reformation did not . . . end with Luther. It is to be continued to the close of this world’s history,” because “grave errors” were perpetuated by the Reformers and many “important truths” were still to be revealed.—Ellen G. White, The Story of Redemption, p. 353.

Thus, the need for the Great Awakening with Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield—and the Wesley brothers who gave birth to the Methodist movement and its emphasis on the vital role of holiness in the Christian life. The work of reform continued with the Second Awakening, through which God raised up Seventh-day Adventists to proclaim the “third angel’s message.” This worldwide proclamation culminates with the Spirit-filled witness of a people who “keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12).

Read James 1:3; 2:5, 22, 23; 5:15. How does faith function in these passages? What do they tell us about what it means to live by faith? How do they show us that faith is more than just an intellectual assent to various propositional truths?

It may come as a surprise to some that James refers to believing and faith 19 times in this short letter, more than his references to works and justification combined! In fact, the importance of faith is stressed right at the beginning of the first chapter in connection with trials and asking for wisdom (vss. 3, 6). This shows that James was not only writing to believers but that he expects them to have a certain quality of faith. As we will see, the act of believing, in itself, is of little avail; true faith carries certain recognizable credentials. That is, true faith will be revealed in the life and character of the believer.

What things do you do on a daily basis that reveal the quality and reality of your faith? How can you show the reality of your faith, even in the “small” things?
To the Twelve Tribes Scattered Abroad

Read James 1:1; Acts 11:19–21; and 1 Peter 2:9, 10. Who are these “twelve tribes,” and how did they become so widely scattered?

As we have seen, James wrote to believers. At first, the gospel work was focused in Jerusalem (Luke 24:47); but, as a result of persecution, which intensified after the stoning of Stephen, these believers were scattered, and the seed of the gospel was planted throughout the cities and surrounding regions of the Roman Empire.

According to Acts 11, the gospel spread to the Gentiles quite early, beginning in Antioch; so, “the twelve tribes” probably refers to Christians as a whole. There do not seem to have been different congregations based on ethnicity, which is why the Jerusalem Council soon had to decide whether believing Gentiles should first become Jews by being circumcised (Acts 15:1–6) in order to become Christians.

Read Acts 15:13–21. How does James address the problem the early church struggled with?

A scriptural solution preserved a unified church: James cites Amos’s prophecy that Israel’s restoration and ultimate expansion would include Gentiles (Acts 15:16, 17), a decree that is based on Mosaic laws for foreign residents (Leviticus 18–20). James addresses his readers as “the twelve tribes” to remind them of their identity as fellow heirs of the promise made to Abraham. Peter has a similar idea in mind when he describes Christians as a “holy nation” (1 Pet. 2:9; compare Exod. 19:5, 6), addressing also those “scattered” abroad (1 Pet. 1:1). The Greek word in both passages is diaspora, which normally referred to Jews living outside the geographical boundaries of Israel proper (see John 7:35).

* A church scattered abroad? Sounds like us, as Seventh-day Adventists. Despite the vast cultural, ethnic, and social differences among us, what unites Seventh-day Adventists in Christ as a distinctive Protestant movement?
James and Jesus

James had the opportunity to observe Jesus when He was a child, a youth, and an adult. Then, at some point, James not only believed in Jesus as the Messiah but became a leader of the Christians in Jerusalem. And yet, James calls himself not a brother but a “bondservant” (James 1:1, NKJV) of Jesus. Clearly, James learned humility and true wisdom. Not surprisingly, these are also important themes of this letter (see James 1:9–11, 21; 3:13–18; 4:6–10).

**Compare** the following passages and summarize what they have in common:

*James 1:22 with Matt. 7:24–27* ____________________________________________________________________________________

*James 3:12 with Matt. 7:16* ____________________________________________________________________________________

*James 4:12 with Matt. 7:1* ____________________________________________________________________________________

The affinity the letter of James has with the teachings of Jesus and particularly the Sermon on the Mount has been widely recognized. “Jesus’ pervasive influence underlies the whole of James’s teaching.” —Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), p. 50.

From a close comparison of James with the Gospels, it appears that this letter is not dependent on any of them. Rather, James writes from an intimate and personal acquaintance with the teachings of Jesus, who always inspired His listeners to faith and challenged them to exercise it.

As we study the book of James this quarter, we will find a very similar approach. James is not content with a weak, fruitless, or vacillating faith. As we will see next week, faith dominates the early part of the book, and James shows how this crucial quality undergirds a vital relationship with Christ.

**Dwell on the quality and reality of your own faith. How real is it? How deep does it go? How does it enable you to live the Christian life? What things could you do, and what choices could you make, that could help improve the quality and depth of your faith?**
Further Study: “His brothers often brought forward the philosophy of the Pharisees, which was threadbare and hoary with age, and presumed to think that they could teach Him who understood all truth, and comprehended all mysteries. They freely condemned that which they could not understand. Their reproaches probed Him to the quick, and His soul was wearied and distressed. They avowed faith in God, and thought they were vindicating God, when God was with them in the flesh, and they knew Him not.

“These things made His path a thorny one to travel. So pained was Christ by the misapprehension in His own home that it was a relief to Him to go where it did not exist.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 326.

Discussion Questions:

1. The letter of James is essentially a handbook on practical Christian living. It may even have been the first New Testament book written (some time between A.D. 44 and 49). That is, besides it being a book on theology, it also tells us how to live out the Christian life. Why is living out what we believe just as, if not more, important than what we believe? Or is what we believe more important than how we live out that belief? For instance, what’s better: a sincere Sunday keeper who truly and seriously keeps the first day of the week holy or an insincere Sabbath keeper who “keeps” the seventh-day Sabbath but doesn’t really take it all that seriously? Give reasons for your answer.

2. As we have seen in Sunday’s study, James was the brother of Jesus. In other words, though Jesus was God Himself, the Creator of all that was made, He was also human, one of us, even to the point that He had siblings. How does this amazing concept help us to understand how the vast gap between heaven and a fallen world was bridged? What does it say to us, too, about the lengths that God goes to in order to save fallen humanity? How does the humanity of Christ help us to understand how we can have victory over sin? How does the humanity of Christ assure us that God understands the reality of our toils and struggles?

3. This week’s lesson mentioned that humility was a theme in James’s letter. Why is humility so important in the Christian life? That is, in light of the Cross and what happened there, how dare any of us ever assume an attitude of arrogance or self-importance, especially when it comes to spiritual matters?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** James 1:17–19

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Understand the historical circumstances, life of, and faith in the early Christian church; and (2) discern the important contribution that the book of James makes to that understanding and the relevance it has on the church today.

**Feel:** Experience hope, knowing that God can change weaknesses into strengths so that, like James, he or she can move from doubt to faith.

**Do:** Choose to act upon his or her beliefs and to follow God’s instructions on how to live the Christian life.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Understanding Who James, the Brother of Jesus, Was

A. How did James and his other brothers relate to Jesus during Christ’s earthly ministry?

B. When did James become a believer in Jesus, and what kind of leader was he in the early church?

II. Feel: Peace Versus Cognitive Dissonance

A. Why is it that some parents tell their children, “Do as I say, not as I do”? What is the difference between beliefs and actions?

B. What “works” are expressed in your Christian life, and how do you feel when your faith and actions (“works”) agree? And when they do not?

III. Do: Aligning Faith and Actions

A. How can your faith be complete? Why is it important to align faith and actions?

B. Analyze your own motives for your “works.” Do they spring from faith? If they don’t, what changes do you need to make to ensure that they do?

**Summary:** Written just over a decade after Christ’s resurrection, the book of James provides us with the earliest glimpse into the early Christian church. Additionally, James, the brother of Jesus, provides an excellent example of moving from unbelief to faith. James became a well-respected leader in the early Christian church, and through this letter he provides insights into how faith and actions work together and explains why that is important.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *James 1:5–7*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Through the example and writing of James, we learn that faith is not built on sight; instead, true faith will be revealed in the life and character of the believer.

**Just for Teachers:** As we begin our study of the book of James, some class members may have some apprehension about this epistle, fearing that it places “works” above faith. However, as we will see throughout this quarter’s lessons, James beautifully blends faith and works together, revealing what Jesus can do in the lives of all who love and long to follow Him. As the eldest brother of Jesus (see Matt. 13:55) and as someone who was not initially a believer, James is a powerful example of the change that can take place in one’s life once he or she surrenders to Christ.

**Opening Activity:** Two thousand years ago when the Roman Empire ruled the Western world, pretenders to the Jewish throne, madmen, and false messiahs abounded. Simon of Peraea (also known as “the son of Joseph”), a former slave of Herod the Great, rebelled and claimed to be king, successfully burning and plundering a palace and several royal homes before he was captured and killed. Athronges, a tall, strong shepherd, led a temporarily successful rebellion against Herod Archelaus and the Romans. Although claiming to be the Messiah, Athronges was cruel to Romans and Jews alike. Then there was Judas of Galilee who preached that God alone was Israel’s ruler. He led a violent resistance against the Roman census, claiming that Jews should not pay taxes to the Romans. Josephus, the well-known Jewish historian, links this group with the Zealots and blames them for the Great Jewish Revolt that led to the destruction of Herod’s Temple (also known as the “The Second Temple”). Judas of Galilee is mentioned in the book of Acts, where he is identified as a failed Messianic leader (see Acts 5:37).

**Consider This:** Given the religious and political atmosphere of the time, it is not difficult to imagine that some were skeptical regarding Jesus’ claim to be the Son of God. Even His own brothers, including James, did not initially accept His Messiahship. Although they knew Jesus as a child in the home and watched Him grow into adolescence and young adulthood, His brothers did not understand His resistance to conform to the expectations of Israel’s religious leaders and often taunted Him (see Mark 3:31, John 7:1–5). Despite their close relationship with Jesus, and even witnessing at least one of His miracles (see John 2:11, 12), why didn’t James and Jesus’
other brothers accept Him as the Messiah during His earthly ministry? Why is seeing not always believing?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** We might think that it would be a great privilege to have Jesus as a brother. But despite James being able to observe Jesus in earlier years, as well as during His ministry, it was apparently no easier for James to believe in Jesus than it was for anyone else. It may even have been harder. As Jesus said, “‘A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household’” (*Mark 6:4, NASB*). By the time Jesus ascended to heaven, however, James and his brothers, including Jude, are numbered with the believers (*Acts 1:14*). Like James, Jude also wrote a New Testament epistle (*Jude; compare Mark 6:3*). Emphasize to your class the fact that, despite being two thousand years removed from the events of Jesus’ life, God can transform us, even as He transformed the lives of His own brothers.

**Bible Commentary**

1. **Paul Versus James** (*Review Galatians 5:6 and Galatians 6:15 with your class.*)

   As we study this epistle, it is important to keep in mind that James is writing about how to live as a Christian, not how to become one. This important distinction sets his epistle apart from Paul’s letters, especially Romans and Galatians, which focus more on how we are saved. It also most likely explains why James talks about the importance of works, but, unlike Paul, never refers to “works of the law” (*see Rom. 3:20, 28; Gal. 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10*).


   For Jews living at that time, the most important of these works was circumcision; some Christians even argued that Gentiles who wanted to be saved had to be circumcised first (*Acts 15:1, 5*). Of course, at the Jerusalem Council, as a result of the prayerful study of Scripture, testimonies borne about the Spirit’s working, and the earnest consideration
of the issues, the church came to a clearer understanding—that baptism by immersion replaces circumcision as a symbol of salvation. Therefore, Paul can say that “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything” and even that “obeying the commandments of God is everything” (Gal. 6:15, 1 Cor. 7:19, NRSV; also Gal. 5:6).

**Consider This:** Note that both Paul (Rom. 2:28, 29; Phil. 3:2, 3) and James (1:26, 27; 3:15–18) show a concern for what it means to be a genuine believer. Help class members understand the similarities and differences in their definitions. Discuss reasons for the differences.

**II. James on Living the Christian Life** *(Review James 1:6–15, 3:1–12, and 4:7 with your class.)*

The letter of James reads like a practical manual on how to live the Christian life. It tells us how to handle doubt and temptation (1:6–15). It describes the kind of attitude we should have toward the rich and the poor (2:1–7, 14–17). We learn about the importance of controlling our words (3:1–12) and how to pray effectively (4:2, 3; 5:15–18). We also find many gems of wisdom worth framing: “be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger” (1:19, NRSV); “the wisdom from above is first pure . . . without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy” (3:17, NRSV); “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (4:6, NRSV); “Submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (4:7, NKJV).

**Consider This:** One of the most important ideas in James is that what we do should agree with what we say. Compare this idea with what Jesus says in Matthew 7:21 and in Mark 3:31–35. What does Jesus indicate as evidence that a person is a member of His spiritual “family”? Point class members to verses in James’s epistle that illustrate this important truth *(see, for example, James 2:14, 18, 19)*.

1. Give reasons for whether or not you think it was easy or hard for James to be a sibling of Jesus. What do you think Jesus would say to you about your own interactions with family members, and why?
2. Is faith essential to understanding and accepting the inspired Word, or is it the other way around? Explain. *(See Rom. 10:17, 1 Cor. 2:13, James 1:18, 1 Pet. 1:23.)*

**STEP 3—Apply**

**Just for Teachers:** Application is a very important part of the lesson, guiding students not only to understand the main points but to practice and apply this knowledge to their personal lives. Thus, with the help of the Holy Spirit,
faith is transformed into action. Ask the class to consider how, in what specific ways, faith (or the lack thereof) is revealed in the life and character of an individual.

Today, much attention is given to the importance of aligning beliefs, values, and actions, especially in the educational, psychological, and financial communities.

“If your beliefs, values and actions are not aligned with your vision then you’re going to get conflicted results,” writes Stephen J. Healey, a transformational author and speaker. “Those results are probably not going to be what you want. . . . Your beliefs and your values really should be the basis of your actions.”—Stephen J. Healey, “Why Are Aligning My Beliefs, Values and Actions So Important?” Sept. 3, 2011, http://www.sjhealey.com/prosperity/aligning-beliefs-values-actions-important.

Thought Question:

What do you believe about Jesus concerning His life, His teachings, and His values?

Application Questions:

How do your actions line up with your professed beliefs and values? If they don’t line up, ask yourself, How may I bring them into alignment—by changing my beliefs and values or by changing my actions? How does Christ give us the power to change?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Throughout this lesson, we have emphasized that (a) it is possible to move from unbelief to belief in Jesus as our Savior; (b) it is essential that faith and action are aligned; (c) that being both a “hearer” and “doer” of the Word is important. The following activity is designed to assist class members in analyzing their faith, beliefs, values, and actions. Please emphasize the importance of giving quality time to this exercise and asking God for wisdom and guidance in its application.

Activity: During the coming week, take a large sheet of paper, turned horizontally, and create a four-column chart. At the top of each column, write these words: BELIEFS/VALUES/ROLES/ACTIONS. List your core beliefs and values in the first two columns. Then list the various roles you are assigned in your life, such as individual, Seventh-day Adventist Christian, Sabbath School/church member, spouse, parent, caretaker, professional, retiree, and so on. Finally, list the actions that accompany each of your roles and compare how they align with your beliefs and values. Which areas, if any, need better alignment? Ask God for wisdom (see James 1:5, 6) and help (Phil. 4:13) in making any needed changes.
The Perfecting of Our Faith

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: James 1:2, 3; 1 Pet. 1:6, 7; Phil. 3:12–15; James 1:19–21; Luke 17:5, 6; Luke 12:16–21.

Memory Text: “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2, NIV).

A dentist explained why his crowns are always flawless. “Unlike some dentists,” he said, “I never have a problem with the crowns that come back from the lab. If I send them perfect work, they send me perfect crowns.” This dentist doesn’t worry about the end result. He focuses on his role in the initial stage of the process.

Likewise, as Christians, we need not get all worked up over whether or not our characters will be good enough in the end. That is God’s work. Our role is to “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Tim. 6:12) by keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, “the author and perfecter of our faith.” Such faith in Christ enables Him to work in us “both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13) and to finish the good work He has begun (Phil. 1:6). Without faith, it is possible to feel defeated, even before we begin, because we focus on ourselves rather than on Him.

As Jesus says, “‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent’” (John 6:29, NKJV). James, as we will see, helps us to understand this important spiritual truth.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 11.
Faith Lasts

Read James 1:2, 3; 1 Peter 1:6, 7; 4:12, 13. What is the common attitude of both James and Peter in regard to trials? How are we supposed to relate to this incredible biblical injunction?

No one likes suffering; we almost always avoid it if we can. The Greek word used in verse 3 for the testing of our faith is *dokimion*. It refers to the process of proving the genuineness of something. Peter likens this testing or trying of our faith to the way fire purifies gold; although such testing may not be pleasant, God expects a successful outcome. Trials should not discourage us; for, if we remain faithful, we will “come forth as gold” (*Job* 23:10; *compare* *Prov.* 17:3).

Thus, we are to rejoice when trials come, especially over our faith, for Jesus says, “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven” (*Matt.* 5:12). Also, trials deepen our appreciation for what Christ endured for us. As 1 Peter 4:13 points out, they enable us to share in Christ’s sufferings.

In short, we need to look through and beyond each trial and visualize the result God intends. That is where faith comes in. We need to believe in a loving Father, rely on His wisdom, and act on the basis of His Word. We can safely entrust our future to Him (*see* *Rom.* 8:28). In fact, only through faith, through knowing for ourselves God’s love, and living by faith in light of that love could we ever possibly rejoice in our trials.

In James 1:3, the ultimate goal of the testing of our faith is “patience” (*NKJV*). The Greek word (*hypomonē*) can also be translated “endurance” (*NASB*) or “perseverance” (*NIV*). *Hypomonē* refers to that which outlasts everything else because it rests confidently in the assurance of God’s final deliverance (*as in* *Luke* 21:19).

It’s one thing to stay faithful to God during trials; that is, to not lose your faith but to cling to the Lord, even in the worst times. But we are told to “rejoice” in our trials. Isn’t that asking too much? After all, at times it can be hard enough just to stay faithful in trials but to rejoice in them? Yet, that’s what we are told. How, then, can we learn to rejoice, when rejoicing is the last thing we feel like doing?
Perfection

Read James 1:2–4. Notice the progression: faith, testing, patience, perfection. James begins with faith because that is the foundation of all true Christian experience. He then says we need trials to test the genuineness of our faith. Lastly, James states that trials can teach us perseverance, so that eventually we will not be caught by surprise and be overcome by them. God’s goal for us is that we “may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:4, NKJV). The language could not be loftier. The word perfect (teleios) means spiritual maturity, while complete (holokleros) refers to wholeness in every way. Truly, we can become so much more in the Lord if we would die to self and allow Him to work in us “to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).

Read Ephesians 4:13 and Philippians 3:12–15. What attitude toward “perfection” are Christians encouraged to have?

Like Paul, followers of Christ will never be satisfied with anything short of patterning their lives after the unselfish, sacrificial love of their Master. But we will never feel as though we have “already attained” or were “already perfected” (NJKV).

Notice, too, in the passages, the emphasis on the future. Paul is pointing toward what he has been promised in God through faith in Jesus. There’s never a time in the Christian walk where we can say, “I have arrived,” at least as far as character goes. (Have you ever noticed, too, that those who say that they have “arrived” are generally obnoxious and self-righteous?) We are like a work of art; we can always be improved upon, and God promises to do just that as long as we press on in faith, seeking to surrender to Him daily in trust and obedience.

If you died right now, would you be good enough to be saved? Or if you had died two weeks after you had accepted Jesus, would you have been good enough to be saved? Do you think in six months you will be good enough? What does your answer tell you about your need for the perfect robe of Christ’s righteousness, regardless of whatever level of “perfection” you attain?
Asking in Faith

**Read** James 1:5, 6. How is wisdom different from knowledge? What connection does James make between wisdom and faith?

It may seem a bit odd that James says, “If any of you lacks wisdom.” Who thinks he or she has enough wisdom to begin with? Solomon, for instance, recognizing his need, humbly asked for “an understanding heart to . . . discern between good and bad” (1 Kings 3:9). Later, he wrote: “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10).

We tend to think of wisdom as that which we know. How do the following texts, however, show us what another side of true wisdom is? *James 1:19–21; 2:15, 16; 3:13.*

Both Proverbs and James describe wisdom as something very practical: not what we know but how we live. For example, being “quick to listen, slow to speak” (*James 1:19, NIV*). Plato said, “Wise men talk because they have something to say; fools, because they would like to say something.” In other words, we can have all the knowledge the world offers but lack true wisdom.

Of course, because God is the Source of all true wisdom, we gain wisdom most by listening to Him—reading His Word and spending thoughtful time contemplating the life of Christ, “who became for us wisdom from God” (*1 Cor. 1:30, NKJV*). By learning to reflect the character of Christ in our own lives, we live out the truth as it is in Jesus. That is true wisdom.

**Read** James 1:6 again. We must ask in faith, not doubting. Isn’t that sometimes hard? Who doesn’t, at times, struggle with doubt? When that happens, what’s crucial is to pray and to start dwelling on all the reasons we have for faith: the story of Jesus, the prophecies in the Bible, and our own personal experiences. How could doing this help us to work through whatever doubt might occasionally arise?
The Flip Side of Faith

**Read** James 1:6–8. What is he saying to us here?

The word for “doubt” refers to one being inwardly divided; this helps us to understand its connection to double-mindedness. We see a clear example of this at Kadesh-Barnea. Israel faced a choice there: move forward in faith or rebel against the Lord. Amazingly, they chose rebellion and wanted to return to the bondage of Egypt. When God intervened and announced through Moses that they would die in the wilderness, suddenly the people “believed”! They said, “‘We will go up to the place which the Lord has promised, for we have sinned’” (Num. 14:40, NKJV).

“Now they seemed sincerely to repent of their sinful conduct; but they sorrowed because of the result of their evil course rather than from a sense of their ingratitude and disobedience. When they found that the Lord did not relent in His decree, their self-will again arose, and they declared that they would not return into the wilderness. In commanding them to retire from the land of their enemies, God tested their apparent submission and proved that it was not real.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 391.

**Read** Luke 17:5, 6. What is Jesus telling us here about faith?

When the disciples asked for more faith, Jesus said mustard seed-sized faith was plenty. What counts is whether our faith is alive and growing, and this can and will happen only as we continue to exercise that faith by reaching out and trusting in God in all situations.

But doubt sometimes gets in the way. Our world bombards us with doubt and skepticism; no one is immune. All we can do is pray our way through it, remembering God’s faithfulness in the past and trusting Him for our future.

What are all the reasons you have for trusting in God and His promises and living by faith? Think through them, dwell on them, and your faith will only increase.
The Rich and the Poor

In this short letter, James shows great concern for poor people; some even consider it his major theme. But to modern ears, his diatribes against the rich and in favor of the poor seem extreme, even shocking. At the same time, however, James isn’t saying anything much different from what Jesus has said.


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James, of course, does not shut the doors of the kingdom on all rich people. But, like Jesus, he recognizes the insidious temptations that come with wealth. Rich or poor, we need to keep our eyes on the real prize. The problem with money is that it tends to deceive us into focusing on the temporal instead of the eternal (2 Cor. 4:18).

No question, the acquisition of wealth, higher education, or social influence tends to separate people from the “less fortunate.” But the early church kept the two classes together by turning worldly values upside down. The one who takes the lowest place, the role of humility, is the one who can glory in exaltation.

“As long as there are hungry ones in God’s world to be fed, naked ones to be clothed, souls perishing for the bread and water of salvation, every unnecessary indulgence, every overplus of capital, pleads for the poor and the naked.”—Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry*, p. 269.

What about yourself? Whether rich or poor, it doesn’t matter; what matters is how you relate to money. What is it about money that makes it so potentially dangerous to our souls?

“God would have his servants become acquainted with their own hearts. In order to bring to them a true knowledge of their condition, he permits the fire of affliction to assail them, so that they may be purified. The trials of life are God’s workmen to remove the impurities, infirmities, and roughness from our characters, and fit them for the society of pure, heavenly angels in glory. Then as we pass through trial, as the fire of affliction kindles upon us, shall we not keep our eyes fixed upon the things that are unseen, on the eternal inheritance, the immortal life, the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory? [A]nd while we do this, the fire will not consume us, but only remove the dross, and we shall come forth seven times purified, bearing the impress of the Divine.”—Ellen G. White, The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, April 10, 1894.

Discussion Questions:

1. What Bible characters do you find most encouraging in times of suffering? Have you learned to find joy in trials? If so, share with the class what has helped you to do this. At the same time, if you haven’t been able to rejoice in your sufferings, talk about that in class, as well (if you feel comfortable doing it).

2. Dwell more on this idea that true wisdom is not so much head knowledge but what we do in faith through Christ. At the same time, why does this not mean that head knowledge isn’t important? How can having, for instance, wrong doctrine be very detrimental to one’s walk with the Lord?

3. A young man had a friend who went through severe trials. Although the young man found the trials painful to watch, he did notice that his friend was growing in grace. When the trials were over, his friend really had changed—and for the better! What things have you learned from your trials that have been spiritually beneficial to you? Ask yourself, Could I have learned them any other way?

4. What can you say to someone who appears sincere in faith and yet admits to being, at times, overcome with doubt? How can you help?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Hebrews 12:2

The Student Will:

Know: (1) Realize that Jesus is the Perfecter of our faith; (2) recognize that trials are tools that strengthen and purify faith; (3) understand that true wisdom is more about how we live than what we know.

Feel: Experience the joy and satisfaction that come from trusting God, receiving His wisdom, and growing in spiritual maturity.

Do: Determine to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, focusing on eternal realities rather than on temporary ones.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Understanding How Jesus Perfects Our Faith
   A. What is faith? How do trials build and strengthen faith? Why are we told to rejoice in trials? How is that possible?
   B. What is the relationship between faith, wisdom, and spiritual maturity? How do we gain these important attributes?
   C. Whether rich or poor, why does it matter how we relate to money? What is so dangerous about earthly wealth?

II. Feel: Experiencing True, Lasting Joy
   A. In what ways do wisdom and spiritual maturity contribute to true, lasting joy?
   B. What kind of feeling(s) do you experience when you know that you are right with God?

III. Do: Focusing on Eternal Realities
   A. Do you find it easier to believe in what you can observe with your senses? Why, or why not?
   B. In what specific ways can we focus on the eternal realities of God rather than on temporary pleasures and sorrows of this earth?

Summary: James shows us how Jesus, the Perfecter of our faith, uses trials to strengthen and purify our faith. James also stresses how true wisdom reveals itself through “good conduct” and meekness. He reminds us that faith requires exercise to grow. Finally, James reminds us not to be bound by earthly wealth but instead to reveal a kind, generous spirit.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: Hebrews 12:1, 2

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: As we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the Perfecter of our faith, we learn to recognize trials as tools God uses to strengthen and purify our faith.

Just for Teachers: Some individuals become uneasy when the words perfect or perfection are mentioned. After all, no one, except Jesus, is “perfect,” right?

But how wonderful it is to know that Jesus is “the author and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2, NIV). Focus on this promise and its practical implications with your class. What does it mean to have perfect (also translated as complete or finished) faith, and how is this accomplished?

Opening Activity/Discussion: David and Nancy Guthrie appeared to be like any other expectant parents, happily looking forward to the birth of their child. But when little Hope was born, early signs signaled that something had gone terribly wrong. The newborn was unable to suck, and she had clubfeet. Testing revealed that Hope had Zellweger syndrome, a disease that “devastates essential bodies called peroxisomes in every cell. Zellweger newborns are severely brain-damaged, often blind and deaf, unable to take food orally.”—David Van Biema, “Modern-Day Job: When God Hides His Face,” Time, quoted in Baptist Standard, July 30, 2001, http://assets.baptiststandard.com/archived/2001/7_30/pages/guthries.html. With no known treatment or cure for Zellweger’s, Hope lived just 199 days.

The odds of carrying a recessive gene for Zellweger syndrome are 1 in 160; both David and Nancy learned that they were carriers. “The odds of two carriers meeting and having a child who suffers from the syndrome are about 1 in 100,000,” according to the Baptist Standard article.

After the heart-wrenching experience with baby Hope, David decided to have a vasectomy. The odds of a woman becoming pregnant after her husband has had this procedure are approximately 1 in 2,000. One and a half years later, Nancy was pregnant again. A placenta-sampling test revealed terrible news—the baby had Zellweger syndrome. Before his first birthday, this baby would be sharing a grave with his sister, Hope.

“If God would ask me to suffer this significantly,” said Nancy, “I think [H]e has something significant [H]e wants to do with it through me, if only just in my heart.”

Thinking of Job, Nancy reflected that he “was blessed through his brokenness, by his restless pursuit of God. He had a new, more intimate relationship
with God, one he could never have found without pain and sorrow.

“In the darkest of days, we’ve experienced a supernatural strength and peace. We often cannot see the hidden purposes of God. But we can determine to be faithful and keep walking toward Him in the darkness.”—David Van Biema, “Modern-Day Job: When God Hides His Face,” Time, reprinted in Baptist Standard, July 30, 2001, http://assets.baptiststandard.com/archived/2001/7_30/pages/guthries.html.

Consider This: In the story above, Nancy states that Job “had a new, more intimate relationship with God, one he could never have found without pain and sorrow.” What do you think? Is it possible to have a strong, intimate relationship with God without ever experiencing pain and sorrow? Why, or why not?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Significantly for us as Seventh-day Adventists, James connects wisdom with the kind of tests and trials that God’s people will face at the end of time. Such wisdom is “the present possession of the righteous remnant, as that which enables them to resist and endure the tests of this age.”—Peter H. Davids, The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), pp. 71, 72. This kind of wisdom, according to James, comes as a gift, by faith. It stands up under testing; and if we believe and listen to God’s Word for this wisdom, it will be ours (Mark 11:24). Show the class how these themes found in James are similar to the description of the remnant in Revelation 14:12, which refers to the “patient endurance” of those who have “the faith of Jesus” and live to see Him come (see Rev. 14:14–16). Emphasize that Jesus is the Perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2) and that He does that through various means, including trials and other faith-building experiences that teach us wisdom, leading us to be drawn to eternal rather than temporal things.

Bible Commentary

I. A Great Cloud of Witnesses (Review Hebrews 11 with your class.)

Abel, at the cost of his life, followed God’s instructions relative to the kind of sacrifice he must bring in worship. Enoch lived in such close communion with God that he was translated. Noah stood virtually alone against a skeptical world about to be destroyed. Abraham left his home and country for a “better country” that God promised to show him. Sarah believed that God would keep His promise and that she would have a son, even though
that was physically impossible. All of these people, as well as the others mentioned in Hebrews 11, put their faith and trust in God’s words and promises, even though they may not have understood them completely and would not live to see their complete fulfillment. Many of these heroes were a kind of “faithful remnant”—they stood almost alone when the vast majority thought differently. Enoch especially lived at a time when wickedness was rampant; yet, “he was unsullied with the prevailing sins of the age in which he lived. So may we remain pure and uncorrupted.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 2, p. 122.

Consider This: Which Bible heroes in Hebrews 11 are most meaningful to you as examples of faith, and why?

■ How would you explain the difference between true faith and spurious faith? Note Hebrews 11:3, 6 and this statement from Gospel Workers: “Faith claims God’s promises and brings forth fruit in obedience. Presumption also claims the promises, but uses them as Satan did, to excuse transgression. . . . It is not faith that claims the favor of Heaven without complying with the conditions on which mercy is to be granted. Genuine faith has its foundation in the promises and provisions of the Scriptures.”—Ellen G. White, Gospel Workers, p. 260.

■ What specific actions is this “great cloud of witnesses” meant to encourage in us today? (See Heb. 11:13–16, 12:1.)

II. Looking to Jesus From Beginning to End (Review Hebrews 12:1–4 with your class.)

Jesus is called the “author and perfecter” of our faith (Heb. 12:2, NASB). Faith itself is a gift, which is why Jesus is its Author. The word for “author” is archēgos, which is used in the New Testament only of Jesus. He is “the Author of life” (Acts 3:15, ESV) and Founder of our salvation (Heb. 2:10). In Hebrews, the word refers specifically to Jesus’ work of opening a path of salvation for believers to follow. It is by our listening to His Word (Rom. 10:17) and finding salvation in Him that faith is born. He is also the Perfecter of our faith, because only the One who took our nature (Heb. 2:14–18) and was tempted as we are without ever sinning (Heb. 4:15, 16) can give us power to obey and teach us how to resist temptation. By studying His life and thinking deeply about the way He treated others, especially those who opposed Him, our faith grows. “Not even by a thought did He [Jesus] yield to temptation. So it may be with us. . . . So long as we are united to Him by faith, sin has no more dominion over us. God reaches for the hand of faith in us to direct it to lay fast hold upon the divinity of Christ, that we may attain to perfection of character.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 123.

Consider This: Why is the remnant just before Jesus comes said not only to keep the commandments of God but also “the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12)? How are
these two attributes related?

■ How many parallels can you find between Enoch and those who live to see Jesus come? (See Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 86–89.)

■ Reread James 1:2–4 in light of Revelation 14:12. What is the relationship between resisting temptation, patiently enduring trials, and character development?

▶STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: This lesson points out a clear pathway of faith: keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, it is easier to focus on eternal realities rather than on temporal life, which helps us to endure trials with patience, strengthening and purifying our faith. This heaven-given patience and faith, described in James 1:3, 4, are the same two attributes described in Revelation 14:12—“Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.” How does this reality help us to rejoice and to “count it all joy” when we suffer from trials?

Thought/Application Questions:

Read Colossians 3:2 and ask your class the following questions:

1. What does it mean to focus on “eternal realities,” or “setting our mind on things above”? How, specifically, do we do that while living on earth?
2. What are “eternal realities,” and why should we focus on them?
3. Faith is a gift, but how do we receive it? (See Rom. 10:17.)

▶STEP 4—Create

Activity: Invite students to participate in one or more of the following activities:

1. Identify a hymn that has given you strength and courage during a difficult time in your life. Sing that song for your class, or make a beautiful, decorated poster featuring the words of the hymn.
2. Locate one or more photos from the past taken during a time when God was particularly close to you. Show the photo and share the story about that time with someone who could use some encouragement.
3. Go for a walk outdoors and look for ways that God has brought forth beauty, even from less-than-ideal circumstances.
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: James 1:12–21, Ps. 119:11, Gen. 3:1–6, Titus 3:5–7, Rom. 13:12, Eph. 4:22.

Memory Text: “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (James 1:12).

We all have experienced it. We resolve not to give in to temptation, but in the heat of the battle, our resolve melts and—much to our own sense of shame and self-loathing—we fall into sin. Sometimes it seems that the more we focus on not sinning, the more powerless against temptation we feel, and the more hopeless our condition appears. We wonder if indeed we are saved at all. It’s hard to imagine any serious Christian who hasn’t wondered about his or her own salvation, especially after having just fallen into sin.

Fortunately, we can have victory over the temptations that so easily ensnare us. None of us, no matter how enveloped in sin, is hopeless, for our “Father of lights” (James 1:17) is greater than our propensity to evil, and only in Him and through His Word can we have victory.

That’s the message from the verses we will study this week. Sure, temptations are real, sin is real, and the battle against self is very real. But God is real, too, and through Him we can more than overcome the temptations that brew inside us, just waiting to take us down.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 18.
The Root of Temptation

Read James 1:13, 14. Why is it important that God does not tempt anyone? Where does temptation originate, and how can this knowledge be helpful in our own struggle with sin?

James is emphatic. Not only is God not the author of evil, He is not the source of temptation either. Evil itself is the source of temptation. According to this passage, the problem lies within us, which is the main reason it’s so hard to resist.

Thus, the battle against sin begins in the mind. As much as many might not want to hear it, the truth is that we choose to sin. No one can force us (Rom. 6:16–18). Sinful desires, inclinations, and propensities do constantly capture our attention. By using common hunting and fishing terms, James 1:14 describes these inward promptings. Our own desires lure and entice us, and when we give in to them, they finally hook and entrap us.

Read Ephesians 6:17, Psalm 119:11, and Luke 4:8. What common theme is seen in all, and how does that relate to the question of victory over temptation?

In the passages in James, he clearly separates temptation from sin. Being tempted from within is not sin. Even Jesus was tempted. The problem is not temptation itself but how we respond to it. Having a sinful nature is not, in and of itself, sin; however, allowing that sinful nature to control our thoughts and dictate our choices is. Thus, we have the promises, found in God’s Word, that offer us the assurance of victory if we claim them for ourselves and cling to them in faith.

Dwell on the idea that sin is always our own choice. (After all, if it weren’t our own choice, how could we be condemned for doing it?) What things can we do on a daily, practical level that could help to keep us from making the wrong choices?
When Lust Conceives

Read James 1:13–15 again. When does temptation become sin?

Several Greek words are used in this passage to describe how sin begins, and all of them are connected with giving birth. When a wrong desire is nurtured, sin is “conceived,” like a baby in the womb. “Sin, when it is completely grown, gives birth to death” (James 1:15, author’s literal translation).

The picture is paradoxical. The process that is supposed to give life results only in death (compare Rom. 7:10–13). Sin, like cancer, takes over and consumes its host. We all know this, for we have all been ruined by sin. Our hearts are evil, and we cannot change them.

Read Genesis 3:1–6. Eve’s experience vividly illustrates the conflict with sin. What steps led her into sin?

At its root, sin begins with distrusting God. Satan, using the same successful method by which he deceived a third of the angels (Rev. 12:4,7–9), raised doubts in Eve’s mind about God’s character (Gen. 3:1–5). Approaching the forbidden tree was not sin, but taking and eating the fruit was. Even so, wrong thoughts seem to have preceded her sinful act (Gen. 3:6). She adopted Satan’s suggestions as her own.

Sin always begins in the mind. Like Eve, we may think about the supposed “benefits” of wrongdoing. Then our imagination and feelings begin to take over. Soon we seize the bait and fall into sin.

Often we wonder how it could happen. The answer is easy: we let it happen. Nobody forced us into sin.

“By earnest prayer and living faith we can resist the assaults of Satan, and keep our hearts unspotted from pollution.

“The strongest temptation is no excuse for sin. However great the pressure brought to bear upon the soul, transgression is our own act. It is not in the power of earth or hell to compel any one to sin. The will must consent, the heart must yield, or passion cannot overbear reason, nor iniquity triumph over righteousness.”—Ellen G. White, “Christian Privileges and Duties,” Signs of the Times®, October 4, 1883.
“Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:16, 17).

Although sin gives birth to death, God is the Source of life. He is the “Father of lights” (James 1:17), a reference to the Creation (Gen. 1:14–18). God gives us birth to a new life, which is the greatest gift we can get “from above” (compare James 1:17 with John 3:3).

Like Paul, who speaks of salvation as the result of God’s grace (Rom. 3:23, 24; Eph. 2:8; 2 Tim. 1:9), James 1:17 calls salvation a “gift.” More so, in the next verse, James makes it clear that salvation, this new birth, is the result of God’s purpose and will for us: “In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth” (James 1:18, NRSV). That is, God wants us to be saved. It was His will, from even before we existed, that we should have salvation and a new life in Him now and for all eternity.


Jesus, Paul, Peter, and James all connect salvation with the new birth. God’s whole purpose in the plan of redemption is to reconnect sin-battered and broken human beings with heaven. The rift was so big and so wide that nothing humans could do could have ever bridged it. Only God’s Word in human form, Jesus, could reconnect heaven to earth. The inspired Word (2 Tim. 3:16) is uniquely able to breathe spiritual life into those whose hearts are open to receive the gift.

In short, our “Father of lights” so loves us that, even as underserving as we are, He gives us “every good gift and every perfect gift” (James 1:17, NKJV), the best of all gifts being Jesus and the new birth that He offers.

What are the gifts you’ve been given “from above”? Why is it so important to dwell on them? What happens when we don’t?
Slow to Speak

Read James 1:19, 20. What important point is James making there?

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God’s Word is powerful. But so are human words. How often have we spoken words that later we wish we could take back? Unfortunately, just being aware of how hurtful wrong words can be, and how destructive anger is, does little to help us get ourselves under control. Left to our own devices, we can never really change. That is why we need to listen more to God and let Him work in us.

“When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God. He bids us, ‘Be still, and know that I am God.’”—Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing, p. 58.

By contrast, problems arise when we stop listening to God and to each other. Whether in the home, at work, or in the church, arguments ensue when listening stops. When that happens, talking begins to accelerate and anger builds. This slippery slope of sinful communication, like the uncontrolled inward desires of James 1:14, 15, can never produce the righteousness of God.

That is why James juxtaposes God’s righteousness with human wrath. As long as we rely on what bubbles up naturally from our sinful nature, the creative power of God’s Word is blocked, and our own unhelpful or even hurtful words arise instead. No wonder that right after talking about all that our “Father of lights” does for us by the gift of a new life, James tells us to be careful with what we say.

What do the following passages teach about words? Prov. 15:1, Isa. 50:4, Eph. 4:29, 5:4, Col. 4:6.

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Think about the last time someone devastated you with his or her words. The depth of emotion you felt should show you just how powerful words can be, either for good or bad. What can you do to help keep your words under control? Why is it so important to think before you speak?
Saved by Receiving

Read James 1:21. What role does the “word” have in what James is saying?

This verse concludes all that has been said so far about faith and salvation. It is an appeal to put away all impurity and separate ourselves from wickedness. The command “put away” (RSV) is used seven out of nine times in the New Testament for detaching oneself from the evil habits that have no place in a life submitted to Christ (Rom. 13:12; Eph. 4:22, 25; Col. 3:8; Heb. 12:1; 1 Pet. 2:1). It can also refer to the taking off of clothing (Acts 7:58), so that the taking off of our “filthy rags” of sin (compare Isa. 64:6) may also be implied. Indeed, the word filthiness (RSV) occurs in James for the “filthy clothes” of the poor in contrast to the sparkling clean clothing of the rich (James 2:2, NKJV). Like Jesus, James decries the human tendency to be so concerned with outward appearance, because God is concerned above all with the condition of our hearts.

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the word filthy (ryparos) is used in only one passage: Zechariah 3:3, 4, where Joshua, the high priest, represents sinful Israel. God takes away the high priest’s filthy garments and clothes him with a clean robe, symbolizing Israel’s forgiveness and cleansing.

This scene is very different from the popular Christian image we sometimes see of Jesus putting a clean white robe over the sinner’s dingy, soiled garments. Who would do this in real life? Nobody puts clean clothes over dirty ones. Likewise in Zechariah, the filthy garments are removed before the clean robe is put on. This doesn’t mean that we must be without sin before we can be clothed in Christ’s righteousness. If that were true, who could be saved? It also doesn’t mean that we cannot be saved or return to Jesus if we fall back into sin. Instead, it means that we must completely surrender to Him, choosing to die daily to our old sinful ways, and allow Him to create us into His image. Christ’s perfect robe of righteousness will then cover us.

Read again James 1:21. How deeply are you seeking to apply what it says here to your life? What does it mean to “engraft” the Word into your heart, and how can you do it?
Further Study: Read about sin and the power to change in Ellen G. White, “Repentance,” *Steps to Christ*, pp. 23–36, and summarize the key points.

“The plan of redemption contemplates our complete recovery from the power of Satan. Christ always separates the contrite soul from sin. He came to destroy the works of the devil, and He has made provision that the Holy Spirit shall be imparted to every repentant soul, to keep him from sinning.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 311.

“If you have accepted Christ as a personal Saviour, you are to forget yourself, and try to help others. Talk of the love of Christ, tell of His goodness. Do every duty that presents itself. Carry the burden of souls upon your heart, and by every means in your power seek to save the lost. As you receive the Spirit of Christ—the Spirit of unselfish love and labor for others—you will grow and bring forth fruit. The graces of the Spirit will ripen in your character. Your faith will increase, your convictions deepen, your love be made perfect. More and more you will reflect the likeness of Christ in all that is pure, noble, and lovely.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 67, 68.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Think more about the reality of the power of words. Why are they so powerful? How can language be easily manipulated? How often is *how* we say or write something just as important, or even more important, than *what* we say or write?

2. Of all the gifts that you have been given “from above,” which is the greatest one, and why?

3. Read over James 1:12–21. What is the essential message there? What hope and promises are there for us?

4. Lust brings forth sin, and sin brings forth death. Why, with such high stakes before us, do we not have the victories that should be ours? What are the ways in which we rationalize sin, and why is that always a dangerous mind game to play?

5. Read the last Ellen G. White statement found above. What crucial counsel is found there, especially for those who might be wavering in faith?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** James 1:21, 22

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** (1) Understand that no one is so evil that he or she is hopeless in God’s eyes. (2) Discern how God uses the “sword” of His Word (Eph. 6:17) to provide a “way of escape” (1 Cor. 10:13, NKJV) from sin.

**Feel:** Appreciate and nurture a love for God and His Word.

**Do:** Choose to apply God’s Word to his or her own life by reading, memorizing, and using Scripture to thwart temptation.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: Understanding the Hope and Power Jesus Offers**

A. What are the differences between being controlled by sin and being controlled by Christ and His righteousness?

B. What is the “sword of the Spirit,” and how can we use it most effectively in our battle against temptation?

II. **Feel: Appreciate and Nurture Love for God’s Word**

A. Why is it, for many, easier to spend an hour watching television or surfing the Internet than it is to spend an hour reading the Bible?

B. How can we foster a love for God’s Word in our own hearts and in others?

III. **Do: Sharpening the Sword of the Spirit**

A. Given that temptations often assail us quickly and unexpectedly, how can we instantly be ready to resist them effectively?

B. What benefits come from spending quality time with God and His Word each day?

**Summary:** God provides everything that we need to step away from the slavery of sin. The most powerful tool He gives us is the “sword of the Spirit,” which is His Word. He urges us to keep that sword sharp and ready by hiding His Word in our hearts so that we might not sin against Him (Ps. 119:11).
Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *James 1:21, 22*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** No one is so evil that he or she is hopeless. Our “Father of lights” is greater than our propensity to evil, and through Him and His implanted Word, we can have victory.

**Just for Teachers:** Many people in this world feel hopeless, powerless, and like pawns in the cruel game of life. Even Christians can despair when they feel their spiritual life stagnating and when they experience defeat as waves of temptation wash over them. The good news is that our God does not leave us as victims to drown in a sea of sin. He has provided lifeboats for all who are willing to use them. In this lesson, seek to connect your class with the power of God’s promises in their everyday lives. Encourage students to implant those promises in their hearts in order to gain the victory over the temptations that assail them.

**Opening Activity/Discussion:** A nickel per verse—that was the deal young Barry’s mother made with him and his brother. For every Bible verse memorized, they were five cents closer to their goal of buying a big Snickers candy bar or Sugar Babies, a soft, chewy milk caramel candy. In order to reach their goals faster, the boys combed through their Bibles, looking for the shortest verses to memorize! But one day, memorizing Scripture became more than just a way to buy candy.

“ ‘When I was 13,’ ” remembers Barry, “ ‘I memorized Proverbs 1:10, “My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.” That very day, two young men from my neighborhood asked me to “help them get back at someone.” I felt the power of Proverbs 1:10 reverberating in the corners of my spirit, and on the strength of that verse, I refused to go with them.

“ ‘They didn’t just get back at someone, they murdered someone,’ ” Barry said. “ ‘Their sad saga was played out on the evening news and the judicial conclusion was life in prison. One of the gentlemen, in fact the gentleman who asked me to go along said, “But, I didn’t do it, the other guy did it.” But it didn’t make any difference; they both received the penalty of life in prison. This means that had I gone along with them, even if I had stood there quoting Scripture, I would have received the same penalty’ ” (Barry Black, quoted by Arcadia Kust, “Senate Chaplain Barry Black Speaks at Christ Church of Oak Brook,” Doings Weekly, July 23, 2012, http://burrridge.suntimes
Because of the power of that verse and of his determination to claim and follow it, rather than living out his life behind bars, Dr. Barry Black serves as the sixty-second chaplain of the U.S. Senate.

Consider This: Imagine what might have happened if Barry Black had not memorized Scripture or had ignored it the day he was invited to “help get back” at someone. How different would his life have been? What have you read in your Bible that helped you the very day you read (or memorized) it?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: This week’s lesson focuses on the power of sin within us and how to resist it.

Bible Commentary

I. The Key to Winning Over Sinning (Review James 1:13–16 with your class.)

We read in James 1:14, 15 how evil desires lead to temptation, how cherishing these desires leads to sin, and ultimately, how continued sinning leads to death. The carnal heart wants to find a way to keep sinning and still be saved. But God says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it!” (Jer. 17:9, NKJV), and “Do not be deceived” (James 1:16, NKJV). Fortunately, James follows up this gloomy picture with good news, in verses 17, 18, which describes the best gift of all—being born again through “the word of truth.” As with the first creation (Ps. 33:6, 9), the new birth takes place by means of God’s Word (compare Rom. 10:17, 2 Cor. 4:6). The Inspired Word (literally, “God-breathed” word in 2 Timothy 3:16) is uniquely able to breathe spiritual life into those whose hearts are open to receive the gift. The Bible is God’s revealed truth. Jesus said, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17). Satan wants to short-circuit our connection with heaven by leading us to doubt the Bible and by complicating its teachings, just as he did with Eve in the Garden of Eden (see Gen. 3:1–5).

Consider This: Ask the students to think about their own experience and then
ask, “When have you felt weak and when have you felt strong in fighting temptation, and what makes the difference?”

Realistically, how much time do you spend studying God’s Word and how much time watching TV or surfing the Web? How does the relative balance impact your experience as described in the previous question?

Read Testimonies for the Church, volume 5, pages 467–476. “Christ alone can make an effectual plea in our behalf. He is able to silence the accuser with arguments founded not upon our merits, but on His own. . . . No sin can be tolerated in those who shall walk with Christ in white. The filthy garments are to be removed, and Christ’s robe of righteousness is to be placed upon us. By repentance and faith we are enabled to render obedience to all the commandments of God, and are found without blame before Him.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 472.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What is the robe of Christ’s righteousness in the above quotation?

2. In light of these comments and such passages as Matthew 24:14, how important is our life witness in the finishing of the gospel work?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: On our own we are utterly helpless against sin and the temptations that come to us every day. But, fortunately, we are not alone in this struggle, and God has equipped us for the battle, arming us with “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17). Emphasize to the class the importance of applying this lesson to their own lives.

Activity: Most often, temptation does not come to us as a written invitation; it often shows up without warning, hardly giving us time to think before we respond to it. That’s why memorizing Scripture can be such a powerful tool, putting an answer on the tip of our tongue to quickly send Satan’s temptations away. “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You,” wrote the psalmist in Psalm 119:11, NKJV.
Some people memorize Scripture fairly easily; others find it difficult. Whether you find it easy or hard, try visiting Scripture Typer at http://scripturetyper.com. Scripture Typer is a wonderful and fun way to memorize Bible texts of your choice. This free site provides a number of helps in memorizing Bible verses and also has links to memory groups—likeminded individuals from around the globe who are memorizing Scripture together. In addition to the features on its Web site, Scripture Typer also offers a free app that is available for Android and iPhone users.

If you do not have access to a computer or other electronic device or if you do not have Internet access, you can still use some of the same principles used by Scripture Typer to help you memorize. Write out the verse you want to memorize, either on a flash card or paper. The more often you write out the verse, or say it aloud, the more quickly you will memorize it. Entire chapters and even books have been memorized in this way.

**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Here is an opportunity for the members of your class to show their creativity. The possibilities for this activity are nearly endless—ranging from using a computer with sophisticated graphics to handmade scrapbooks. It’s also an intergenerational activity that members can enjoy doing with younger or older members of the family. Encourage class members to not only make a book for themselves but another one to give as a gift.

**Activity:** Make a personal promise book, filled with the portions of Scripture that are especially meaningful and helpful to you in resisting temptation. Use your best creativity in making your book beautiful, using pictures or other illustrations. In addition to your own book, you may want to create a promise book for someone you know who is struggling and present the book to him or her as a special gift. This activity is one you may enjoy doing with another member of your family or with a group of friends. Whether you use a computer with graphics or a homemade scrapbook of promises, make it a special resource that you will enjoy looking at again and again.

Alternately, mark a Bible, highlighting or underlining your favorite promises of hope and empowerment. Keep it handy to strengthen your faith during temptation or give it as a gift of encouragement to someone going through a difficult time.

If the above resources are unavailable, try setting your favorite scriptures to music. Or learn scripture that has been set to song. Pray for an opportunity to share, through music or through recitation, your favorite texts with those with whom you come in contact.
Being and Doing

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (James 1:22).

Jean Francois Gravelet, better known as “The Great Blondin,” became famous for walking across Niagara Falls on a tightrope. In September of 1860, the Prince of Wales had witnessed Blondin’s crossing of the falls with an assistant on his back. After the walk, Blondin turned to the British prince and offered to carry him across the falls too. Although the prince had heard of the man’s skills, and had even just seen them in action, he was still not ready to place his life in Blondin’s hands.

The point is, of course, that hearing and seeing are not enough when it comes to a relationship with God. We may be intellectually convinced about the existence of God, the truth of the gospel, and the Second Coming. We may have even seen for ourselves the reality of God’s love and care. Yet, even with all that, we may not really be ready to commit ourselves fully into His hands, an action that would be revealed by our works. This is precisely why James emphasizes the importance of being doers, not just hearers, of the Word.

This week we’ll look at what being a doer of the Word means for those saved by grace.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 25.
Knowing Your Enemy

Someone once said this about his enemy: “I see him every day—when I’m shaving.” This is exactly what James wants us to recognize: our greatest enemy is ourselves. Salvation begins by seeing who we really are, not who we imagine ourselves to be.

Read James 1:23, 24. Who is described here, and what is the basic problem?

While there is nothing wrong with looking our best, many people spend a great deal of time and money to improve their appearance. But we need to make sure that we don’t deceive ourselves. James says we need to get a better view of ourselves, no matter how much we might not like what we see.

Read Matthew 19:16–22 and 26:33–35, 69–75. How does the self-image of each of these two men compare with the reality? What do their two different reactions to Jesus’ words say about them?

The rich young man thought he had been keeping the commandments. Suddenly he was challenged to adhere to a different kind of obedience, one that he had never anticipated, one that went much deeper than mere outward compliance to rules and regulations. (See Rom. 7:7.)

Peter, like this young man, also had a distorted picture of himself. Self-confidently, he predicted that even if everyone else should stumble and fall away, he would remain faithful—even if it cost him his life. But neither realized how tightly sin held him in its grasp. Both were self-deceived about their true spiritual state. Peter, however, eventually was converted. As far as we know, the rich young ruler wasn’t.

It's always so easy to see the faults in others but not in ourselves, right? Deep down, though, we probably are more aware of our faults than we want to admit. Look deep into your own soul. What does this view tell you about why you must have a Savior?
Being a Doer

Read James 1:22 again. The Greek says “to be” doers of the Word. How might the message have been different had James simply said, “Do the Word”?

James combines being and doing. He does not separate them, nor does he make one more important than the other. They are like two sides of the same coin, inseparable. We are to be doers. Furthermore, the tense of the Greek word for be here refers to an ongoing lifestyle of obedience, one that is expected of us now rather than at some indefinite time in the future.

The point is, we are to become new people in the Lord, and as a result of what we become, we do the things that God commands us to. This is something quite different from merely following rules (which seems to have been the problem with the rich young ruler, as we saw in yesterday’s daily study).

Read Luke 6:27–38. What are some of the actions that we should be taking?

“Love your enemies.”“Give to everyone who asks of you.”“Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:27, 30, 36, NKJV). Sounds impossible, doesn’t it? And it is, on our own. Love like this does not come naturally to sinful human beings. That is why Jesus goes on to talk about two different kinds of trees and the fruit each produces (Luke 6:43–45).

Similarly, in Galatians 5 Paul contrasts the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19–21) with the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23). It is almost as if the more we focus on doing, the worse we become; whereas, when we are being led by the Spirit, it yields a totally different outcome—the fruit of love and obedience.

Think about a time you did something simply because it was required of you or because it was a rule you had to obey. Contrast that to the time you did something similar because it was something you wanted to do, something that flowed naturally out of you because of Christ living in you. How does this contrast help us to understand the point of today’s study?
The Law of Freedom

Read James 1:25. What does he say about the role of the law?

James echoes the Psalms in calling God’s law “perfect” (Ps. 19:7) and a way of freedom (Ps. 119:45). But notice that the law in James cannot save us and certainly cannot cleanse us. It shows us God’s ideal, but it cannot make us follow that ideal any more than seeing a world-class athlete perform amazing feats could enable us to do the same. To follow that ideal, we need the power of Christ in our lives.

Read Romans 8:2, 4 and 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18. What makes the difference between the law as an instrument of death or as something that shows the way to freedom and life?

Even Paul affirms that “not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified” (Rom. 2:13, NKJV). As he says, we can become doers only through the work of the Spirit writing the law on our hearts. Only when we obey it from the heart can the law be a law of freedom.

Thus, the problem is not with the law but with us. We forget who we really are: sinners in constant need of a Savior. Outside of Christ, we hear only the law’s condemnation. But in Christ, we become new men and women (2 Cor. 5:17) who are set free in Jesus (John 8:36). We hear Him speaking the law to us, that we should “‘love one another, as I have loved you’” (John 15:12, NKJV). Through Christ, we experience the freedom of God’s sons and daughters who are saved by grace and who will not want to slip back into the condemnation and bondage we had as transgressors. In Christ, not only are we forgiven our sins, we now have a new life, one in which we are able to render obedience to the law. We do so, however, not in order to be saved but out of the freedom that comes from knowing that we already are saved and, therefore, no longer stand condemned by the law.

Think about what it would be like, having the natures we do, to try to keep the law well enough to be saved by it. How would this make the law a means of bondage? How has Jesus freed us from that bondage while, at the same time, commanding us to keep the law?
Useful or Useless?

Read James 1:26, 27 and compare it to Matthew 25:35, 36, 40 and Romans 12:9–18. In light of these passages, how would you define true Christianity?

If Jesus, James, and Paul emphasize anything, it is the importance of being a useful Christian. By loving “the least of these” (Matt. 25:40), by taking the time to visit those most easily overlooked, by showing hospitality—in all these practical ways and more—we reveal Jesus’ love and become the channel by which Jesus loves through us.

“The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian.”—Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing, p. 470. Of course, as she goes on to explain, “to live such a life, to exert such an influence, costs at every step effort, self-sacrifice, discipline.”—Page 470. It does not come naturally or automatically. If our religion consists only in affirmations of belief and listening to sermons, it is largely useless.

James describes “religion” or “religious” in verses 26, 27 with a word that suggests being unusually devout. Such an attitude has immediate, visible consequences, and people will notice the difference.

One obvious change will be our choice of words. Instead of using uninhibited remarks and harsh tones and gestures, we will become more sensitive to the effect our communication exerts on others. We will “bridle” our tongue so that it does not dash off ahead of us with all the violence and energy of an untamed horse.

James also singles out orphans and widows as those most needing our love and care. From a worldly standpoint, it does not make sense to focus our resources on those who can give nothing back to society. But from God’s viewpoint, it is precisely how we treat those who have been cast off and rejected by the world that reveals which of us are Christ’s true followers: either by lending money to those who cannot pay us back; inviting to dinner those who cannot reciprocate; or blessing and praying for those who mistreat us (Luke 6:35, 14:12–14, Matt. 5:44). As Paul points out, we are re-created in Christ Jesus for good works (Eph. 2:10).

How much of your own time and energy do you spend helping those in need? What does your answer say to you about how “useful” your faith really is?
Unlike the World

**What** does it mean to keep oneself “unspotted from the world”? *James 1:27, NKJV.* How could that even be possible? See also 1 John 2:15, 16; 2 Pet. 1:4.

Some people seem to think that if only they could move far enough away from the world, they could avoid most of its temptations. Though there’s some truth to that, and we should try to avoid temptation as much as possible (especially those temptations we find hardest to resist), our problems and weaknesses do tend to follow us wherever we go. The problem with sin isn’t so much what is *out there*, though that certainly plays a role, as much as it is what’s *in us*, and in our hearts. That’s where the true battle is, and we will have to fight that battle no matter where we live.

It is also an interesting phenomenon that solving some problems makes those that remain seem more obvious. For example, cleaning one area of a room makes any dirt nearby stand out even more. So also with the spiritual life: “the closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty you will appear in your own eyes; for your vision will be clearer, and your imperfections will be seen in broad and distinct contrast to His perfect nature.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 64.

Let’s not have Ellen G. White say here what she isn’t saying. She isn’t saying that the closer we get to Jesus the faultier we actually become. She continues: “The more our sense of need drives us to Him and to the word of God, the more exalted views we shall have of His character, and the more fully we shall reflect His image.”—*Steps to Christ*, p. 65.

Real religion leads a person to “hunger and thirst” for a deeper experience (*Matt. 5:6*). Jesus spent adequate time alone with His heavenly Father in order to know His will. Yet, He never shut Himself off from people. He went to where the people were. His “food” was reaching out to the needy, breaking down barriers of prejudice, and sharing the good news of eternal life (*John 4:28–35*).

Despite the fact that Jesus and the earliest Christians had a diet and lifestyle quite different from the Gentile world around them, these practices never kept them from sharing their faith. They went everywhere, and the gospel spread throughout the empire and became firmly planted, even in such centers of corruption and wickedness as Rome.
**Further Study:** Ellen G. White, “The Test of Discipleship,” pp. 59–63, in *Steps to Christ*.

“The law is God’s great moral looking glass. Man is to compare his words, his spirit, his actions with the Word of God.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 935.

“Instead of releasing man from obedience, it is faith, and faith only, that makes us partakers of the grace of Christ, which enables us to render obedience.

“As Jesus was in human nature, so God means His followers to be. In His strength we are to live the life of purity and nobility which the Saviour lived.”—Ellen G. White, *Our Father Cares*, p. 69.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Though we have been told it would be to our advantage to move away (if possible) from worldly places, why is that not the ultimate answer to the problems of sin and temptation? How far would we have to go in order to be away from any kind of temptation at all? What is the only answer for sin and temptation, regardless of where we live?

2. Police were trying to place electronic eavesdropping devices in an office where they suspected criminals were working. The only problem: vicious Dobermans surrounded the compound. So, the police, each night, would feed the dogs hamburgers. At first they would toss about five or six between the bars. Before long, the dogs were not only eating the burgers out of the officers’ hands, but they were licking the officers’ hands when done. Thus, with the guard dogs tamed, the police were able to infiltrate and plant the devices. What lesson can we take from this story about how we, if we are not careful, can let our own guards down?

3. Think more about this idea of being a doer of the Word as opposed to just believing the Word. What is, in the end, the real difference between the two?

4. What do you say to those who claim that because of the grace of Christ, they are free from the law? What do they often really mean by that, and how would you answer them?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** James 1:25

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** (1) Recognize that the root of temptation comes from his or her own lusts and desires. (2) Discern that God’s ways are better than his or her own natural ways. (3) Admit that, of ourselves, it is impossible to resist temptation, but with God, all things are possible.

**Feel:** Experience the power in overcoming temptation that God makes available through His Holy Spirit and His Word, the Bible.

**Do:** Choose to abandon “the old man of sin” and become a new person in Christ.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Recognizing the Real Problem

- **A** Are you tempted by things that have no real attraction for you? Why, or why not?
- **B** How can we be certain that it is better to follow God’s revealed way than our own natural desires?

II. Feel: Responding to Sin’s Control

- **A** Do you find it easier to fall into temptation when you are alone or when you are with someone else? Why?
- **B** Describe your feelings after you are able, with God’s help, to resist a temptation that in the past had entrapped you.

III. Do: Cast Off the Old, Put On the New

- **A** Have you (or has someone you know) experienced a positive change in your spiritual life? How could you tell that a change had taken place? What was different?
- **B** How can we “cast off” our old ways and become new men and women in Christ? What can we do to ensure a lasting life change?

**Summary:** Those who are saved by grace will be doers of God’s Word because they have placed their faith fully in Him. The root of temptation comes from our own lusts and desires, but God’s Word is an effective weapon against sin. Satan attempts to make sin appear attractive, but when we are fully surrendered to God we will accept that His ways are best, and we will become new people in Him.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *James 1:25*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Those who are saved by grace will be doers of God’s Word, because they have placed their faith fully in Him.

**Just for Teachers:** This week we will explore how God’s ways are always best and how being a “doer” of God’s Word brings many blessings. Important points to emphasize: (1) recognizing that temptation springs from our lusts and desires and (2) admitting that it is impossible on our own to resist temptation, but with God all things are possible.

**Opening Activity/Discussion:** Sunday, July 22, 2012, was the big day, and Alicia Trott was ready. For months and years, the 28-year-old nursing professor at the University of Southern Maine had been training for the famous Ironman Lake Placid athletic event.

During the grueling race, athletes from across the United States test their speed and endurance through a 2.4-mile swim in the chilly waters of Mirror Lake, followed by a demanding 112-mile bike ride over the Adirondack Mountain High Peaks, ending with a 26.2-mile run through the mountains and around the lake.

Shortly before 7:00 A.M., Alicia stepped into Mirror Lake. She, along with all the other participants, hoped to qualify for one of the 50 coveted spots for the Ironman World Championship in Kona, Hawaii.

“May this be the best day of your life!” shouted the announcer. The starting pistol fired, and more than three thousand athletes churned up the waters of Mirror Lake.

Eleven hours, forty-seven minutes, and twenty-eight seconds later, Alicia crossed the finish line. Placing third in her age category, she qualified for the world championship in Kona!

Family and friends surrounded Alicia, ecstatic at her victory and qualification for the world championship. “So, when is the Ironman in Kona?” someone asked.

“October 13,” came the answer.

October 13? Alicia’s strong heart skipped a beat. She knew that October 13, 2012, was a Saturday—the Sabbath. Although she kept silent, Alicia knew what she was going to do. She would not be going to Kona.
Consider This: Given that we are saved by grace, was there really an issue if Alicia participated in the Ironman on Sabbath? Why, or why not? What is the relationship, in this situation, of faith and grace to being a “doer” of the Word?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: The prophet Ezekiel was apparently well-known for his eloquence—so much so that word about him spread throughout the city. People told their friends and relatives, “Please come and hear the word of the Lord.” But there was a problem. Not with Ezekiel—he was a faithful watchman who warned Israel of imminent disaster if they did not change their ways (Ezek. 33:1–11). The problem was with the people. God described it to Ezekiel this way: “Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them” (vs. 32, NKJV). Despite the prophet’s warnings, Jerusalem fell (vs. 21). The people heard the warning but failed to act on it. Their experience underscores the importance of not just hearing the word of the Lord but actually choosing to do it. Jesus frequently warns against hearing but not doing (Matt. 7:21–27, Luke 8:21, John 13:17), as does the rest of the New Testament (see 1 John 3:18).

Bible Commentary

I. Seeing and Doing (Review James 1:22 with your class.)

James 1:21 describes how the Word of God, implanted in our hearts, is able to save us. We do not save ourselves; it is God’s work in us through His creative Word. Paul agrees (Rom. 10:17, 2 Cor. 4:6). In fact, the contrast in James 1:22 between hearing and doing is also made by Paul in Romans 2:13: “for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified” (NKJV). Justification is now freely given, based on faith (Rom. 3:26, 5:1), but it is ratified in the investigative judgment, and the final reward of eternal life and immortality is bestowed based on works corresponding to our faith (Matt. 16:27, 1 Pet. 1:17, Rev. 20:12, 22:12).

So, the Word is “able” to save us as long as we allow it to do its work in our hearts and lives. As James will make clear in chapter 2, faith, in the sense of mere believing, is useless to save. It must be an active faith, made manifest by good works. This manifestation of faith by works is essential not in order to save us but to reveal that God’s work of salvation is effective in us. It renders us “safe to save” in the sense of our final glorification when Jesus comes. “It is not
possible for us to drift into heaven. . . . Those who refuse to co-operate with God on earth would not co-operate with Him in heaven. It would not be safe to take them to heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 280.

**Consider This:** Salvation in all its aspects is God’s work from start to finish, as we permit Him to have His way with us. In what sense, then, is character development both His work and our work?

**II. The Law of Freedom** *(Review James 1:23–25 with your class.)*

Seventh-day Adventists have sometimes been characterized as hopeless legalists in bondage to the law. Nowadays some Seventh-day Adventists go to the opposite extreme and seem afraid even to mention the law for fear of being misunderstood. After all, can God’s law really have anything to do with freedom?

Because “all have sinned” *(Rom. 3:23)*, the law identifies us as transgressors and condemns us to death *(vs. 19, James 2:9)*. If it didn’t, it wouldn’t be doing its job. We are like prisoners on death row with the law standing guard over us, at least according to Paul *(Gal. 3:23)*. How, then, can James call the law a “law of freedom” *(James 2:12, HCSB)*? Because the law shows us our need of a Savior. Then, after we come to faith in Christ, we are justified and no longer under the law’s condemnation *(Gal. 3:24)*. We are prisoners only as long as we continue in sin. But Jesus sets us free from the fear of condemnation and “the law of sin and death” *(Rom. 8:1, 2; Heb. 2:14, 15)*.

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. Which seems to be the greater danger in your church, legalism or a lax attitude toward obedience? Why is it so hard to get the balance right?

2. It has been said that some people are so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good. Is it also possible, even for Christians, to be so earthly minded that God cannot use us?

3. Active faith includes working for the salvation of others, charitable giving, community service, and other loving acts of generosity, based on what we have received from Christ. In light of this, discuss with the class how involved your
church is in the needs of your community. What more for your community could you be doing now and for eternity?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: How can we become the people that God longs for us to be—not only hearers but doers of His Word? How does placing our faith fully in Jesus enable us to do what He asks us to do? The answer, of course, involves dying to self and becoming new creatures in Christ—to be born again. In this important application section, guide your class into understanding this vital concept.

Object Lesson: In Romans 6:6, Paul states, “our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.”

Every New Year in the country of Nicaragua, the people celebrate a tradition that illustrates Paul’s point very well. A few days before New Year’s Eve, stuffed “old men” appear around shops and homes, waiting for the big night. These effigies represent the old year. They wear men’s shirts and trousers stuffed with newspaper, straw, and other flammable material. Nestled inside are dozens of firecrackers, rockets, and other pyrotechnic wonders. As midnight approaches, these “old men” light up the Nicaraguan sky as they explode, celebrating the New Year.

Thought Questions:

What does the “old man” in Romans 6:6 represent, and how is it “crucified with Christ”? What insights about Paul’s point does the object lesson furnish? How can we become free from serving sin?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The following activity is designed to help reiterate the important concept of this week’s lesson—surrendering our old, sinful selves to God so that He can enable us to be not only hearers but doers of His Word.

Activity: Make a list, either mentally or written out on paper, of the sins that you struggle with and would like to remove from your life. Then—if working with a paper list—cut it into paper strips and read each one aloud, asking God to remove these besetting sins from your life. (Alternately, if doing this activity without a paper list, confess each sin before God.) Tell Him that you want to be not only a hearer but a doer of His Word. Rip the strips into shreds and toss them away.
Love and the Law

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: James 2:1–13; Mark 2:16; Lev. 19:17, 18; Rom. 13:8–10; John 12:48.

Memory Text: “For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13, NASB).

We know the story well; the question is, How well has it sunk in? First a priest, then a Levite, going from Jerusalem to Jericho, encountered a man lying half dead in the road. Though both just finished their religious duties, neither was, apparently, able to link those duties with any sense of obligation to the injured soul, and so each kept walking. Finally, a Samaritan, a half-pagan, happened by, took pity on the man, bandaged his wounds, and paid for his stay at an inn where he could recover. He also promised to pay the innkeeper for anything else the man might need (see Luke 10:30–37).

Jesus told that story in response to a question by a lawyer about eternal life. Rather than tell the lawyer, “Try harder!” or “Do more!” Jesus painted a picture of love in action. That is, we are to love even in potentially dangerous or unpleasant circumstances, and we are to love even those we don’t like.

Though it’s not easy, and often goes against our nature, true love involves a substantial amount of risk and calls us to tear down barriers that separate us as people, both outside and (especially) inside the church. This week we’ll see what James has to say about this crucial truth.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 1.
The Man in Gold

Read James 2:1–4. It is, among other things, a study in contrasts. One person is rich, well dressed, and, apparently, important, while the other is poor, shabbily dressed, and, apparently, a nobody. One receives the utmost courtesy, the other disdain. One is offered a comfortable, prominent seat; the other is told to stand off to the side or find a place on the floor.

The description is not a very pretty one, especially because it is depicted (potentially, at least) as happening in a worship service! The Greek word for “gathering” or “assembly” in verse 2 is *synagŏgē*, probably an early reference to a Jewish-Christian Sabbath service, many of which would have taken place in private homes (see Acts 18:7, 8).

In the Greco-Roman culture of the first century, one’s public image and position were all important. Those with wealth, education, or political influence were expected to use these assets to enhance their reputation and benefit their personal interests. Any large gift to public or religious projects obligated the receiver to reciprocate to the giver in some way. Kindness was repaid with loyalty and generosity with public appreciation. The few upper-class people who attended Christian services expected privileged treatment. To ignore these expectations would have brought disgrace on the church. A failure to be “politically correct” or to reject societal values was a recipe for offense and a cause for division.

Read Mark 2:16 and Luke 11:43. What societal expectations are involved? How do they conflict with the principles of the gospel?

It is not a sin to be poor or rich, but one barometer of our Christian experience is how we treat people who are different from us in age, wealth, education, and even religious convictions. We tend to give more respect to those we perceive as “above” us on the social ladder and less respect to those “below.” We must remember that it is easy to get pulled into convention even though God calls us to be different (see Rom. 12:2).

Let’s face it: we might not be as open and as crass about it as James depicted, but are we not all easily susceptible to playing favorites? How can we learn to recognize this problem in ourselves and, ultimately, deal with it?
Class Struggle

As every literature evangelist knows, very often those who have the least are willing to sacrifice the most to buy Christian books. Well-to-do neighborhoods tend to be tough territory to sell books in, because the people who live there may be content with what they have and so very often do not feel their need of God as much as those who have less. The same phenomenon is also detectable on a much larger scale: the church often has grown the fastest in places and periods of economic and social stress. After all, aren’t even those individuals who are struggling with big issues often more open to the hope presented in the story of Jesus than are those who think that things are going great for them?

Read James 2:5, 6. How does James expand here on what he wrote in the four previous verses?

Judging from this passage, it would seem that there were major issues in the church among the rich and the poor. God chose the poor who, though rejected by the world, were “rich in faith,” while the rich used their wealth to “oppress” the poor. This problem, that of the rich exploiting the poor, was an ever-present reality at that time. Even worse, Roman law codified discrimination against the poor and in favor of the rich.

“Persons of lower class, who were thought to act from economic self-interest, could not bring accusations against persons of higher class, and the laws prescribed harsher penalties for lower-class persons convicted of offenses than for offenders from the higher class.”—Craig S. Keener, The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 694.

Read James 2:7. What important point does James make here about the impact of this bad behavior?

Their bad behavior is really blasphemy against “the good name” of Jesus. Bad actions are bad enough in and of themselves; what makes them worse is when those who profess the name of Jesus do them. And even worse would be those who, in the name of Jesus, use their wealth or power to gain advantage over others in the churches, which often leads to divisions and quarrels. Hence, how careful we should be that our words and actions match the “good name” we associate ourselves with.
Loving Our Neighbors

Read James 2:8, 9, along with Leviticus 19:17, 18 and Matthew 5:43–45. What crucial message are we being given here?

James calls God’s law “the royal law” (James 2:8) because it is the law of the “KING OF KINGS” (Rev. 19:16). The law of His kingdom is given in detail in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), which includes the first of nine references in the New Testament to loving our neighbor.

Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:43 suggest the way Leviticus 19:18 was understood at the time. For example, the immediately preceding commands in Leviticus use apparent synonyms for one’s neighbor: they prohibit hating one’s “brother” (Lev. 19:17) and holding a grudge against one’s fellow Israelite (Lev. 19:18).

Most likely, some interpreted these commands to mean it would be fine to be angry with or hate someone who was not an Israelite, because he or she is not specifically mentioned in these Levitical texts. After all, people who were not Israelites were also generally considered to be enemies. We now know that such an attitude existed in the Qumran community, a group of devout Jews who had separated themselves from the rest of the nation. They were taught to hate “the children of darkness” and “the men of perdition” (The Community Rule 1QS 1:10; 9:21, 22), labels which apparently included not only foreigners but even Israelites who had rejected the community’s teachings.

“Sin is the greatest of all evils, and it is ours to pity and help the sinner. There are many who err, and who feel their shame and their folly. They are hungry for words of encouragement. They look upon their mistakes and errors, until they are driven almost to desperation. These souls we are not to neglect. If we are Christians, we shall not pass by on the other side, keeping as far as possible from the very ones who most need our help. When we see human beings in distress, whether through affliction or through sin, we shall never say, This does not concern me.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 504.

Jesus’ life is the greatest example we’ll ever have of selfless love for the undeserving and those who didn’t love back. How can we learn to express such love for those whom we deem undeserving or who don’t love us back? Why, in the end, is complete self-surrender and death to self the only answer?
The Whole Law

Read James 2:10, 11. Now read the passages listed in the table below and classify them as either emphasizing the “whole law,” the “law of love,” or both.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whole Law</th>
<th>Law of Love</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matt. 5:18, 19</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Matt. 22:36–40</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rom. 13:8–10</td>
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<td>Gal. 3:10</td>
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<td>Gal. 5:3</td>
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<td>Gal. 5:14</td>
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It is hard for us to grasp how radical Jesus’ teaching on the law was. For devout Jews then (and for many today), one cannot really claim to keep the law without a commitment to keeping all the laws found in the books of Moses. Eventually, 613 separate laws were identified (248 positive laws and 365 negative ones).

The question put to Jesus about which law was most important (Matt. 22:36) was probably meant to trap Him. But although Jesus seems to have affirmed every “jot” (the smallest Hebrew letter, Matt. 5:18) as important, He also taught that love to God and love to our neighbor were the most important commandments because they sum up all the others.

Jesus’ teaching also shows that obedience cannot be done in a vacuum. It is always relational, or it is meaningless. In other words, if I tithe because I am afraid of being lost if I don’t, it is not relational. On the other hand, if I tithe out of gratitude for how much God has given me, then my actions are based on my relationship with God.

Jesus also spoke about the “weightier matters” of the law as being “judgment, mercy, and faith” (Matt. 23:23). All of these revolve around relationships too—with God and with other people. James is, therefore, not saying anything different than did Jesus or Paul: any transgression of God’s law damages to some extent our relationship to God and to others. So, it is not a question of having enough good deeds to outweigh our bad deeds. That is obedience in a vacuum, acting as if it all revolves around us. Instead, by knowing Jesus, we begin to direct our attention away from ourselves and toward devotion to God and service to others.

How much of your obedience comes from your love for God and others and how much from a sense of obligation? Is working from obligation always wrong though? Perhaps you don’t feel love for a person but help him or her only because you know you are supposed to. What, if anything, is wrong with that?
Nothing is clearer than the teaching that we will be judged by the law based on what we have done, whether for good or for evil. At the same time, too, the Bible is also clear that through faith in Jesus, we are covered by His righteousness.

This covering entails two aspects: forgiveness (justification) and obedience (sanctification). “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him” (Col. 2:6, NKJV); and “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27, NKJV).

It is often said that we will be judged based not only on what we have done but also on what we have not done. While this is true, many have a wrong idea of what this means. It is not about doing more things. That is a recipe for discouragement and self-defeat. Notice how James describes it in the first half of verse 13: “judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy” (NKJV). Again, it is a relational definition of “doing.”

If we thought about it long enough, we could become so paranoid about the judgment that we would give up in despair. But that is not what it means to “fear God . . . for the hour of His judgment has come” (Rev. 14:7, NKJV)! Instead, we must always trust in the righteousness of Jesus, whose merits alone are our only hope in the judgment. It’s our love for God, who has saved us by His righteousness, that should spur us on to do all the things that He has called us to do.

At the same time, the warnings in the Bible about the judgment are there for our good, so that we do not lull ourselves into a false sense of security. James says, “Mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13, NKJV). We must remember his words, especially when we deal with those who have fallen into the worst of sins.

Have you ever messed up really badly, and when you expected only condemnation and judgment, you were given mercy, grace, and forgiveness instead? How did you feel? How can you make sure that you don’t forget that the next time someone else messes up badly?

“God has acknowledged you before men and angels as His child; pray that you may do no dishonor to the ‘worthy name by which ye are called.’ James 2:7. God sends you into the world as His representative. In every act of life you are to make manifest the name of God. . . . This you can do only through the acceptance of the grace and righteousness of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 107.

“Through Christ, Justice is enabled to forgive without sacrificing one jot of its exalted holiness.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 936.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Gandhi summed up the thinking of many when he said, “I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.” Why, unfortunately, is it not hard to understand why he said that? And though, of course, it’s so easy to look at what others have done in the name of Christ, why must we instead look at ourselves and at what we have done in the name of Jesus? How well do we reveal Him to the world around us?

2. Is your local church a place where people feel valued and respected regardless of their background, social standing, idiosyncrasies, and so on? If not, what can you do to make a difference?

3. What are some of the traditions and social norms in your country that are contrary to the principles of the biblical faith? What are some overt ones, and what are some of the more subtle ones? After identifying what they are, how can you learn to transcend them so that you are able to live out and reveal the principles of the gospel in a way that could show others that Jesus offers us all a better way of life?

4. It’s one thing to love your neighbor, but what does it mean to love God? In class, discuss what it means to love God, why we love Him, and how we express that love.

5. “Mercy triumphs over judgment.” What does that mean on a practical level, such as when we have to deal with those who do wrong? What kind of balance is needed there?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** Romans 13:8–10

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Understand what the law of Christ is and how it applies to his or her life today; and discern the important and responsible role Christ has given to him or her as His ambassadors.

**Feel:** Sense the need for Christ’s wisdom and guidance in fulfilling this role.

**Do:** Resolve with Christ’s help to turn his or her attention away from self toward loving and serving others as He would.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Comprehending the Law of Love

A. What is the law of love, and what motivates our actions? How are the two related?

B. Why does Christ call us to be His ambassadors, and what responsibilities does that entail?

II. Feel: Independence Versus Dependence

A. How does being dependent upon Christ change our focus from ourselves to others? In what ways are we dependent upon Christ each day?

B. Which is easier—to be judgmental or to show mercy? Does it vary? Why? What should be the motivation for showing mercy?

III. Do: Accepting Christ’s Grace and Righteousness

A. How do good works reveal the reality of our faith?

B. In what ways does Christ’s righteousness in your life affect the lives of those with whom you come into contact each day?

**Summary:** The balance between judgment and mercy is revealed when the concept of love and the law is understood. It’s our love for God, who has saved us by His righteousness, that spurs us on to do the things He has called us to do. It is the doers of His law of love who will be justified. Christ has called us to be His ambassadors, revealing in our lives His love and mercy to the world.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: Romans 13:8–10

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: In fulfilling God’s law of love, we direct our attention away from self and toward devotion to God and service to others.

Just for Teachers: Too often, when the subject of God’s law is approached, self is made the focus in one of two ways: (1) I must be good, and that goodness is shown when I keep the commandments; or (2) I don’t have to do anything, because Jesus did it all for me. Both approaches emphasize the wrong person: me. Instead, fulfilling the law is outwardly focused, shown by our love to God and to others (see Rom. 13:8–10). Share the story below with the class and guide the discussion in such a way that your students will understand the key concept for this week’s lesson.

Opening Activity: Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz, a German diplomat in Denmark, informed his friend Hans Hedtoft, a leading Danish Social Democrat, of a secret plan. Following the German invasion of Denmark, 7,500 Jews would be rounded up and deported during the Jewish New Year’s Eve—Rosh Hashanah—October 1, 1943.

Hedtoft immediately informed the head of the Jewish community and the chief rabbi. Plans were quickly made to hide or evacuate all Danish Jews. Duckwitz made a secret and dangerous journey to Sweden to discuss with Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson the possibility of Jews finding refuge in Denmark’s neutral northern neighbor. Additionally, at the risk of their own lives, Danes did everything possible to support their Jewish friends and neighbors.

As a result of Duckwitz’s passing on secret information to the right sources, as well as the actions of the Danish people and the Swedish government, it is estimated that 99 percent of all Danish Jews survived (“10 People Who Saved Jews During World War Two,” Listverse, Nov. 6, 2008, http://listverse.com/2008/11/06/10-people-who-saved-jews-during-world-war-two/).

Consider This: What is the law of Christ, and how did Duckwitz (and the Danes) fulfill this law?
Just for Teachers: Theologians sometimes talk about the different “uses” or roles of the law as we find them in Scripture and as taught by Luther and Calvin: (1) civil law to restrain or curb sin; (2) moral law to convict sinners of their sin and need of a Savior; and (3) the law as revelation of God’s will for the Christian’s life, enabling him or her to grow in grace. This “third use of the law” is sometimes artificially restricted to the teaching on law in the New Testament. But Jesus, Paul, and the other apostles base their teaching on the moral laws found in the Old Testament, especially the Ten Commandments. The “law of Christ” is not different from this moral law, as if Jesus put some new law in place of the old. After all, He was the One who spoke the law from Mount Sinai and gave Moses other laws to foreshadow the coming of Christ (ceremonial law) and illustrate the application of the moral law for the nation (civil law) and in a variety of individual circumstances (moral and health laws). What Paul refers to in Galatians 6:2 as the “law of Christ” is his elaboration on the procedure given by Jesus for handling conflict in the church (Matt. 18:15–17; compare Matt. 5:23, 24). By applying these counsels of Jesus and Paul, “the disease is healed. They [the restored church members] are fully set to do good to one another. This is the fulfilling of the law of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, The Upward Look, p. 106.

Bible Commentary

I. Jesus and the Law of Love (Review Romans 13:8–10 with your class.)

Very often, when Jesus talked about the law, He emphasized the foundation on which it is all based—love. But love doesn’t exist in a vacuum. It, too, is a gift of God, given to be shared with God and with one another (Deut. 6:5, Lev. 19:18). But notice how Jesus redefines this love in John 13:34, 35. It is not really a new commandment, but, in another sense, it is totally new because Jesus’ own example shows how deep and wide and high and broad God’s law of love is. Can any higher definition of love be imagined than that which Jesus exemplified?

Being like Jesus is not an end in itself and certainly not a means of salvation. Being like Jesus is important because we are His ambassadors in this world (see 2 Cor. 5:20; compare Acts 4:13). Jesus wants to love people through us. From the beginning, God has called His people to stand out from the world, to be “in the world, not of the world.” Being baptized in the name of Jesus means that we bear that
name because we now belong to Him. In short, to “witness” means that our words and actions are to be a testimony of God’s love to those around us. We are called by “a worthy name” (James 2:7) and called to live up to that name.

Questions for Discussion:

1. James 2:9 mentions that one function of the law is to “convict” us when we break the law. (Other ways in which the Greek word could be translated include “expose,” “punish,” “convince,” and “discipline.”) How does this work in practice? (See Rom. 7:9; compare Rom. 3:20; 5:13, 20.) Can we be “convicted” but not convinced?

2. In preparation for the class, read the chapter “Facing Life’s Record,” in The Great Controversy, and note the elements of justice and mercy. During the lesson study, ask class members what their understanding of the judgment is and how they feel about it. Then have someone read 1 John 4:17–19 and discuss it. Ask class members when they last heard a sermon on the judgment. As a Sabbath School class, brainstorm and quote as many Bible verses as you can think of about the judgment. What picture does it suggest? Share with them what you noted from “Facing Life’s Record” and ask them how similar or different it is to their picture of the judgment.

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: In the Bible Commentary section, the statement was made, “Being like Jesus is important because we are His ambassadors in this world.” This point is based on 2 Corinthians 5:20: “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (NKJV). How does being an “ambassador for Christ” fulfill God’s law of love? Are we all called to be ambassadors for Christ, and if so, what does that mean for our lives today? Read and discuss how the following quotations on the qualities of an effective diplomat apply to the life and mission of an ambassador for Christ.
Activity: What does it mean to be an ambassador? In the purest sense, as one dictionary defines it, an ambassador is “a diplomatic official of the highest rank, sent by one sovereign or state to another as its resident representative.”

When we are baptized, we are acknowledging allegiance to Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords. He then sends us as His ambassadors to be His “resident representatives,” living in this world on His diplomatic mission, representing Him and His kingdom and presenting His message of reconciliation (see 2 Cor. 5:20).


François de Callières, an eighteenth-century author on foundational diplomacy, is recorded in the same source as having made a similar comment: “The good diplomatist must have an observant mind, a gift of application which rejects being diverted by pleasures or frivolous amusements, a sound judgment which takes the measure of things as they are, and which goes straight to the goal by the shortest and most natural paths without wandering into meaningless refinements and subtleties. . . . The diplomatist must be quick, resourceful, a good listener, courteous and agreeable.”—Pages 87, 88.

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Drawing from the application discussion above, encourage the students to reflect on what it means in personal, practical terms to fulfill the law of Christ by being an ambassador for Him.

Activity: Invite class members to work together to create a poster titled “Ambassadors for Christ,” listing qualities of effective ambassadors, as well as a mission statement. Include pictures or drawings of class members, then place the poster in a visible area each Sabbath. Members may also make a smaller, individual poster or write an “Ambassador for Christ” job description, including a mission statement. Encourage individuals to place their poster/job description where they can see it often, serving as a reminder of their important mission. Alternately, to do this exercise without supplies, start a discussion on what it means to be an ambassador for Christ.
Faith That Works

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: James 2:14–26; Rom. 3:27, 28; Titus 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:2; Rom. 4:1–5; Josh. 2:1–21.

Memory Text: “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26, NKJV).

He was a successful doctor and an elder in a high-profile church of several hundred members. He was a major giver to the church’s big projects, and his generosity encouraged others to be more sacrificial. The doctor was also a great preacher. When the pastor was gone, he spoke, and everyone looked forward to his messages, which were theologically deep, heartfelt, and spiritual.

Then one day the truth came out. The doctor’s absence at church the previous Sabbath had not been because he was on vacation, as many had thought. No, he was found dead in his beachfront condo from an overdose of recreational narcotics.

Worse was the shocking revelation that in his bedroom were dozens of pornographic videos and magazines. The church was devastated, especially the young people, who had looked up to him as a role model. Though we must leave all judgment in God’s hands, the doctor’s actions certainly call into question the reality of his faith.

The point? Though we are saved by faith, we cannot separate faith and works in the life of a Christian, a crucial but often misunderstood truth expounded upon in the book of James.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 8.
Dead Faith

“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?” (James 2:14, NKJV).

How do we understand this verse in the context of salvation by faith alone? Read James 2:15–17; compare Rom. 3:27, 28; Eph. 2:8, 9.

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Faith without works. James 2:15, 16 gives a vivid illustration of this kind of phony faith. As we have already seen, obedience in the book of James is relational. So, how do we relate to a brother or sister in the church who is in need? Words are not enough. We cannot simply say, “Go in peace. God will provide,” when God has provided us the means to help that brother or sister.

Of course, needs can be endless, and we cannot meet them all. But there is a principle called “the power of one.” We are the hands and feet of Jesus, and we can help others one person at a time. In fact, that is how Jesus usually worked. In Mark 5:22–34, a man whose daughter was dying appealed to Him for help. On the way, a woman approached from behind and touched Jesus’ garment. After the healing, Jesus could have gone on and the woman would have left rejoicing. But Jesus knew that she needed more than physical healing. So, He stopped and took the time so that she could learn to be a witness for Jesus, to share as well as to receive. Then He said the same words we have in James 2:16: “Go in peace” (Mark 5:34, NIV). But, unlike the words in James, in this case, they actually meant something!

When we recognize a need but do nothing about it, we have missed an opportunity to exercise faith. By doing so, our faith gets a little weaker and a little deader. This is because faith without works dies. James describes it even more starkly: faith is dead already. If it were alive, the works would be there. If they are not, what good is it? At the end of verse 14, James asks a question about this kind of workless and worthless faith. It comes across far more strongly in Greek than it does in most translations: “That faith cannot save him, can it?” The answer James expects us to give is clearly “No.”

How can we learn to better express our faith through our works while protecting ourselves from the deception that our works save us?
**Saving Faith**

**Read** James 2:18. What is the main point James is making? How do we show our faith by our works?

James uses a common rhetorical technique whereby a potential objector comes forward. In this case, the objector tries to drive a wedge between faith and works by suggesting that as long as a person has one or the other, he or she is fine. But the whole point James is trying to make is that Christians cannot hope to be saved by faith if there are no corresponding works: “Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works” (vs. 18, NKJV).

The key point is that not just any faith will save. Genuine faith, *saving* faith, is characterized by good works. Likewise, works are only good works if they spring from faith. Faith and works are inseparable. Like two sides of a coin, one cannot exist without the other. Also like a coin, one side is the head and the other the tail. Faith comes first and then leads the way to corresponding works.

**Consider** Paul’s attitude toward works in Ephesians 2:10, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 1 Timothy 5:25, and Titus 2:14. Why are good works so important?

Paul was not against good works per se. He was against works as a means of salvation (see Gal. 2:16). In fact, Paul said that those who rely on works of the law to be saved are under a curse, because no one who tries to be saved by keeping the law actually succeeds in keeping it (Gal. 3:10). Obedience is possible only through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

“If man cannot, by any of his good works, merit salvation, then it must be wholly of grace, received by man as a sinner because he receives and believes in Jesus. It is wholly a free gift. Justification by faith is placed beyond controversy. And all this controversy is ended, as soon as the matter is settled that the merits of fallen man in his good works can never procure eternal life for him.”—Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 20.

**Why should the great news that we cannot work our way to heaven motivate us, out of a love for God, to do all the good works that we can?**
The “Faith” of Demons

If works are absent, there is only one other way to “prove” the genuineness of one’s faith: by orthodoxy. If I believe the right things, then I must have faith, right?

**Read** 2 Corinthians 4:2; 1 Timothy 2:4; James 5:19, 20; 1 Peter 1:22; and 1 John 3:18, 19. What do these verses tell us about how important knowing truth is?

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There is no question that an intellectual knowledge of truth has its place, a very important place. Yet, that knowledge, in and of itself, is not sufficient to prove that a person has saving faith.

**What** warning is given to us in James 2:19 about a false concept of what true faith is?

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The most fundamental statement of faith in the Old Testament is Deuteronomy 6:4: “‘Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!’” (*NASB*). Known as the Shema (because this is the Hebrew word it begins with), this verse neatly summarizes belief in one God. Every other biblical teaching flows from this cardinal truth.

But even the demons believe this truth. In fact, they know it! And yet, what good does it do them? They tremble in God’s presence, as they did also when confronted by Jesus and commanded by Him to come out of their victims (*Mark 3:11, 5:7*).

An intellectual faith that has no effect on how we act is useless; in fact, it is the same faith that demons have, demons who are actively at work to deceive us with false doctrines and lies. As with Israel at the time of Jesus, demons will encourage people to believe their deceptions based on their victims’ desires to hold on to impure and unrighteous behavior: “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils” (*1 Tim. 4:1*).

Faith must be manifested in our lives or else it is not saving faith; it is, instead, “the faith of demons,” and such a faith won’t save us any more than it will save them.
Abraham’s Faith

Read James 2:21–24 and compare it with Romans 4:1–5, 22–24. How is the faith of Abraham described in these texts, and on what is justification based?

Interestingly, both James and Paul quote Genesis 15:6, but they seem to arrive at opposite conclusions. According to James, Abraham was justified by works, but Paul seems, in Romans 4:2, to deny this possibility explicitly (compare vs. 24).

However, the immediate context of Romans 4 has to do with whether circumcision is necessary for justification; that is, whether Gentiles had to become Jews in order to be saved (Rom. 3:28–30). Paul shows that Abraham’s faith, not his “work” of being circumcised, was the basis of justification, because Abraham believed even before he was circumcised. Abraham was circumcised later as an outward sign of his inward faith (Rom. 4:9–11). But works alone, even circumcision, are not sufficient for justification, because only those “who also walk in the steps of that faith [of] our father Abraham” (Rom. 4:12, NKJV) will be justified.

Is this emphasis really so different from that of James? Paul even goes on to use the same “proof” of Abraham’s faith that James does (see Rom. 4:17–21). Abraham believed God could resurrect Isaac because He “gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist” (vs. 17, NASB; compare Heb. 11:17–19). Paul also defines saving faith as “being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform” (Rom. 4:21, NKJV). In short, faith that trusts God to keep His promises and obediently relies on His word is saving faith. These works are not “works of law” but “works of faith.” Or, as James puts it: “Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?” (2:22, NKJV; emphasis added).

Many stress the importance of faith and works, but even this separates the two, at least to some extent. True faith is “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6, NKJV). Good works are not just the outward sign of faith; they are the outworking of faith. Abraham’s faith in the God who created all life motivated him to obey God in offering up his only son, Isaac. According to James, it is by obedience that faith is made perfect.

What is your own experience with how works (or the lack thereof) impact your faith?
The Faith of Rahab

“Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?” (James 2:25, NKJV). Read Joshua 2:1–21. How do we understand this example, again in the context of salvation by faith alone?

According to Hebrews 11:31, the inhabitants of Jericho did not believe. Most modern translations describe them as being “disobedient.” The inhabitants of Jericho knew about Israel’s signal victories over the Midianites and the Amorites; so, they were well aware of the power of Israel’s God. God’s judgment on Israel at Baalpeor taught the people in Jericho of His holiness as well as His abhorrence of idolatry and immorality: “All these events were known to the inhabitants of Jericho, and there were many who shared Rahab’s conviction, though they refused to obey it.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 492.

Rahab was not saved because of her dishonesty but in spite of it. She believed in the true God, and she acted on that faith by protecting the spies that Joshua sent out. There were also conditions: she obeyed the messengers’ direction to hang the scarlet cord out her window, which was reminiscent of the blood sprinkled around the doorposts of the Israelite homes at the time of their Passover deliverance (see Exod. 12:21–24). While far from perfect, Rahab’s life is a model of faith that shows the reality of God’s forgiveness and grace for everyone willing to step out in faith and to trust God with the results.

Read James 2:26. How does this text summarize the relationship between faith and works?

Just as the body is only a corpse without the breath of life, so faith without works is dead. In addition, without real faith any “obedience” we might try to render would only amount to “dead works” (Heb. 6:1, 9:14), which are meaningless in the sight of God.

A harlot saved by faith? If that were the only example of salvation by faith we had, what false conclusions could we draw from it? Nevertheless, what hope can you take from her story for yourself?
Further Study: “When self is put entirely away, then you can obtain a new and rich experience, you will discern your own imperfections as you lie low at the foot of the cross, and as you view the perfections of Christ, self will sink into insignificance.

“Christ will appear to the discerning eye the perfection of attractive loveliness; then His mould will be upon mind and heart, and will be revealed in the character. The impress of the divine mind should be made upon the heart, and manifested in the life. Come to Jesus in your need, pray in living faith, hold fast to the hand of divine power, believe, only believe, and you will see the salvation of God. If you will be taught, God will teach you; if you will be led, He will lead you to fountains of living waters.”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies to Southern Africa, p. 26.

Discussion Questions:

1. Read over James 2 in one quick sitting. What is the essential message there for those who trust only in the merits of Christ’s righteousness for their salvation?

2. Some argue that James talks about faith and works without reference to Paul, and that we should interpret James on his own terms. What’s wrong with that kind of thinking? Why, especially in this case, is it important to keep in mind what other texts say about faith and works? In fact, in the heat of the Protestant Reformation, Catholic apologists often ran to the book of James to defend the Roman Church against the Protestants. Why does this show us how important it is to build our doctrines on all the texts we have at our disposal?

3. It is often said that faith and works should be kept in “balance.” In light of this lesson, do you agree with that statement? Discuss your answer with others in the class.

4. Why do we find no mention in James (or the rest of the New Testament) of Abraham’s failure of faith in connection with Ishmael or about Rahab’s lying? What does this fact teach us about what it means to be covered by Christ’s righteousness?
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** James 2:14–26

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** (1) Realize that good works are a natural result of genuine faith; (2) discern that belief is not the same as faith; and (3) recognize that the relationship between faith and works is like the body and the spirit—integrated into one.

**Feel:** Experience the assurance that comes from trusting God to keep His promises and obediently relying on His Word in saving faith.

**Do:** Accept the miracle of God’s re-creative power whereby He gives him or her the faith and Spirit-led obedience to do His will.

**Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Understanding Faith That Works

A. What is the difference between works as an “outward sign” of faith and the “outworking” of faith? Give examples of each.

B. What is true love, and how is it revealed?

C. Is it possible to divide faith and good works? What is faith without good works? What are works without faith?

II. Feel: Experiencing God’s Assurance

A. True or False: “No one who tries to be saved by keeping the law actually succeeds in keeping it.” *(See Gal. 3:10.)* Explain your answer.

B. Why is it that good works come naturally to those who have true faith?

III. Do: Accepting God’s Gift of Active Faith

A. How can one experience the difference between belief and faith?

B. Explain how “doing good” is an exercise of faith.

**Summary:** Faith that works can be a somewhat difficult concept to grasp. Some want to separate faith and works, but genuine, saving faith is characterized by good works. We can never be saved by our works, but without them our faith is dead. Words and actions go together, and faith reveals itself in works. An intellectual faith that has no effect on how we act is useless. Good works are not just the outward sign of faith; they are the outworking of faith.
Learning Cycle

**STEP 1—Motivate**

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *James 2:21–26*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** “Good works” focus on others and stem from the outworking of faith rather than on being just the outward sign of faith.

**Just for Teachers:** At least as early as the book of James, we see that human beings have struggled with the false dichotomy of faith or works, love or law, and mercy or justice as being the way to happiness and salvation. In this lesson, we will see how good works come naturally to those who have true faith.

**Opening Activity:** It was a revolutionary day—June 25, 1967. For the first time ever, 400 million people in 31 countries were simultaneously brought together via satellite during the first live global television link. Titled *Our World*, the live, two-and-a-half-hour TV special featured performers from around the world, with the most memorable saved for the closing act. Based in a London studio, Britain’s famous foursome—the Beatles—rocked the world, telling how all problems could be solved: “It’s easy. All you need is love. . . . Love is all you need.”— “Our World” (TV Special), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_World_(TV_special).

Nearly half a century later, the words still echo on airwaves and brainwaves, and continue making theological waves. “Love (and/or faith) is all you need,” say some. Others counter, “What about works?” Thus, the age-old question of how one is saved rages on.

**Consider This:** Are there times in life when all you need is love? If so, when are those times, and how is love revealed? Are there times when more than just love is needed? Give examples. What about salvation—is love all we need, or is there more to it than that? Explain. What is true love, and how is it revealed?

**STEP 2—Explore**

**Just for Teachers:** In Paul’s day, many of his countrymen flaunted circumcision as a badge of righteousness. It served as “proof” of one’s belief in God and membership in the covenant community of Israel (*Gen. 17:10–14, Exod. 12:48*). But it also meant that many felt no need of faith in Christ or forgiveness through His blood, because God had
provided the temple sacrifices to atone for sin (see Lev. 1:4; 4:20, 26, 35; 5:6; 6:7, et cetera).

Think, in turn, about similar behavior that distinguishes us as Seventh-day Adventists. We keep the Sabbath from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday. We abstain from harmful substances like tobacco, alcohol, and harmful drugs. From what we eat to what we wear, we bear a living testimony of our faith. But might these practices, as good and important as they are, also run the risk of becoming merely “badges of righteousness”? How can we avoid falling into the trap of making them a means of salvation? Ask the class about the role of attitude in the Christian life. Is there a place for taking pride in the good things we do? Why, or why not? (See Luke 17:7–10.)

I. The Source and Goal of Righteousness (Review James 2:20–26 with your class.)

Abraham, as the “father” of Israel, was the prime example of righteousness. Being the “quarry” or source from which Israel was dug, he was the natural authority to look to (Isa. 51:1, 2) to learn about obedience. It was natural to think of circumcision as the all-important proof of following in his footsteps. But, in fact, circumcision came as a result of believing (Rom. 4:10, 11).

As both Paul and James point out, obedience itself was not the most important element, but Abraham’s faith—faith that God would enable Sarah to give birth to the promised son (Rom. 4:19–21), faith willing even to give back that miracle son as an offering (James 2:21, 22), believing that God could even raise him from the dead (Heb. 11:19). Both James and Paul even quote the same verse in Genesis to prove this point (Gen. 15:6; compare Rom. 4:3, James 2:23). (Contrast this biblical perspective with the understanding of the Jews about Abraham as their father in John 8:39.) The Greek word used to describe the man in James 2:20 is kene, which literally means “empty.” Ironically, most versions translate this in intellectual terms (“foolish” or “vain”) despite the fact that James is arguing against an intellectual faith. The more likely allusion is to a man devoid of the Spirit of God and ripe for demonic control.

Jesus describes this situation in Matthew 12:43–45. When a person decides to change and leave off the sinful way of life (epitomized in the parable by an unclean spirit leaving the person), a void is created. The void must be filled by the Spirit of God if the change is ultimately to be for the better. Otherwise, as Jesus warns, the final result may be
even worse, as it was with those who refused to accept Jesus. We could even be deceived by demons helping us to feign piety: “The same evil spirit that tempted Christ in the wilderness, and that possessed the maniac of Capernaum, controlled the unbelieving Jews. But with them he assumed an air of piety, seeking to deceive them as to their motives in rejecting the Saviour. Their condition was more hopeless than that of the demoniac, for they felt no need of Christ and were therefore held fast under the power of Satan.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 256. Spiritual life is a miracle of God’s re-creative power, whereby God gives us faith and Spirit-led obedience to do His will.

The Bible indicates that faith is made perfect by works of obedience. This was true of Abraham, but it was even more true of Jesus (see Heb. 2:10; 5:8, 9), whose footsteps we are to follow (1 Pet. 2:21–24, 1 John 2:6). In what way do lifestyle choices such as Sabbath keeping and what we eat and drink prove the genuineness of our faith (or lack thereof)? How is it different from being saved by doing these things?

Questions for Discussion:

1. Have you ever felt spiritually “empty” as a result of going against your conscience? What difference does having the right doctrine make if our lifestyles don’t match our faith?
2. Why is obedience only possible through the gift and working of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:13, 14; Titus 3:5–7, 8)?
3. Discuss with the class the relative importance of practicing the truth and being guided by the Spirit. Is one more important than the other? Explain. What happens when either becomes too dominant?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Knowledge is important, but application is key; the two go hand in hand, much like faith and works. Encourage your class members to take time to analyze the truth-revealing verses below and to carefully consider the thought questions.

Thought Questions:

Which is more important, faith or obedience? Defend your answer. Can a person have faith without obedience? Or obedience without faith? True or False: “Faith is the root of all true obedience.” Explain.

In his letter to Titus, a young Greek believer, Paul explains the relationship between good works (“deeds”), mercy, and salvation in Titus 3:5, 8, NASB.
Reread the text, and answer these questions:

1. We are saved not on the basis of what, but according to what?

2. Why does Paul emphasize that this is a “trustworthy statement”?

3. Those who have believed God (faith) will be careful to do what?

4. In these verses, what does Paul say are “good and profitable”?

**STEP 4—Create**

*Just for Teachers:* The following idea works well in a group “brain-storming” session. However, individual activities resulting from the brainstorming may be assigned to individuals or couples. Stress that these works are an outworking, or a completion, of our faith in Jesus.

**Activity:** As we have seen, “faith-works” are others-oriented. Jesus invites us to exercise our faith through works that will be a blessing to others. He says:

‘Walk with me. Teach with me. Feed others with me. Wash feet with me. Also feed me. Give me water. Clothe me. Visit me.’ Follow Me! He commanded.”—“If Jesus Flew Into Town Tomorrow,” A Faith That Works.com, http://afaiththatworks.com.

Please notice that these are acts of faith, not thoughts or feelings of faith. God is interested in faith that works, not a “faith” that just thinks or feels, no matter how strong or sincere.

Brainstorm, as a class, as to how you can put your faith into action. Look at the verbs above, and consider them one by one—who could you walk with this week? Who needs to be taught about Jesus—perhaps a children’s Sabbath School class would be grateful for your help? Is there someone in need that you could feed this week? Whose feet do you need to wash at the next foot-washing opportunity? How can you and/or your class help give clean water to those who need it? Can you help clothe someone in need this week? When was the last time you visited someone who has not been to church in a while or is in the hospital or prison? Jesus bids us today to “Follow Me!”
Words hold tremendous power. “A word fitly spoken” (Prov. 25:11)—praise, poetry, stories—can shape lives in profound ways. What we say may linger for days or even years. Children, for example, absorb words like sponges. That’s why they soon speak fluently whatever language they grow up hearing. It’s also why the messages they hear about themselves may foreshadow their future success or failure. For better or worse, the communication style of parents is replicated and amplified in their children.

The written word is powerful, too, and even more lasting. Most powerful of all is God’s Word. Consider: “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Ps. 119:105); and “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (vs. 11). Jesus directed the attention of the disciples away from temporal blessings to something much more vital: “The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63).

Words can soothe and reassure or poison and contaminate. How often have you said something you wished you could take back?

This week, as we will see, James has some important words about, well, words.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 15.
Accountability

**Read** James 3:1. What important point is James making here about accountability?

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Teachers in the church and in Christian schools have an especially heavy responsibility because they shape minds and hearts in ways that will last for years. This effect includes the rippling impact they will have on many others beyond their immediate sphere of influence. The more we know, the more responsible we become for utilizing and imparting that knowledge.

At the entrance to the Tyndale House library in Cambridge, England, is a plaque reminding every scholar who enters there: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” *(Prov. 9:10)*. Man is not the measure of all things; God is, and all true education begins and ends with Him. Unfortunately, as knowledge increases, dependence on God tends to diminish. It is too often practiced and taught, for example, that science functions independently from God. Some teachers of theology, in striving for credibility, also may utilize methods that leave little or no room for faith. As a result, faith can gradually get squeezed out of the minds and hearts of both teachers and students. But as long as educating for eternity, not just for this world, is uppermost for teachers and students alike, learning will be a precious, even inspirational, endeavor.

Paul understood this responsibility, for he trained and ordained leaders in the churches he raised up *(Acts 14:23; compare Titus 1:5)*. He even gave instructions to Timothy to guard God’s flock from inexperienced and unwise shepherds *(see 1 Tim. 1:3–7; 3:2–6; 6:2–5; 2 Tim. 2:14, 15)*, warning that some are “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” *(2 Tim. 3:7, NKJV)*.

Parents carry a weighty responsibility in teaching their children, who in turn influence others. All of us, in fact, by the example we set, can have a profound influence on those around us. How important then that we seek God’s wisdom, which He has promised us *(James 1:5)*, that we might model His ways and exert a godly influence. For we all, for good or for bad, do exert influence over others.

Think about those who have influenced you in a positive way. What did they do? How did they impact you? And, most important, how can you do the same for others?
Word Power

“For we all stumble in many ways” (James 3:2, ESV). What a refreshing admission, especially considering James’s emphasis on behavior! Still, our acknowledgment of the “real” need not dim our belief in God’s ideal for us as His representatives on earth.

“If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body” (vs. 2, ESV). The form of the condition in Greek implies that not stumbling in word is a real possibility. The importance of words can scarcely be overestimated. Thoughts lead to words, which in turn lead to actions. Words also reinforce what we think. Thus, they influence not only what we do but also what others do. We are interconnected through language.

This week’s passage contains several illustrations of the power of the tongue. The first three emphasize how something small can have huge consequences: a bit and bridle can turn a horse, a rudder can steer a ship, and a spark can engulf a forest in flames.

What positive kinds of “word power” do we find in Scripture? See Deut. 6:6, 7; 23:23; Ps. 40:3; Prov. 10:20, 21; 12:25; Mal. 2:6, 7; Luke 4:22; Rom. 10:6–8.

Young children are impressionable, but, like trees that grow stiffer and more fixed, children resist change more as they age. In one sense, we are all teachers, whether in the home or in the church. Because our words have so much power, it’s important to bathe our thoughts in God’s Word early in the day. After all, what feeds our thoughts and words, God’s Spirit or another source? We must not underestimate the enormous changes that are possible through God’s Word (Ps. 33:6; compare 2 Cor. 4:6) as opposed to other sources.

Words are so potentially powerful that, with just a few sentences, you can devastate a person, perhaps for the rest of his or her life. On the other hand, positive words can uplift someone, perhaps for just as long.

If you had dynamite in your hands, how careful would you be with it? What should your answer tell you about how you should deal with something even more powerful than dynamite?
“Little” Things Are the Big Things

Read James 3:3–5. What do the two illustrations have in common, and how do they relate to the tongue?

Both the bit in a horse’s mouth and the rudder of a ship are very small compared to what they control. Yet, with a slight movement of the hand, the horse’s or the ship’s direction can be completely changed. By the same token, “even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things” (vs. 5, NKJV). In other words, a word or even a look or a gesture might seem small, but each can change a friend into an enemy or transform a bad situation into something good. “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger” (Prov. 15:1). Imagine a horse galloping at full speed and a ship slicing through the water at full throttle but both headed in the wrong direction. The faster something goes, the farther away it gets from its destination. The best course then is to stop and turn around as soon as possible. The same is true of our words. If a conversation is going from bad to worse, the sooner we stop, the better.

Read Luke 9:51–56. What was Jesus’ response to the suggestion of the disciples? What was the result, and what lessons might this story have for us?

Although the disciples had a biblical precedent for their suggestion (2 Kings 1:10, 12), Jesus rejected the suggestion. His rebuke dramatically altered the situation. The story ends simply by indicating that “they went to another village” (Luke 9:56). Jesus turned His rejection by a Samaritan village into a learning experience for His followers. In the heat of the moment, when feelings rise up and clamor for us to defend ourselves, we can remember the example of Jesus and, figuratively speaking, move on “to another village.”

“As drops of water make the river, so little things make up life. Life is a river, peaceful, calm, and enjoyable, or it is a troubled river, always casting up mire and dirt.”—Ellen G. White, That I May Know Him, p. 209.

What are some “little” things in your life that, as you dwell further on them, might not be so “little” after all?
Damage Control

We’ve all experienced it. Something we said gets magnified, perhaps even exaggerated, to the point that we don’t even recognize it anymore. As James says, “See how great a forest a little fire kindles” (3:5, NKJV).

Read prayerfully and carefully James 3:6. What is he saying about the power of our tongue, of our words, to “defile” everything about us? Why should this verse make us tremble before we speak?

While fire, when used symbolically, can signify cleansing (Isa. 4:4, Zech. 13:9), it more frequently refers to destruction (see, for example, Josh. 6:24; 11:9, 11; 1 Sam. 30:3; Matt. 7:19), including the destructiveness of ill-advised words (Prov. 16:27, 26:21).

Not only can a large fire start from a spark, it can also ravage and destroy with amazing speed. In the same way, words can destroy friendships, marriages, and reputations. They can sink into a child’s psyche and mar his or her self-concept and future development.

Sin originated on earth with a seemingly innocent question (see Gen. 3:1). It began in heaven in a similar way. Lucifer “began to insinuate doubts concerning the laws that governed heavenly beings.”—Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 37. So, it is no exaggeration to say that the tongue is “set on fire by hell” (James 3:6, NKJV).

While it is true that words once spoken are gone forever and that we cannot fully undo what we have said, we should do all we can to lessen the damage and correct what we can. Taking steps to make things right will also help us not to repeat the same mistake. For example, after a further revelation from God, Nathan the prophet returned to David immediately to correct something he had said (see 2 Sam. 7:1–17). Peter wept bitterly over his denial of Christ and later demonstrated more openly the genuineness of his repentance (John 21:15–17).

Though “no man can tame the tongue” (James 3:8, NKJV), we are admonished to “keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies” (Ps. 34:13, NIV). Only the Spirit of God can help us to keep our words in check (see Eph. 4:29–32).

Read James 3:6–8. Why should the thoughts in these verses make us be so careful with what we say? How can we learn to appreciate the power for good, or evil, contained in our mouths?
Blessing and Cursing

Read James 3:9–12. What truth does James illustrate using the fountain, the fig tree, and the grapevine?

The idea of both blessing and cursing coming out of the mouth of a Christian is disturbing, to say the least. What about watching profanity-laced television programs or movies during the week and attending church on Sabbath to hear the Word of God? What about someone who speaks the truth and wonderful words about Jesus, only to later be heard telling an off-color joke? These images should be spiritually disturbing because they are contrary to what we know to be right. The same mouth that praises God later tells a dirty joke? What’s wrong with this contrast?

James uses the image of a spring. Water quality depends on its source, and the root determines the fruit (compare Matt. 7:16–18). Similarly, if God’s Word is implanted in us, its working will be evident in our lives. Understanding this truth frees us from the burden to “prove” our faith. Pure religion is rooted in faith, which is self-authenticating, just as a pure water spring needs no proof other than the water that flows naturally from it.

At the same time, though, one could ask, “If we were to take a ‘snapshot’ of certain devoted followers of God at low points in their experience (Moses murdering the Egyptian, David with Bathsheba, and so on), might we not legitimately question their profession?”

God’s will, of course, is that we do not sin (1 John 2:1). However, since the fall of Adam and Eve, God has made provision for our forgiveness if we do sin, based on faith in the promised Sacrifice (compare Ps. 32:1, 2). Nevertheless, the fact remains that sin brings sadness while obedience brings blessing. Moses spent 40 years tending sheep to unlearn the training that led him to kill, and David suffered the death of the child Bathsheba bore, as well as a divided household that threatened his kingdom to the end of his life. Sure, we can be forgiven our sins after we do them; the problem, however, is that so often the consequences of those sins can remain, often with devastating results not just for ourselves but for others too. How much better to be on our knees asking for the power of victory than having to ask for forgiveness afterward and then plead for the damage to be brought under control.
Further Study: Read about the power of speech in “Talents,” from the book *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 335–339, by Ellen G. White, and share the points that impressed you with your Sabbath School class.

“When in the company of those who indulge in foolish talk, it is our duty to change the subject of conversation if possible. By the help of the grace of God we should quietly drop words or introduce a subject that will turn the conversation into a profitable channel. . . .

“Far more than we do, we need to speak of the precious chapters in our experience. We should speak of the mercy and loving-kindness of God, of the matchless depths of the Saviour’s love. Our words should be words of praise and thanksgiving. If the mind and heart are full of the love of God, this will be revealed in the conversation. It will not be a difficult matter to impart that which enters into our spiritual life. Great thoughts, noble aspirations, clear perceptions of truth, unselfish purposes, yearnings for piety and holiness, will bear fruit in words that reveal the character of the heart treasure. When Christ is thus revealed in our speech, it will have power in winning souls to Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 337, 338.

Discussion Questions:

1. The problem with words is that, for most of us, they come out so easily. So often, too, they come out almost before we even have a chance to think about what we are saying. Because this is true, how can we learn to think carefully before we open our mouths?

2. Think about the power of your words even upon your own self. Do this experiment: consciously talk to others as much as you can about what God has done in your life, how He has blessed you, how He has gotten you through trials, and so on. Do this even for only a day or so, and then ask yourself, How has this impacted my faith?

3. What do you think your words reveal to others about what goes on in your heart? Might they be revealing more than you would like to think? If you recorded all your spoken words in a single day and then played them back to yourself, what would they reveal about you?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: James 3:2, 6–10

The Student Will:

Know: Recognize the destructive capabilities of negative speech and the secret to controlling the untamable tongue.
Feel: Nurture a desire to speak only words that uplift.
Do: Extinguish the fires that his or her negative speech has kindled.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: The Sum of a Perfect Man

A What does James mean by perfect?

B What is the secret to gaining control over the untamable tongue?

C How does negative speech behave like a fire?

II. Feel: The Tongue Is a Fire

A What does it feel like to be “burned” by unkind words?

B How can speech be used to uplift others around you, cultivating in their hearts a feeling of hope and joy?

III. Do: Taming the Tongue

A What can be done to put out the fires your tongue has ignited?

B How can you heal those who have been burned by your words?

Summary: Speech has the power to heal or destroy; thus, we must choose our words wisely.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *James 3:2, 6–10*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Speech has the power to heal or destroy; thus, we must choose our words wisely.

**Just for Teachers:** Help students grasp, through an exploration of James’s comparison of the tongue to fire, the destructive capabilities of negative speech.

**Opening Activity:** Describe fire, using as many of the senses as possible. What are its characteristics? How does it behave? What are its benefits to humankind, as well as its dangers? What happens when a fire rages out of control?

**Consider This:** James compares the tongue to a fire. If a drought-stricken field or forest catches fire, what chance is there of putting the fire out without any damaging effects? Based on how a fire behaves, how does our incendiary or blistering speech “burn” others?

STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** Help students to understand what James means by being “perfect,” as well as the secret to controlling the untamable tongue—a seemingly impossible task over which every Christian, nonetheless, is exhorted to strive for mastery.

I. Taming the Tongue: The Sum of the Perfect Man *(Review James 3:2 with your class.)*

What is the definition of a perfect man? Contrary to popularly held cultural or even religious ideals, it may not be what one expects. Perfection in the Bible is defined not by a plethora of good works, education, wealth, recognition, or by abstaining from harmful practices or excess. According to James, the embodiment of “perfection,” at least in this context, is an individual who has complete mastery over his or her speech. “And if anyone does not offend in speech [never says the wrong things], he is a fully developed character and a perfect man, able to control his whole body and to curb his entire nature” *(vs. 2, Amplified).* James’s assertion begs a vital set
of questions: What exactly is meant by “perfect”; and, consequently, how does not offending in speech lead to becoming a mature, fully developed individual?

In light of these questions, let’s delve into the origins of the word perfect as used in this verse. The word rendered “perfect” here has its roots in the Greek word teleios, meaning to be complete or mature in one’s growth, work, or moral character. Here, James reveals that the key to attaining such mastery or perfection resides in the tongue. By this image, he means, metaphorically, our power of choice over the words we use. Think of it. Every individual is endowed with this astounding power to choose, which includes the wondrous, even radical, potential to combine words in verbal and written arrangements with life-altering capabilities: to heal wounds or cause them; to destroy or grow relationships; to inspire or discourage minds. All this potential resides in the freedom to choose our words. Implicit in such choices are not merely the words we say but the ones we refrain from saying.

But to conclude with this observation is to fail to grasp the full importance of the transformational effect on our lives that comes from controlling our speech. Thus, we must dig deeper into this verse to get at its meat. We begin by noting that James establishes a connection between perfection, or controlling one’s tongue, and controlling the entire body, or physical nature, with all its appetites, passions, desires, and cravings. Implicit in this connection is a very powerful promise for character growth and spiritual victory: control the tongue and control the nature. The result? Attaining full maturity as an individual—what James calls perfection.

The connection between speech and maturity is so pivotal because the promise here goes far beyond simply gaining victory over saying the wrong thing. It promises us that if we control our words, we can gain control over every other facet of our lives, both our bodies and our entire natures. Why? Words are an indicator of the state of the heart. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34, NKJV). If the heart is pure, the speech will be. What an incredible admission, which, in turn, leads to the issue of our accountability to use this power wisely. For, as we are told elsewhere in Scripture, we will have to give an account in the judgment for every word used, whether for good or evil.

Consider This: How does the world define perfection? By contrast, what is the Bible’s definition, as outlined in James, of a perfect man? What does James mean by perfect? What is the connection between having control over one’s speech and control over one’s entire nature? Why is this true?
II. The Tongue Is a Fire (Review James 3:6–10 with your class.)

Georgia O’Keeffe, arguably the greatest American landscape artist of the twentieth century, once wrote, “It is only by selection, by elimination, by emphasis, that we get at the real meaning of things.” Or to frame her observation another way: what you leave out is just as important as what you leave in. If this is true of art, it is doubly true of language.

Every Christian must strive for this mastery in speech—for a “word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver” (Prov. 25:11, NKJV). But how do we attain it? James openly admits that control is hard—even impossible, in human strength. Yet, as we learned in the first section of the commentary, if the tongue is controlled, then the entire nature is subdued. However, now James seems to be telling us that it can’t be controlled. He presents us with a powerful contradiction that cannot be resolved in human terms. But the Bible tells us that what can’t be resolved in human terms can be resolved in divine ones, for “the things which are impossible with men are possible with God” (Luke 18:27, NKJV).

But how does God make the impossible possible?

By way of answering this question, let’s first unpack the verse to see exactly how difficult it is to control the tongue, given how dangerous it is. James uses poetic language to describe the power of words to destroy and wound. He compares negative speech to (1) fire, (2) wild, undomesticated animals, and (3) poison. Fire decimates. Wild animals are feral and can kill. Poison is deadly. All three images suggest the infliction of total annihilation, damage, or permanent destruction. James is using such potent imagery to make his point: the negative power of speech is deadly, and no human can tame it.

But implicit in this blatant admission about how difficult it is to attain this mastery is the key to obtaining it. For while it is true that no man can tame the tongue, we can do all things through Christ and His indwelling presence in the body temple. “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5, NKJV). Thus, we are assured victory through this union: “Greater is [H]e that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

Consider This: What does James mean when he says, “The tongue is a fire”? How is the power of speech like a poison? Why is the tongue a wild beast that no man can tame? James presents us with the following paradox: on the one hand, he says that no one can tame the tongue, but on the other, he says that if it is tamed, then we can have control over our entire nature. Such an admission implies that the impossible can be achieved. By what power is this feat achieved, and how does transformation take place?
STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Help students to apply James’s wisdom to their everyday interactions with others.

Application Questions:

1. Change someone’s mind and you change his or her heart. Arguments are won less by the power of our words than by the spirit behind them. In conflict, why is it more important to ask yourself, “Am I revealing Christ and His Spirit,” rather than “Am I winning this war of words?” What does the first attitude reveal of one’s motives and attitude? Why is the war for the heart of the one with whom we are in conflict more important than winning the battle of wits and words?

2. Fire often costs billions in damages. And even when it is finally extinguished, priceless resources—including lives—are irretrievably lost. What can you do to put out the fires, so to speak, that your tongue may have lit or spread? How can the passage in James, put into action, help you to retard the flames and salvage the situation?

3. How can you heal the “burn victims” wounded by your hasty, careless speech?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Help the students, through this exercise, to create new understanding of the destructiveness of negative speech. Divide into small groups, assigning the following task. Appoint a spokesperson for each group.

James uses potent images to convey his point about the destructive power of negative speech. Fire, feral animals, and poison are all deadly if ingested or permitted to run unbridled and out of control. Think of other images in contemporary life that are equally destructive (examples: natural disasters, such as tornadoes, tsunamis, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, and manmade ones, such as oil spills, nuclear weapons, chemical or germ warfare, et cetera). How do such modern images lend fresh insights into the destructiveness of unbridled speech? Share your insights with the class.
SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: James 3:13–4:10; Deut. 4:6; Gal. 5:17; Jer. 3:6–10, 20; Acts 19:13–16; Ps. 24:3–6.

Memory Text: “Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you” (James 4:10, NASB).

In many midsize and larger companies, a “middle-manager mentality” exists. This attitude happens when workers feel entitled to something they do not yet have: more respect, a higher salary, a more advanced position, and so on. This unhealthy attitude develops over time as the person strives to get ahead. Symptoms may include flattering remarks served up to decision makers and uncomplimentary revelations made about coworkers, all seasoned with a spirit of selfish rivalry. When one major television news anchor advanced to the top without destroying others to get there, a colleague admiringly observed: “There were no dead bodies.”

It would be nice to think that selfish rivalry is confined to secular organizations and that the church operates quite differently. Unfortunately, Scripture indicates that all too often worldly “wisdom” also operates among believers.

This week, let’s see what the Word of God has to say about this unfortunate reality.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 22.
The Meekness of Wisdom

“Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom” (James 3:13, ESV). “The meekness of wisdom”? What might that mean?

Some commentators think that the entire third chapter of James has to do with what qualifies (or disqualifies) people to be teachers. Naturally, the “wise and understanding” would seem to be good candidates, but the scope seems to be broader, encompassing the whole congregation. The wisdom James describes here and throughout the epistle is not primarily the intellectual variety so esteemed by the ancient Greeks and many Western countries today. Rather, wisdom is seen in one’s conduct and lifestyle, as indicated by the Greek word for it, anastrophe, translated “conduct” (used also in 1 Tim. 4:12, Heb. 13:7, 1 Pet. 1:15, 2:12). Our actions and conduct testify as to how wise we are. Jesus taught the same, saying that “ ‘wisdom is justified by her children’ ” (Matt. 11:19, NKJV).

Interestingly, the only place in the Old Testament where the phrase translated “wise and understanding” is found is in Moses’ admonition to Israel to observe all the laws that God had commanded: “Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people’ ” (Deut. 4:6, ESV; emphasis added).

In contrast, the “bitter” water spring referred to in James 3:11 produces “envy and selfish ambition” (vs. 14, NIV) in the church. The latter translates from the Greek word eritheia, which refers to “the exclusive pursuit of one’s own interests.”—Ceslas Spicq, Theological Lexicon of the New Testament (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers), vol. 2, p. 70. That’s an attitude that sounds more like Satan in heaven than like what Christians should be on earth. Unless we make a conscious choice to die to self and surrender our wills to the Lord, all of us could be in danger of displaying precisely the attitudes here that James warns about.

Dwell more on the phrase “the meekness of wisdom.” What are some of the situations in which, right now, some of this wisdom on your part would be very helpful?
Two Kinds of Wisdom

Read James 3:15, 16. What is his description of worldly wisdom? What are the common ways we see this “wisdom” manifested in the world, or even in the church?

The wisdom that we have naturally is “earthly,” even “demonic” or “devilish,” and devoid of the Spirit. This should not be too surprising. Long ago Solomon spoke about the “way that seems right” as being “the way of death” (Prov. 14:12, NKJV; 16:25, NKJV). This wisdom is destructive to its core. If jealousy and selfish ambition are cultivated and expressed, the natural result will be disorder and dissension, similar to the situation in Corinth (see 2 Cor. 12:20, where several of the same words are used).

Read James 3:17, 18; John 3:3–7; Colossians 3:1, 2. Together, what are these texts telling us about “heavenly” wisdom?

While James never refers to the Holy Spirit directly, the idea of the new birth is clearly present. The apostle seems to prefer, instead, the agricultural metaphor of sowing and bearing fruit, perhaps based on Jesus’ parables that refer to the Word being “sown” in people’s hearts as they hear the gospel message (see Matt. 13:3–9, 18–23). Heavenly wisdom is “full of mercy,” as well as “good fruits.” As we have seen, despite the emphasis in James on obedience and good works as the fruit of faith, mercy triumphs even in the judgment (James 2:13). In other words, the truly wise will not only be meek and humble like Jesus but also peaceable, gentle, merciful, and forgiving, willing to overlook the faults of others, not critical or judgmental of them.

It’s so easy to fall into the ways of the world, isn’t it? Examine yourself: how much does worldly wisdom, in contrast to wisdom from heaven, influence how you live?
Cause of Conflict and Quarrels

“Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?” (James 4:1, NKJV; compare Gal. 5:17). What basic conflict do both of these passages describe?

The opening verses of James 4 describe believers torn asunder by internal, bitter strife. There is an inward cause of the outward quarrels in the church: the cravings for pleasure (the word in Greek gives us our word hedonism). These sinful desires, which Paul metaphorically refers to as “the flesh,” are actively making war against our higher, spiritual motivations. The Christian life involves a protracted battle which, if not governed by the “wisdom from above” (James 3:17), spills out to the church itself and causes spiritual trauma among believers.

Read James 4:2, 3. What specific sinful desires are mentioned, and how are they affecting the church?

These verses contain direct references to the Ten Commandments: “You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain” (James 4:2, NKJV). The repeated references to the problem of envy, coveting, and cravings or passions (compare James 3:14, 16) reflect a perspective similar to the one expressed by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, in which the inner motivations, not just outward actions, are in view. Therefore, the reference to murder is probably meant, in this broader sense, to include anger. The earliest congregations probably did not have members killing one another. On the other hand, as we learn from the book of Acts, there were times, particularly in Jerusalem where James was based, when betrayal could easily have led to the arrest and putting to death of church members.

“It is the love of self that brings unrest. When we are born from above, the same mind will be in us that was in Jesus, the mind that led Him to humble Himself that we might be saved. Then we shall not be seeking the highest place. We shall desire to sit at the feet of Jesus, and learn of Him.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, pp. 330, 331.
Alluding to the biblical concept of Israel as God’s bride, James likens believers’ going along with worldly customs and being influenced by worldly attitudes to spiritual adultery. In reality, they are choosing a different master and lord.

The next verse, James 4:5, is not easy to understand. Some have called it the most difficult verse in the New Testament. The ambiguity of the Greek text is reflected in the major translations. Some consider the “spirit” to be the Holy Spirit (“the Spirit . . . in us yearns jealously,” *NKJV, HCSB; “He jealously desires the Spirit . . . ,” *NASB). Others consider it to be the human spirit (“God yearns jealously for the spirit that he has made to dwell in us,” *NRSV; “he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us,” *NIV). The latter rendering by the NIV fits the grammar and context best, but regardless of the translation, the meaning of the verse is not very clear. Based on a careful study of the verse’s syntax and the immediate context, verses 5 and 6 could be translated as follows: “Or do you think that the Scripture speaks in vain against envy? The spirit which He has caused to dwell in us yearns, but He gives more grace. Therefore He says, ‘God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble’ ” (*James 4:5, 6, author’s translation).  

As verses 1–4 make clear, the human spirit (or “heart”) is permeated with desires that, while not originally or in themselves evil, have been twisted by sin into wicked pathways. Grace is the only real solution to our plight. The proud, however, have placed themselves in a position where they can’t easily receive that grace. Someone wrote that we get grace as do beggars holding out a tin cup before a waterfall. Only a person humble, meek, and aware of his or her utter need and dependency is open to grace, to the unmerited favor bestowed upon those who are, in every way, unworthy. As Ellen G. White wrote, “Our great need is our only claim on God’s mercy.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 317.

Look at yourself. What in you makes you worthy of salvation? How does your answer help you realize the great need of grace in your own life? How does the Cross, and the Cross alone, answer that need?
Submission to God

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7, NRSV). Notice the order of the commands here. If we try to resist the devil in our own strength, what chance of success do we have? When seven Jewish exorcists tried to get a demon out of a possessed man by using the names of Jesus and Paul as a kind of magic formula, the demon-possessed man so overpowered the exorcists that they ran away naked and bleeding (Acts 19:13–16). Thus, we need to submit to God and His will in order to resist the devil. In fact, by taking that very step, we are resisting the devil.

At the same time, we should not suppose that the first readers of James’s letter had never submitted themselves to God before. James is clearly writing to professed believers. So, perhaps we need to think more in terms of submitting ourselves to God daily and resisting the devil whenever his temptations assert themselves.

Read James 4:8–10. What commands does James give, and how are they interrelated? How are they connected with submission to God, as well?

The appeal to change in these verses is the culmination of all that James has been saying since 3:13. In the passage we have been studying this week, there are contrasts between heavenly wisdom and devilish wisdom, and between the proud who exalt themselves as the devil did (see Isa. 14:12–14) and the lowly who submit to God and humble themselves. There is also a charge of infidelity to the covenant with God (James 4:4), and the charge of being double-minded is repeated (vs. 8; compare 1:8). Therefore, the call to submit to God goes beyond moralistic admonition; it is calling sinners to repentance, as Jesus did (Luke 5:32).

How should one repent? James supplies the steps (based on Psalm 24:3–6): (1) draw near to God, and He will draw near to you; (2) cleanse your hands and purify your hearts (that is, actions as well as thoughts); (3) lament, mourn, and weep for your shortcomings, realizing again that your need is your only claim to God’s grace.

“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up” (James 4:10, NKJV). What does that mean? How do you learn to humble yourself? How can we learn to emulate the humility that Jesus revealed?
Further Study: “There are many whose hearts are aching under a load of care because they seek to reach the world’s standard. They have chosen its service, accepted its perplexities, adopted its customs. Thus their character is marred, and their life made a weariness. In order to gratify ambition and worldly desires, they wound the conscience, and bring upon themselves an additional burden of remorse. The continual worry is wearing out the life forces. Our Lord desires them to lay aside this yoke of bondage. . . . He bids them seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and His promise is that all things needful to them for this life shall be added.” —Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 330.

Discussion Questions:

1. Think more about the two kinds of wisdom discussed in Monday’s study and make a list of the thoughts associated with each. Now think about times during this week where you made important decisions or took important actions. Which kind of wisdom was involved?

2. As we saw on Sunday, God promised Israel that, as a result of their observing His laws, surrounding nations would come to admire them as “a wise and understanding people.” But did this not lead Israel to become proud? This is, of course, contrary to heavenly wisdom, which leads to humility. What happened to them, and how can we learn to avoid their mistakes? How could a proper understanding of the true meaning of the sanctuary service have been their best defense against pride? How should the Cross, for us today, be the ultimate defense against pride?

3. Read again the Ellen G. White statement above. How many of the world’s standards do we strive for? Are those standards always, of necessity, wrong? So often, too, we can read of people who, by the world’s standards, seem to have everything; and yet, their lives turn out to be wrecks. What should that tell us about just how deceptive so much of what the world offers really is? Most important, though, how can we learn to resist the world and help our young people, who can be easily caught up by the false promises of the world, not to fall into this trap?

4. Dwell more on this idea of humility. Why is that so important in the life of a Christian? Why is pride so deadly for anyone who wants to follow Jesus?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: James 3:13–18

The Student Will:

Know: Discern that wisdom is more than simply the power to differentiate between good and evil but the right understanding of how to treat others.
Feel: Cultivate a desire to act and speak wisely.
Do: Serve God with an undivided heart.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: True Wisdom

A What is the difference between the wisdom that comes from above and the wisdom that comes from below?

B What is the precondition of receiving true wisdom?

II. Feel: Speaking and Acting Wisely

A What can you do to cultivate a desire to speak and act wisely?

B How can you nurture a spirit of humility in the soul?

III. Do: Serving God With an Undivided Heart

A What must we give up to ensure we serve God with an undivided heart?

B How may we remain calm and humble in difficult situations?

Summary: True wisdom reveals itself through a life of humble, loving words and actions.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *James 3:13–18*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: According to James, true wisdom reveals itself through a life of humble, loving words and actions.

Just for Teachers: Reinforce the idea in the minds and hearts of class members that wisdom is more than simply the power to discern between good and evil. It is having the right understanding of how to treat others and applying it.

Opening Activity: Ask class members to define wisdom in their own words. Then ask them to give examples from history of people valued for their wisdom. Discuss contributions to society or history, medicine or science, and art or music that demonstrate their wisdom.

Consider This: What is the difference between someone who is wise versus one who is merely knowledgeable? Why are both kinds of intelligence important, and why, especially, do we need wisdom? Of the examples of wise men and women given, how did their lives demonstrate wisdom? Specifically, what words or actions did they display that showed this truth? How do their destinies help shape our understanding of what wisdom is?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Help students to understand the following: (1) the difference between heavenly and earthly wisdom; (2) what true wisdom is and how it acts; (3) how one cultivates wisdom in life; and (4) why God desires us to serve Him with an undivided heart.

I. The Wisdom That Descends From Above *(Review James 3:13–18 with your class.)*

James speaks of the crucial need for wisdom, an attribute that every Christian must possess. But what is this wisdom, and how does one obtain it?

Before he defines wisdom, contrasting it with what it is not, James lists the vital prerequisite for receiving the wisdom that “descends from above.” He asks, “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom” *(vs. 13, NKJV).*
The prerequisite, then, of receiving wisdom is meekness, or humility. But why does James assert the importance of meekness ahead of, say, love or even knowledge? Digging deeper into the word’s etymological roots illumines the matter. Meekness comes from the Greek word prautēs, a word that means “mild” and, by extension, “humility.” One dictionary defines meekness as “humbly patient or docile, as under provocation from others” and “gentle; kind.” It is unfortunate that the word humble also has negative associations, making it somewhat unsavory, an undesirable characteristic in our time, as it is also used to imply inferiority, subservience, or unimportance. But the biblical denotation of the word is closer to “courteously respectful.” It suggests remaining calm under pressure or provocation, courteous and gentle in the face of opposition or argument. Humility is the aspect of love that Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 13:4 that is “not easily provoked.” It is also a prerequisite to seeking the Lord, as Zephaniah tells us (Zeph. 2:3). And as Paul beseeches, meekness, along with “lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love” (Eph. 4:2, NKJV) is proof of Christ in us.

The opposite of this meekness is a boasting heart, filled with “bitter envy and self-seeking” (James 3:14, NKJV). James warns that this “wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic” (vs. 15, NKJV). Strong language. James uncompromisingly exposes the source of this wisdom as satanic. What causes it? James locates it in the heart: “For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there” (vs. 16, NKJV). The panacea for such self-seeking is also the condition for receiving true wisdom: humility.

James defines true wisdom—“the wisdom that is from above”—as having the following characteristics: it is (1) “first pure,” (2) “then peacable,” (3) “gentle,” (4) “willing to yield,” (5) “full of mercy” and (6) “good fruits,” (7) “without partiality,” and (8) “without hypocrisy” (vs. 17, NKJV). James sums up all these qualities in the next verse as “the fruit of righteousness,” admonishing that such fruit is sown only “in peace by those who make peace” (vs. 18, NKJV). Only the soul at peace with God is the fertile orchard, as it were, capable of producing such fruit.

Consider This: According to James, what are the attributes of true wisdom? In contrast, what are the attributes of the wisdom that ascends from below? What is the prerequisite for receiving true wisdom? How do we grow this righteous fruit?

II. The Jealous Yearning of God (Review James 4:1–10 with your class.)
A Native American piece of folklore tells the story of a man who says to his grandson: “There are two wolves fighting inside the heart of every man.” His grandson asks, “Which one wins?” The grandfather answers, “The one you feed.”

James also speaks of the war going on in the heart of every man, and asks, Where do such “wars and fights come from?” *(4:1, NKJV)*. “Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?” He goes on to explain what feeds this war: “You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. . . . Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?” *(vss. 2, 4, NKJV)*. As we’ve seen, James isn’t afraid to use strong language to make his point. Here he accuses God’s people of spiritual infidelity. They have broken their “marriage vow” to God. How? By friendship with the world. Note how James speaks of being a friend to the world, rather than lover. When we think of adultery, we think of someone breaking the marriage vow through illicit sex. But here, James’s warning against the friendship of the world is akin to Jesus’ warning about adultery. One need not have relations with a man or a woman to commit adultery but simply to look on him or her with lust.

Befriending the world—lusting after its pleasures and embracing its values—is enough to break our vow to God. God is an amorous husband; as James tells us, “‘the Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealousy’” *(vs. 5, NKJV)*. God’s love is an all-or-nothing love: we cannot serve Him or be His with a divided heart. The sin of ancient, adulterous Israel was that “their heart [was] divided” *(Hos. 10:2)*. The cure to healing a divided heart is the same now as then: God’s grace, through which He “resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” *(James 4:6, NKJV)*. And that grace bestows the rebellious soul with meekness.

James outlines how this grace gives us the victory over the divided heart, knitting it as one with the Father’s: We are told first to (1) “submit to God.” And then (2) “resist the devil,” and the result is that he will flee *(vs. 7)*. Notice the order of things, which is very important. We are not told to resist until we surrender. Why? We lack the strength to defeat the devil on our own. What does it mean to submit? James clarifies this process point by point: (1) “Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and (2) purify your hearts, you double-minded” *(vs. 8, NKJV)*. (3) “Lament” and (4) “mourn” and (5) “weep!” *(vs. 9, NKJV)*. (6) “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up” *(vs. 10, NKJV)*. Clean hands refer to clean actions, a clean heart to pure emotions and thoughts. God gives His grace only to the humble, transforming a divided heart into an undivided one.

**Consider This:** James speaks of a war waged in the soul of every human.
What is this war, and what is the cause of it? Why does James pinpoint “lust” as a perpetrator of this war, and what can be done about it? How does James define the friendship of the world? What is the danger to one’s spiritual life of being a friend of the world? Why does James call God’s people adulterous? What does James mean by submission to God and resistance to the devil? Why is the order in which we engage in these things so vitally important to success? What role does humility play in the final outcome?

**STEP 3—Apply**

*Just for Teachers:* Help students to imagine ways to apply the knowledge James gave regarding humility and wisdom as strategies for resolving conflict in their own lives.

**Application Questions:**

Every day we are confronted by situations, from the mildly annoying to the truly cataclysmic, that test our fidelity to God:

1. Someone cuts us off in traffic, and we fight to stay calm.
2. A family member threatens to cut us off because of a dispute, and we struggle to maintain fearlessness and courtesy.

Sometimes we fall—we lash out and regret it. How can we keep from giving in to reactions that demonstrate the “wisdom from below” in each of the given situations?

**STEP 4—Create**

*Just for Teachers:* Convey to students that preparedness beforehand can help us to resolve conflict or, at the very least, to lessen the damage when it comes.

**Activity:** Devise a list of strategies to help you maintain your fidelity to God’s love in difficult situations that demand humility. How do the following strategies help, as well?

1. Personal prayer.
2. Having an intercessory prayer partner, who is committed to praying for your spiritual growth and strength.
3. Memorizing Scriptures that can be called on in times of duress.
4. Reading a book on conflict/resolution strategies and/or how to handle difficult situations.
One Lawgiver and Judge

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: James 4:11–17; Acts 17:11; Heb. 4:15, 16; Luke 12:13–21; Eccles. 2:15–19; Titus 2:14.

Memory Text: “There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?” (James 4:12).

Our attitude toward law, whether God’s law or humans’, affects how we relate to others and even how we relate to God Himself. Have you noticed that sometimes the rich and famous act as if they are above the law? Even some who make the laws, or enforce them, may look for ways to write those laws for their own personal gain. Disrespect for a society’s laws, then, can involve disrespect for other people, because laws govern how we relate to each other.

At the same time, those whose attitude toward law is rigid and unbending may also have difficulty in their interpersonal relationships. At a deeper level, our view of the law depends on the degree of respect we have for the wisdom of the lawgivers and the fairness of their laws.

This week’s lesson begins with a look at the law but then leads into some important words about a form of arrogance and self-dependence that we might not be aware of but which we are warned about as being sin, a violation of God’s law. In fact, we’re given here, in James, another way of looking at sin.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 29.
Judgment or Discernment?

“Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it” (James 4:11, NIV). How does judging others amount to sitting in judgment of the law?

The initial phrase in verse 11 that is literally translated “speak against” could include several sins of speech, including slander, bearing false witness, and angry words (see Lev. 19:15–18). On the one hand, it seems that James uses milder language here than in chapter 3; yet, the implications of speaking against one’s brother or sister seem more serious in that doing so calls into question the law itself.

By placing ourselves on the judgment seat, we ignore our own weaknesses (see Matt. 7:1–3) and focus instead on another’s wrongdoing, as if we were somehow outside of or above the law. Such a focus also fails to love our neighbor as ourselves (Lev. 19:18). Thus, we are not keeping the law.

At the same time, however, while we should not be judging others, we must learn to have spiritual discernment.

**Identify in the following passages the areas in which spiritual discernment is called for:** Acts 17:11, 1 Cor. 6:1–5, 2 Cor. 13:5, Phil. 1:9, 1 John 4:1, Gal. 6:1.

We are to compare what people teach and preach with the Word of God. We should also, as far as possible, encourage church members to settle their differences among themselves rather than in courts, where the judges may or may not be guided by God’s Word. Most important, we should examine ourselves as to the health of our faith relationship and whether what we dwell on is uplifting and excellent or detrimental to our Christian experience.

It’s so easy to criticize and judge others, especially when they do things we don’t like. How can we learn to know whether we have crossed the line from being spiritually discerning to being judgmental toward God’s law?
The Lawgiver Is Judge

All the laws of the Old Testament are from Jesus. They are sometimes called the laws of Moses because they were given through him (2 Chron. 33:8, Neh. 10:29), but it was Jesus who led the Israelites through the wilderness and spoke the Ten Commandments to them at Mount Sinai (see 1 Cor. 10:1–4). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus clarified and amplified the law. He is the “Word . . . made flesh” (John 1:14), and it is by His Word that we will be judged (John 12:48).

“There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?” (James 4:12, ESV). What do the following verses tell us about Jesus as our Judge? Isa. 33:22; 11:1–5; Heb. 4:15, 16; Rev. 19:11–16.

Only someone who knows the law very well is qualified to judge whether or not it has been broken. Lawyers study for many years before taking bar exams, which test their readiness to begin their practice. The scribes in the time of Jesus (many of whom were Pharisees) diligently studied also, and not only the Mosaic laws but also the accumulated legal traditions. The fact that Jesus did not agree with many of these traditions resulted in serious conflict with the leaders. But as the One who gave these laws, He was and is uniquely qualified to explain what they mean and to assess whether or not they have been transgressed. So when He comes again, His reward is with Him to give to all according to their works (Rev. 22:12). Furthermore, by taking on human nature, living a sinless life, dying in our place, and being raised victorious over sin and death, Jesus is able to save us from sin.

“God has committed all judgment unto the Son, for without controversy He is God manifest in the flesh.”

“God designed that the Prince of sufferers in humanity should be judge of the whole world. He who came from the heavenly courts to save man from eternal death; . . . He who submitted to be arraigned before an earthly tribunal, and who suffered the ignominious death of the cross—He alone is to pronounce the sentence of reward or of punishment.”—Ellen G. White, Maranatha, p. 341. As both Lawgiver and Savior, Christ is uniquely qualified to be our Judge.

Either reward or punishment, we will face only one or the other. What’s your only hope of reward?
Planning Ahead

Read James 4:13. (Compare Luke 12:13–21.) How do we balance prudent planning for the future with our need to live each day in expectation of Christ’s imminent coming? How can we avoid the trap of merely building bigger “barns”?

It may seem very reasonable to plan a year in advance or even more. Businesses commonly have short-, medium-, and long-range plans. Individuals and families need to save for the future and to make provision for unexpected expenses. On the other hand, we also believe that Jesus is coming soon and that, someday, all of our earthly possessions will be consumed by flames (see 2 Pet. 3:10–12).

These two approaches to life are not necessarily in conflict. Someone has said, “Plan as if Christ were not coming for years but live each day as if Christ were coming tomorrow.” This is good as far as it goes, though long-term planning can make it difficult to take one day at a time. Many of Jesus’ hearers (and no doubt many Christians today) would consider that the rich man who decided to build bigger barns was prosperous because God was blessing him. But Jesus reveals to us the man’s inner thoughts: “‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry’” (Luke 12:19, NKJV). In short, his overarching concern was to lay up treasure for himself.

Most important, rather than making our plans too definite, “Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that’” (James 4:15, NKJV). This means more than simply appending “d.v.” (Deo volente, Latin for “God willing”) to the end of a sentence about our future plans. It means we should submit all our plans to God. We can pray, “God, I want to know Your will. If You are not pleased with these plans, please show me.” Then, if our plans are not good, God will show us that—as long as we remain attentive and willing to correct our plans or even change them entirely.

Read again James 4:13. Though on the surface nothing really seems wrong with what is being said, obviously there’s a problem—not in what the people want to do but in their attitude about it. How can we be careful not to get caught up in that same attitude, even subconsciously?
A Mist

**Read** James 4:14. What crucial point is being made here?

Life is uncertain. Every breath is a gift. James 4:14 uses a very rare Greek word (*atmis*), which is translated as “vapor” or “mist.” Like the Hebrew word *hebel* (“breath, vapor”), which occurs 38 times in Ecclesiastes and is often translated as “vanity,” it emphasizes the transitory nature of life. Who hasn’t, especially as we get older, experienced just how fast and fleeting life is? Well into his old age, well-known evangelist Billy Graham said, “I never knew that life went by so quickly.”

In other words, there’s always the imminence of death. We are all just a heartbeat away from it. Any of us, at any moment, for any number of reasons, could die in an instant. How rightly James says, “yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring” (4:14, ESV), including death.

“I will not here dwell upon the shortness and uncertainty of life; but there is a terrible danger—a danger not sufficiently understood—in delaying to yield to the pleading voice of God’s Holy Spirit, in choosing to live in sin; for such this delay really is.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 32.

Plus, not only is life so short but, in and of itself, it can also be so unsatisfying.

**Read** Ecclesiastes 2:15–19; 4:4; 5:10; 9:11, 12. How does the message of Solomon here only add to the point that James has made?

We see so much injustice, so much unfairness, so much that doesn’t make sense in this life. No wonder we all long for the promise of eternal life made to us through Jesus. Without that, we are just a mist that will be gone and forever forgotten.

**Take stock:** How much of this world holds you in its grip? How can you always keep in mind just how fleeting it all is?
James here is dealing with the attitude of self-dependence. In fact, he calls that attitude “arrogance” and the words spoken as “boasting”; he says it is “evil.” That’s how important the right attitude is for the Christian.

Read verse 17. The Bible defines sin in two ways: (1) doing wrong; (2) not doing right. The first definition is given by John: “sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). Many modern versions render it “sin is lawlessness,” but the Greek word anomia refers to specific violations of the law rather than to habitual lawless behavior (see its use in Rom. 4:7, Titus 2:14, Heb. 10:17). The second definition is given in James 4:17: “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” We must therefore go beyond simply resisting temptation to do wrong. We are called to be “children of light” (Eph. 5:8) and to “let [our] light shine before others, so that they may see [our] good works and give glory to [our] Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16, ESV; emphasis added).

Of course, one could get easily discouraged because, after all, who constantly does all the good they could possibly do every single day? But that’s not the issue. Even Jesus’ life was not a continual round of ceaseless activity. There were times when He withdrew to pray or simply to rest (Luke 5:16, Mark 6:31). Most important, He sought God’s will in everything He did (John 5:30). Jesus even compared doing God’s will to eating: “‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work’” (John 4:34, NKJV). Just as there are limits to how much we can eat at one sitting, so there are limits to how much we can do. That is why Jesus goes on to say that some sow while others reap but both “rejoice together” (vss. 36–38). As we work for the Lord, we will be encouraged to do more and will pray for a greater willingness to be used in every possible way.

How does prayer help us die to self and thus maintain an attitude of surrender to the will of God? Whatever your plans are, how can you learn to surrender them to the Lord?
Further Study: Read about the value of time in Ellen G. White, “Talents,” *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 342–346, and share with your Sabbath School class the points that impressed you.

“Let no one among you glory any longer against the truth by declaring that this spirit [of discerning the evil motives of others] is a necessary consequence of dealing faithfully with wrongdoers and of standing in defense of the truth. Such wisdom has many admirers, but it is very deceptive and harmful. It does not come from above, but is the fruit of an unregenerated heart. Its originator is Satan himself. Let no accuser of others credit himself with discernment; for in so doing he clothes the attributes of Satan with the garments of righteousness.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 936, 937.

“He who is guilty of wrong is the first to suspect wrong. By condemning another he is trying to conceal or excuse the evil of his own heart. It was through sin that men gained the knowledge of evil; no sooner had the first pair sinned than they began to accuse each other; and this is what human nature will inevitably do when uncontrolled by the grace of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 126.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Look at the last Ellen G. White statement above. How can we protect ourselves against doing the same thing: judging and accusing others so that we try to feel better about ourselves and our own shortcomings?

2. Dwell on the fact of just how fast life goes by. What should that tell us about what our priorities should be? Though we’re told by the special theory of relativity that time itself varies depending upon how fast we are moving in a frame of reference, one thing is certain: no matter how fast, or slowly, time goes by, once a moment is gone, it is gone forever. How should this sobering thought impact what we do with our time?

3. How do we deal with those whose sins need to be dealt with and yet not fall into the trap that James has warned us about?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: James 4:1, 11, 12

The Student Will:

Know: Deepen his or her understanding of all that gossip encompasses in order to avoid it.
Feel: Be convicted to speak always with a loving spirit and a kind heart.
Do: Shun all forms of gossip, faultfinding, negative criticism, and presumption.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: Speech Like Wild Horses
   A  According to James, why should we shun gossip?
   B  Why does James equate criticizing others with criticizing the law and the Lawgiver?

II. Feel: A Loving Spirit
   A  How can we steer harsh conversations away from gossip, faultfinding, and criticism?
   B  Why is having the right spirit as important as speaking the right words?

III. Do: Avoiding Flesh-Eating Words
   A  What are some strategies for handling gossip, rumors, and harsh criticism?
   B  How can you guard against presumption?

Summary: When we gossip and criticize others, we are, as James reveals, really criticizing the law and the Lawgiver.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *James 4:1, 11, 12, 13, 16*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** When we gossip and criticize others, we are, as James reveals, really criticizing the law and the Lawgiver.

**Just for Teachers:** Help learners to expand their definition of gossip in order to recognize and avoid it in all its forms.

**Opening Activity:** Invite class members to read James 4:11, 12 in various versions of the Bible. How is the word *gossip* translated in each one? How do these different renderings enlarge our understanding of all that gossip encompasses?

**Consider This:** Think of a time in which someone you loved or cared about—including you—was hurt by a rumor or a false account circulated at work or in the family circle. How did it make you feel to hear others talking about the one you cared about? How did you react? What is the best way to handle gossip, rumors, and harsh criticism?

STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** Deepen your learners’ knowledge of all that gossip encompasses, and why, according to James, it must be avoided. Second, help them understand the dangers of presumption.

**I. Speech Like Wild Horses (Review James 4:1, 11, 12 with your class.)**

A single word can contain a world. Looking into its past, as it were, may enrich our understanding of its usage in the present. In Arabic, for example, at some point in history, a Bedouin or nomad must have watched a herd of wild horses careening across the desert, demolishing the dunes, and, thus, the word for “gossip” in Arabic was born. Ever after, any time one spotted a stampede of wild horses one was reminded of the destructiveness of evil speech.

The word for “slander” or “speak evil” that James uses in the Greek does not have such colorful roots as in Arabic, but it defines the nature of gossip as no less destructive. It derives from the verb *katalaeo*, which
means to slander or be a traducer. A traducer is someone who exposes another person to shame or blame by means of falsehood and misrepresentation. A true palimpsest in that it contains many layers of meaning, traducer harbors a darker nuance when its layers are pulled back—a sinister shade of meaning that exposes the motives behind the actions of those who traffic in slander. The word *traducer* originates in a root meaning “to lead,” which in and of itself may not necessarily designate anything malevolent; but in the context of speaking evil, it suggests active premeditation or deliberate intention to degrade or wound. Additionally, the noun form in the Greek contains the notion of being a *backbiter*, another word that is worth looking up in one’s own language. A backbiter is someone who doesn’t simply speak evil about others but is one who “says mean or spiteful things about someone” who is not present.

Bear in mind: even if the one we gossip about is not there, God hears every word. We are told that we shall give an account in the judgment for every idle word we speak (Matt. 12:36, 37). The gossiper says, “If you don’t have anything nice to say, come sit next to me.” While humorous, it reminds us of the destructive potential of words. The origins of the word *sarcastic* remind us, as well: it means “flesh-eating.” Its close cousin *sarcophagus* means “coffin”—a box for a corpse. Every time we gossip we may not literally kill, but we make corpses, nonetheless, of the characters we bash. We shudder with revulsion at cultures that persist in the savage practice of eating other humans; yet, every time we gossip or feed on the scandals of others, are we not, in a sense, guilty of cannibalism?

James gives two reasons for condemning and refraining from evil speaking: (1) the traducer or slanderer, in maligning and criticizing his brother or sister in Christ, is actually maligning and criticizing the Law and judging the Law (James 4:11). How? Because such practice runs contrary to the golden rule: “ ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself’ ” (Luke 10:27, NKJV). To attack another is, really, to attack God; it is to find fault with the very law that condemns the attack. (2) Faultfinding is not only passing judgment on one’s neighbor, it is usurping the very prerogatives of judgment that are God’s alone to exercise.

Notice how James refers to his audience: “brethren” and “brother,” in verse 11, and now “neighbor” (James 4:12, Amplified). Through such word choices, James reminds us of the close familial ties that should exist between believers. As John said, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friend” (John 15:13, NKJV). True love acts the opposite of slander. Instead of taking the life of a brother, it is willing to sacrifice its own to save him. James’s use of the word *neighbor* brings
to mind Jesus’ use of it in the parable of the good Samaritan in answer to the question, “ ‘Who is my neighbor?’ ” (Luke 10:29, NKJV). As the parable shows, and the writings of Ellen G. White attest, “Our neighbor is every person who needs our help.”—Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 376. Each Christian was that man left for dead on the road. And each is God’s Samaritan, healed to save others left for dead. Such understanding should forever elevate us to treat with courtesy and respect all with whom we come in contact.

**Consider This:** In what sense can gossip be equated with murder? What do the origins of the word for gossip in the Greek reveal about the meaning of the word? How does that deepen our understanding of just how inimical gossip is? What reasons does James give for condemning gossip? Why is criticizing another equivalent not only to criticizing the law but usurping the prerogatives of God as Judge?

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II. A Wisp of Vapor, A Puff of Smoke *(Review James 4:13, 16 with your class.)*

These verses attack the heart of presumption—overstepping the bounds of what is reasonable and fair. James is saying that it is not reasonable—therefore it is presumptuous—to make plans for our lives independent of God’s will. Scripture gives us several reasons why this is so, one of which is: “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?” (1 Cor. 6:19, NKJV). Christ Himself says that denying self is requisite to carrying our crosses. We can’t carry our own ambitions and at the same time shoulder the cross. We will drop the cross.

To press the point home, lest believers delude themselves with thinking they can safely postpone committing all to Christ, James, in language that echoes Ecclesiastes, asks, “What is the nature of your life? You are [really] but a wisp of vapor (a puff of smoke, a mist)” *(James 4:14, Amplified).* These images imply that, when life ends, there is nothing to suggest we once existed at all—no trace left. Therefore, all our plans, all our desires, come to an end.

James is not saying that we should not make plans; he is saying that we should remember (1) that we are God’s intellectual, emotional, and material property; (2) the means He gives us to conduct business is a gift from Him; (3) that, as a safeguard against presumption, we should lay those plans and gifts at His feet first, before devising what we will do; (4) adopt the following attitude: “You ought instead to say, If the Lord is willing, we shall live and we shall do this or that [thing]” *(vs. 15, Amplified).* Such an attitude acknowledges God’s absolute sovereignty over every aspect of life and
recognizes that the purpose of all we do is to carry out His will, first and foremost. It subordinates self to the King of the universe and acknowledges our total submission to and dependence on Him. After all, the only thing that survives death is “the spiritual and moral character.”—Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, book 1, p. 259.

**Consider This:** What is presumption, according to James? What is its opposite? What does presumption reveal about the heart? What does it mean to do something according to “the Lord’s will”? Why is this a vital part of all our planning?

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**STEP 3—Apply**

**Application Questions:**

1. What can you do to avoid gossip? List some strategies you can use when people around you are talking negatively about someone (for example, changing the subject, silent prayer, saying something kind, et cetera).

2. How can you guard against presumption?

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**STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Use the following activity to help learners grasp the futility of existence, apart from Christ, and the importance of guarding against presumption.

**Activity:** Describe what happens when a rock is thrown into a lake. (For example, the water breaks open, leaving a gash. But then, in seconds, it is sown over, and very soon, even the ripples that the abrasion created disappear, leaving nothing to reveal that the rock ever broke the surface.) How does this illustration reveal the frailty of our human existence and of the importance of laying everything at the cross in submission to Christ?
SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:21).

The worldwide popularity of the television show Who Wants to Be a Millionaire? suggests that many people vicariously enjoy the rags-to-riches fantasy and probably hope it could happen to them someday.

But wealth isn’t all that many believe it to be. Studies suggest that increasing income follows the law of diminishing returns: beyond allowing people to live comfortably, more possessions do not buy more happiness. Meaningful relationships, job satisfaction, and a purposeful life usually make a greater contribution to one’s happiness than does wealth. The best things are freely given, such as loving words, a smile, a listening ear, simple kindnesses, acceptance, respect, a sympathetic touch, and genuine friendship.

Even more precious are the gifts given by God: faith, hope, wisdom, patience, love, contentment, and many other blessings that come through His Spirit’s presence in our lives. The irony is that, while many Christians would agree with these sentiments, their daily living suggests that selfishness often has the upper hand. As we’ll see this week, greed is a big mistake, one fraught with horrendous consequences.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 6.
Justice Will Be Done!

Chapter 5 of James begins with a bang: “Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you!” (James 5:1, NKJV). No doubt, that would have gotten his readers’ attention.

In James 1:10, 11, he reminded the rich of the impermanence of wealth. Here, in chapter 5, he urges those who stubbornly hold on to it to “weep and howl.” It is as if their impending judgment is even now being poured out. The vivid description continues throughout our passage for this week, bringing to mind the divine retribution for the wicked excess that characterizes the period just prior to Christ’s return (see Luke 17:27–29; 2 Tim. 3:1, 2; Rev. 18:3, 7). A similar attitude permeates God’s last-day church (Rev. 3:17). Interestingly, the Greek word translated as “miseries” in James 5:1 comes from the same root used to describe Laodicea as “wretched” in Revelation 3:17.

There is so much injustice in the world, especially economic injustice. Sometimes it is so hard to understand why some people get rich exploiting the poor and, worse, why they seem to get away with it! Read Psalm 73:3–19. What hope is found in these verses regarding this perennial problem?

Throughout the books of the Old Testament prophets, we find a concern for justice and the promise that God will act to set things right. But this persistent and settled sense of hope did not seem to make the uncomfortable and perplexing period of waiting for God’s intervention any easier. For instance, writing at a time of widespread apostasy among God’s people, when Babylon, swelling with pride, celebrated its power and prosperity, the prophet Habakkuk peppered God with pointed questions (see Hab. 1:2–4, 13, 14). God’s short answer was to trust in Him and wait a little longer (Hab. 2:2–4). And the prophet did just that (see Hab. 3:17, 18).

What injustices cause you to simmer and burn inside with anger and outrage? (And there is so much more going on that you don’t even know about!) Though, of course, we should do what we can to alleviate injustice, how can we learn to rest in the promise that, somehow, when it’s all over, God’s justice will be done?
When Wealth Becomes Worthless

Read James 5:2, 3. What warning is James giving here? Though his words are quite strong, what kind of wealth is he talking about? What’s the basic message?

Rotting wealth, moth-eaten clothing, and even silver and gold rusting—these are images for us to consider soberly as our planet spins blissfully on, faster and faster toward its demise.

The world’s economic situation always seems to be going from one crisis to another; even the “good” times, when they come, rarely last and are always followed by a downturn. Any semblance of economic stability and tranquility that the global marketplace might offer is fleeting and largely imaginary. Discontent and instability grows as the disparity between rich and poor widens. Such was the situation when James wrote that the poor were growing increasingly desperate and the rich more intolerant of the plight of the destitute.

Consider the following individuals and describe the effect wealth (or the lack of it) had on them:

1. Nabal (1 Sam. 25:2–11)

2. Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:12–19)

3. Peter (Acts 3:1–10)

Sooner or later, worldly wealth loses its luster for all of us. We learn its limitations and maybe even its dark side. Money has its place; the problem is when people put it in the wrong place.

James says money will be “a witness against” those who misuse it (James 5:3). Though he gives this warning in an end-time context, the point should be clear: how we use our money matters. The image of flesh-consuming fire is meant to wake us up to the seriousness of the choices we are making with our money. Are we heaping up treasure that will ultimately be burned up, or are we saving for eternity? (See Luke 12:33, 34.)

Think carefully about your attitude toward money and how it affects your relationships. What does this say about how you are using it?
Cries of the Poor

Reading through James, we may notice that several different categories of wealthy people are mentioned, including rich merchants who will be cut down in the midst of their pursuits (James 1:11), business people who sue to protect their investments (James 2:6), and agricultural landholders who have withheld wages from their laborers (James 5:4). These verses describe the rich negatively based on their past behavior, present attitude, and future punishment. These people have essentially “heaped up treasure” (vs. 3, NKJV) at the expense of the poor.

“Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out” (vs. 4, NASB). Compare Lev. 19:13; Deut. 24:14, 15; Jer. 22:13. What important principle is seen here, not just in the immediate contexts but in general in regard to how we deal with others?

In Israel in Bible times, as soon as wages were paid, many, if not most, of the workers used these earnings to buy food to feed their families. Withholding wages often meant the family had to go hungry. Thus, it was a serious matter that James was addressing here.

No wonder, then, that James spoke so strongly against those who held back wages from those who worked for them. It’s bad enough to defraud anyone of anything, but for someone already rich to hoard wealth by stealing from the poor is a sin, not just against the poor but a sin against heaven itself. And, as James writes, it will be dealt with in due time!

“Riches bring with them great responsibilities. To obtain wealth by unjust dealing, by overreaching in trade, by oppressing the widow and the fatherless, or by hoarding up riches and neglecting the wants of the needy, will eventually bring the just retribution described by the inspired apostle: ‘Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.’ ”—Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 2, p. 682.

What are your dealings with others when it comes to money? What do those dealings say about your Christianity and about how much you reflect the character of Christ?
Fat and Happy (for Now)

“You have lived on the earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter” (James 5:5, ESV; compare Ezek. 16:49, Amos 4:1). What do these passages link to luxurious indulgence?

In the ancient world, the notion prevailed that there was a fixed amount of wealth, meaning that if the wealth of some people increased, the wealth of others had to decrease. In other words, the rich can get richer only by making the poor poorer. “Creating” wealth without adversely affecting the wealth of others, however, seems to be a relatively modern idea. Some even argue that, as the rich get richer, they can help make the poor richer too. On the other hand, considering the competition among developed and developing nations for increasingly scarcer resources, the limitations of wealth creation can seem more pressing. Hence, the issue of wealth inequality still rages today.

One of the most famous stories of Jesus dealing with issues of inequality is the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (see Luke 16:19–31). At the time of Jesus, most people were lucky to have two garments instead of just one and happy if they feasted once a year. By contrast, the rich man in the story “was clothed in purple and fine linen” (the most expensive kind of garments) “and who feasted sumptuously every day” (vs. 19, ESV). Poor Lazarus, despite being carried to the gate of the rich man’s house, had to beg for the few crumbs he received.

Contrary to popular opinion, the real focus of the parable is this life, not the afterlife. In fact, the original Greek makes no mention of “heaven” and “hell” at all. Both the rich man and Lazarus are depicted in the same place (vs. 23)—the grave (hadēs). The chasm separating them symbolizes the fact that after a person dies, his or her eternal destiny is fixed. Therefore, how we treat people in this life (as described in “Moses and the prophets,” vss. 29, 31, NKJV) is extremely important. There is no future life in which we can make up for what we failed to do in this one: “He who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?” (1 John 4:20, NKJV).

What regretful things have you done that, though you might be able to “make up” for now, you won’t be able to make up for them later?
Blame the Victim

When someone has done wrong, the natural tendency is to try to escape responsibility. Often people try to do this by transferring the responsibility to someone else—including the person who has been wronged. Murderers excuse themselves by pleading self-defense or blaming their upbringing. By saying they were enticed, sexual abusers blame the victim. Husbands and wives who get divorced typically blame the other for the failed marriage. Those guilty of killing the martyrs of the Christian faith blamed the martyrs by accusing them of heresy. Indeed, Jesus warned His disciples that “‘the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service’” (John 16:2, NKJV). In fact, we believe that James, too, was killed for his faith.

In light of this, the words in James 5:6 carry even more weight: “Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.” How many times have you condemned others only to realize later that you were really the one who was wrong? Think especially about the last phrase of this verse. Does this mean that we should just let people walk all over us? On the other hand, how many quarrels have you had that would never have happened if you had put up no resistance? What does Jesus mean by “turning the other cheek” (Matt. 5:39)? How are we on a practical level to do this (or is the problem that we want to be “practical” about something that, in and of itself, isn’t really supposed to be practical)?

As we have seen, James has quite a bit to say about the rich and the poor. It should be kept in mind, though, that James never condemns the rich simply because they are rich. It is their attitudes and actions that matter to God. Similarly, the bare fact of being economically poor does not in itself endear a person to God. It is the “poor in spirit” and “rich in faith” who will be “heirs of the kingdom” (Matt. 5:3, James 2:5, NKJV). These inner qualities may have no relation to our particular economic circumstances. But then again, they may. Those who are “rich, and increased with goods” (Rev. 3:17) may be more needy spiritually than they think. God warned Israel to beware lest after they entered the land and became prosperous they should forget that all the good things they enjoyed came from Him, including the “power to get wealth” (Deut. 8:11–18).
Further Study: “Money has great value, because it can do great good. In the hands of God’s children it is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, and clothing for the naked. It is a defense for the oppressed, and a means of help to the sick. But money is of no more value than sand, only as it is put to use in providing for the necessities of life, in blessing others, and advancing the cause of Christ.

“Hoarded wealth is not merely useless, it is a curse. In this life it is a snare to the soul, drawing the affections away from the heavenly treasure. . . .

“He who realizes that his money is a talent from God will use it economically, and will feel it a duty to save that he may give.”—Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, pp. 351, 352.

Discussion Questions:

1. Consider the following statements: “The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender” (Prov. 22:7, ESV). “Many poor families are poor because they spend their money as soon as they receive it. . . .

“When one becomes involved in debt, he is in one of Satan’s nets, which he sets for souls.”—Ellen G. White, The Adventist Home, p. 392. Is helping people to get out of debt or to avoid getting into debt a part of “preach[ing] the gospel to the poor”? (Luke 4:18). Why, or why not?


3. Economic disparity is everywhere. Some people have two, three, even four or more luxurious homes while others are happy to scrounge up a few pieces of wood and cobble them into a shelter. And what about those who have become obese by stuffing themselves while there are children all over the world going to bed hungry? Some argue that by taking from the rich we can give more to the poor. Others argue that as the rich get richer, they can help lift the poor out of poverty. How do we work, as Christians, to help alleviate the problem of extreme poverty? What things should we do to help, and what things shouldn’t we do?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: James 5:1–6

The Student Will:

Know: Know that a transformed life is the result of turning away from sin.
Feel: Grieve over his or her sins in heartfelt repentance.
Do: Demonstrate, through the unselfish distribution of means, his or her conviction that all wealth comes from God.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: True Repentance
   A Why does James ask the rich to grieve, and for what reasons?
   B Define repentance and godly sorrow, according to Scripture.

II. Feel: Weep and Howl!
   A How does godly sorrow lead to repentance?
   B Why can there be no true change in life without experiencing sincere sorrow for sin and a subsequent turning away from it?

III. Do: Storing up Wealth in a Day of Slaughter
   A How can we show, through the management of our resources, the belief that all we possess comes from God?
   B What can you do to demonstrate to others the futility of trusting in riches?

Summary: There can be no true reform without genuine repentance.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: James 5:1–6

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: There can be no reform without genuine repentance.

Just for Teachers: Help learners to understand that a transformed life is the result of turning away from sin.

Opening Activity: Look at, in as many translations as possible, James’s injunction to “weep aloud and lament” (James 5:1, Amplified). The New King James Version uses the word howl. These are all visual and audible—or public—displays of grief. Discuss the ways in which one mourns death in your society. How is grief enacted audibly and visually as a means of memorializing loss? Share your experiences of mourning and grieving, whether for a loved one or some other loss, including modes of mourning, both seen and heard.

Consider This: How do your experiences of grief help you to understand James’s injunction to grieve for sin? Why is grieving for sin necessary? Take time in silent prayer to grieve for the suffering your sins have caused to others and to Jesus. How does this mourning bring you closer to God?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Help learners to understand the necessity and meaning of true repentance and the futility of trusting in wealth.

I. Weep Aloud and Lament (Review James 5:1–6 with your class.)

James invites the wealthy to “weep aloud and lament over the miseries (the woes) that are surely coming upon you” (vs. 1, Amplified). What is the purpose of James’s injunction to engage in such ostentatious displays of grief? Wouldn’t it have been more spiritually—not to mention materially and civically—beneficial for the whole of society if instead he had asked the rich to repay fourfold what they had taken by fraud, as the tax collector Zacchaeus voluntarily did after Jesus’ transformative visit to his home? Aren’t restoration and reform the necessary fruit of grace in the
transformed life and the ultimate outworking of its purpose?

To this question, James undoubtedly would answer, Yes. At the same time, he would equally acknowledge that just as reform is the outworking of grace, there can be no reform without repentance. The term “you rich” would seem to imply a spiritual designation as well as a material one—that is, one of being wealthy in material goods but impoverished spiritually. John alludes to this group of people in Revelation, in his message to the church of the Laodiceans: “For you say, I am rich; I have prospered and grown wealthy, and I am in need of nothing; and you do not realize and understand that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:17, Amplified). Without the patient’s heeding James’s injunction to grieve, the panacea that John suggests cannot produce a cure: “Therefore I counsel you to purchase from Me gold refined and tested by fire, that you may be [truly] wealthy, and white clothes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nudity from being seen, and salve to put on your eyes, that you may see” (vs. 18, Amplified).

Grief, true sorrow for sin, is the requisite currency for this transaction. In Bible times laments were expressions of grief for those who died. James is asking the wealthy to lament their own deaths while they are still living; that is, while they still have the capacity to repent. James makes it clear that the literal garments of the rich “have become moth-eaten” (James 5:2, Amplified), suggesting that they are spiritually unfit to cover them and that their deeds of corruption are clearly seen by others. What they need is eye salve—the spiritual discernment given by the Holy Spirit—John speaks of to see themselves truly, and the living gold—faith—to reach out and purchase what is freely offered: the imperishable riches of God’s mercy so that they might be rich toward others and store up riches in heaven.

Consider This: Why does James ask the rich to “lament and howl”? What is the purpose of such grief? How does “godly sorrow,” as the Bible puts it (2 Cor. 7:10, NKJV), lead to repentance?

II. In a Day of Slaughter (Review James 5:2–6 with your class.)

James follows his injunction to grieve with two lists of judgment against the rich. The first list (vss. 2, 3) pronounces doom on the accumulated wealth itself, detailing exactly how it has become accursed. The second list (vss. 4–6) details the actual crimes the wealthy have committed that have brought these curses on what they have amassed.
Let’s look at each list to understand more fully the spiritual implications for our own lives of the futility of trusting in riches and the terrible price not only the wealthy pay but also the cost to society for wealth gained at the expense of others.

Wealth is measured by what we own. The rich to whom James refers aren’t simply wealthy—they possess “abundant wealth” (*vs. 2, Amplified*). They have more than enough while those whom they extort have nothing. Their abundant wealth manifests itself in three ways: (1) their “[many] garments” (*vs. 2, Amplified*), (2) in “gold and silver” and (3) what James refers to broadly as unspecified “treasure” (*vs. 3*)—what we would call valuables—houses, lands, art collections, jewelry, stocks and bonds, etcetera, today. These treasures—the expensive clothing, gold, silver, and other valuables—have been amassed or, as James puts it, “heaped together . . . for the last days” (*vs. 3*). A heap denotes a very large pile of anything. It suggests a surfeit, an overabundance, implying greed and avarice. Most disturbing of all is the phrase “for the last days,” suggesting an intention or action on the part of the wealthy to choose to pursue accumulating wealth in the last days of earth’s history ahead of spiritual considerations. Implicit is a kind of reasoning used to justify their pursuit and practices—doing it for the cause of God.

But in his second list, James uncovers that what they are doing is not for God but in place of God. “[But] look!” he says in verse 4 of the Amplified version. In asking us to behold, James implies that the evidence of their treachery is clearly visible. “[Here are] the wages that you have withheld by fraud from the laborers who have reaped your fields, crying out [for vengeance]: and the cries of the harvesters have come to the ears of the Lord of hosts. [Here] on earth you have abandoned yourselves to soft (prodigal) living and to [the pleasures of] self-indulgence and self-gratification. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and have murdered the righteous (innocent man), [while] he offers no resistance to you” (*vss. 4–6, Amplified*).

James warns that the pursuit of riches for the sake of wealth alone leads to (1) extortion, (2) self-indulgence, (3) self-gratification, (4) material gluttony, (5) injustice, (6) and murder. Not only are these transgressions clearly visible; it is possible they are visible because the wealthy do them openly with no fear of reprisal. Their acts are not only seen by humanity; they are seen by God. What, Jesus once asked, does it profit a man to gain the whole world but lose his soul? “‘Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?’” (*Matt. 16:26, NKJV*). The world shows too often how little it values the weight of a soul. James is pleading for the world to lament, to grieve “over the miseries (the woes)” (*James 5:1, Amplified*) with “godly sorrow that produces repentance” (*2 Cor. 7:10, NKJV*) to avert the judgments from the “day of slaughter” (*James 5:5, Amplified*) that “are surely coming upon you” (*vs. 1, Amplified*).
Consider This: Wealth is a gift from God; yet, why is the wealth accumulated here condemned? By what means have the wealthy accumulated their wealth? What does James warn will happen if the rich do not “weep and lament” or repent?

STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Encourage class members to apply James’s exhortation for repentance to their everyday life situations.

Application Questions:

How do you count yourself wealthy? Financial wealth is not the only way societies measure affluence and wealth, although it is one of the most obvious. Some people measure it by health or families. Others by recognition and fame. Still others by personal achievement. All these are good when we keep two things in perspective: (1) the wealth we value is a gift from God, given to bless others before ourselves, and (2) it is meant to be devoted to the service of God, to be used for the advancement of His cause and not for self-aggrandizement. What things has God honored us with? Why must we let God honor us instead of seeking honor?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: This exercise is to be done outside of class to help learners personalize James’s message not to idolize anything that divides the heart.

Activity: James asks the rich to lament the miseries that sin leads to. What are the things we need to turn away from or forsake? What things, if we were to lament over them, would bring us closer to Jesus? Ask students to compose a lament, or prayer, addressed to God that is an expression of grief or sorrow for sin or the suffering it has wrought. Let the lament be in the form of their choice: poem, painting, singing a hymn, or composing their own music.
Getting Ready for the Harvest

SABBATH AFTERNOON


Memory Text: “You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand” (James 5:8, NKJV).

In Greco-Roman times (as in some places still today), a flurry of activity preceded the coming of a visiting dignitary. Streets were cleared, shop windows cleaned, flowers planted, and crime prevention increased. Every effort was directed at making sure the place looked perfect when the official arrived.

The Greek word parousia, which is used throughout the New Testament for Christ’s “coming,” as well as in James 5:7, 8, is a technical expression for the arrival of a king or dignitary. If such preparations preceded the arrival of earthly rulers, should we not make every effort to make our hearts ready for the coming of our Lord and Savior?

But how do we make such a preparation when we do not know “of that day or hour” (Matt. 24:36)? What does it mean to be “patient” and to “establish” our hearts? How does this relate to the idea of the “early and latter rain” (James 5:7)? Though in the texts for this week the context appears to be the end of time, the basic message is so relevant to believers at any time. Throughout our history and even in our own lives now, we face trials and suffering that call for us to stand firm in the faith, as did the prophets of old.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 13.
Waiting for “Rain”

Farmers are directly dependent on the weather for their livelihood. If the weather is too dry or too wet, too cold or too hot, their produce will be adversely affected. In drier countries, such as Israel, the margin of safety is even less, and the importance of plentiful rain at the proper times is significantly greater. Whether grown on a small family farm or a large estate, the crop and its subsequent value are directly dependent on rain.

The early rain, which generally falls in October and November, moistens the ground and prepares it for planting and germination. The latter rain, around March or April, ripens the crops for harvest.


“Under the figure of the early and the latter rain, that falls in Eastern lands at seedtime and harvest, the Hebrew prophets foretold the bestowal of spiritual grace in extraordinary measure upon God’s church. The outpouring of the Spirit in the days of the apostles was the beginning of the early, or former rain, and glorious was the result. . . . But near the close of earth’s harvest, a special bestowal of spiritual grace is promised to prepare the church for the coming of the Son of man. This outpouring of the Spirit is likened to the falling of the latter rain; and it is for this added power that Christians are to send their petitions to the Lord of the harvest ‘in the time of the latter rain.’”

—Ellen G. White, Our Father Cares, p. 212.

Jesus refers to the “harvest” at “the end of the world” (Matt. 13:39). Mark 4:26–29 presents a very similar picture to that of James 5:7. The farmer waits for the grain to ripen: “‘first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come’” (Mark 4:28, 29, ESV). Only at harvesttime is it possible to distinguish the wheat from the tares (Matt. 13:28–30; compare Mal. 3:17, 18).

What should the fact that we can distinguish the wheat from the tares only at harvesttime tell us about how we must live out our faith now, before the harvest?
How Near Is “Near”?

James 5:8 affirms that Christ’s coming is “at hand” or “near.” But, after nearly two thousand years, how are we to understand this promise?

Jesus described the coming kingdom (Matt. 4:17, 10:7, 24:33) by means of parables to teach the unfamiliar “heavenly things” in terms that are understandable. A close study of these parables reveals that the kingdom has two aspects: a present, spiritual reality and a glorious reality still to come. All the apostles fixed their hope in the imminent coming of Jesus (Rom. 13:11, Heb. 10:25, James 5:9), but they never identify exactly when that would be. Like us, they wanted to know when, but Jesus explained that this information was not best for them to know (Acts 1:6, 7). After all, how zealous would they be in sharing the gospel with the world had they known that the work would not be finished for almost two thousand years—and counting?

What does James mean when he says “establish your hearts” (James 5:8, NKJV), and why do you think the awaited fruit is called “precious” (timios; vs. 7)? See 1 Thess. 3:13, 2 Thess. 3:3, 1 Pet. 1:19, 1 Cor. 3:12.

The word establish (stērizō) means to “fix firmly” or “strengthen.” Our hearts are to be so wedded to the Lord that they cannot be moved despite the pressures brought against them. Becoming settled in the truth (2 Pet. 1:12), withstanding temptation, and enduring trials and suffering for our faith (Acts 14:22) all contribute to this work.

Spiritual growth is a process that is not always easy but that bears “precious fruit.” Believers, redeemed by “the precious [timios] blood of Christ” (1 Pet. 1:19, NKJV), are of infinite value to the heavenly “Farmer.” The word timios is also used to describe the “precious stones” that symbolize believers who are “built” on Christ, the “foundation” stone of God’s spiritual temple, the church (1 Cor. 3:11, 12). Paul likens unstable believers, on the other hand, to wood, hay, and straw that will not last and will ultimately be consumed by fire when Christ comes (vss. 12–15). It is important, therefore, to ask ourselves on a regular basis whether our energies are really directed toward what we value most, toward what and who is most precious to us!

“Each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is” (vs. 13, NKJV). Look at your life. What sort of work is it?
Grumbling, Groaning, and Growing

When is the Second Coming? Why are we still here? It’s not surprising that now, in the twenty-first century, we have doubters and scoffers. In the history of the church, this is nothing new. The most dangerous threats to Israel throughout its history came not from their enemies but from within their own ranks and from within their own hearts. Likewise, as the coming of the Lord approaches, “we have far more to fear from within than from without. . . . The unbelief indulged, the doubts expressed, the darkness cherished, encourage the presence of evil angels, and open the way for the accomplishment of Satan’s devices.”—Ellen G. White, _Last Day Events_, p. 156.

Therefore James 5:9 warns us, “Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.” What grudges or grumbles against others, or even against the church, have you had (and maybe at times with good cause too)? The question is, How have you handled them? With meekness, humility, and forgiveness, as you have been forgiven by God (see Luke 7:39–50), or by worldly standards? Be honest with yourself!

From what we have read earlier in this epistle, it seems that there were serious challenges among the believers, including favoritism (James 2:1, 9), evil surmising (vs. 4), evil speaking toward one another (3:10, 4:11), envy (3:14), quarrels (4:1), and worldliness (vss. 4, 13, 14). Consistently, James directs us to deep solutions to these problems: faith (James 1:3, 6), “the implanted word” (vs. 21, NKJV), beholding “the law of liberty” (James 1:25, 2:12, NKJV), single-mindedness and godly wisdom (James 3:13, 17), grace (James 4:6), and clean hands and a pure heart (vs. 8). He also insists that there be outward expressions of God’s inward workings (James 2:14–26), including visiting the afflicted and forgotten (James 1:27), showing mercy (James 2:13), and sowing peace rather than discord (James 3:18).

Ultimately, we are accountable to God; the One to whom we must give account is the Lord who is the Judge and who will give to everyone according to his or her work.

As we wait for the Lord’s return, what are positive ways you can encourage and uplift others? Why is it important that you do so?
Models of Patient Endurance

Read James 5:10, 11. What do Job and the prophets have in common? Why do you think these examples are highlighted? What personal lessons can we take away from these stories for ourselves amid our own trials?

The prophets of Israel were faithful in preaching the Word of the Lord without altering or compromising it. Hebrews, in extolling the prophets’ fidelity to God, paints a clear picture: they “stopped the mouths of lions [Daniel], quenched the violence of fire [Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego], escaped the edge of the sword [Elijah and Elisha], . . . had . . . imprisonment [Jeremiah and Micaiah], . . . stoned [Zechariah, son of Jehoiada], . . . sawn asunder [Isaiah], . . . [and] slain with the sword [see 1 Kings 19:10]” (Heb. 11:33–37). Of course, Job’s sufferings are also proverbial, as is the patience he exemplified despite derision by his own wife and the censure of those who came to commiserate with him. What set these heroes of faith and many others apart from the normal or average follower of God? James mentions several qualities: patience, endurance, and, above all, hope and trust in God.

One of the attributes is “patience” (makrothymias), also translated as “longsuffering” or “forbearance.” It refers to the capacity to stand up under difficult circumstances and trials, to weather whatever life (or the devil!) throws at us. The prophets endured all their suffering for the Word of God patiently (James 5:10). This word is used frequently in the New Testament, including in a reference to Abraham waiting “patiently” during his many years of sojourning for God to fulfill His promise to give him a son (Heb. 6:12, 15). It also describes Jesus bearing up patiently through all His sufferings and death on the cross (2 Pet. 3:15).

Endurance (hypomonē), on the other hand, focuses on the end goal of this process, looking forward to the finish line. Job is put forward as the epitome of this quality. Despite all he suffered, Job looked steadfastly toward the final vindication he expected to receive (Job 14:13–15, 19:23–27).

What are you struggling with now? What have you prayed for that has not yet come? How often have you even felt a sense of hopelessness? Think through the trials of some of the Bible characters listed above (or others); imagine how helpless they must have felt at times. What can you draw from their suffering that could help you work through your own?
Transparent as the Sunlight

Read James 5:12. Commentators have puzzled over why James seems to make such a major issue out of swearing solemn oaths. Even if the intent were to prohibit all speech of this kind, why would it seem to be urged as important “above all” that he has spoken about in this chapter or perhaps in the entire letter? Is it really that big of an issue? We need to keep in mind what we have seen throughout our study of this epistle: that James is not content with a superficial faith or form of religion, despite the caricatures of him that we sometimes hear. James is thoroughly gospel-oriented, so much so that he sets standards too high for us to reach without God’s forgiving and empowering grace. Our words reveal what is in our hearts: “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34, NKJV). The theology of James is permeated with the thinking of Jesus, who commanded us: “Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King” (Matt. 5:34, 35). Some people apparently even placed the hairs of their head in pledge to guarantee their words (vs. 36). But Jesus said all of this was evil: “‘Let your “Yes” be “Yes,” and your “No,” “No”’” (Matt. 5:37, NKJV).

Everything belongs to God, including every hair on our heads (even if, in some cases, there aren’t many!), so “there is nothing that we have a right to pledge, as if it were our own, for the fulfillment of our word. . . .

“Everything that Christians do should be as transparent as the sunlight. Truth is of God; deception, in every one of its myriad forms, is of Satan.”—Ellen G. White, Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, pp. 66, 68. Clearly, Christ was not prohibiting judicial oaths because He Himself, when placed under oath by the high priest, did not refuse to answer, nor did He even condemn the process despite numerous deviations from sound jurisprudence (Matt. 26:63, 64).

Several things need to be kept in mind when speaking the truth, first and foremost being that we seldom even know all the truth, even about ourselves, and so we must be humble. Second, when we do speak the truth, it should always be spoken in love and for the edification of those who hear.

Read Ephesians 4:15, 29 and Colossians 4:6. Dwell prayerfully on the powerful message of these texts. Think how different (and better!) your life would be were you, through God’s grace, to strictly follow these admonitions.
Further Study: Read about the experiences of Elijah and Job in times of testing and their significance for us in the last days in Ellen G. White, “From Jezreel to Horeb,” pp. 155–166; “‘What Doest Thou Here?’” pp. 167–176; “‘In the Spirit and Power of Elias,’” pp. 177–189, in Prophets and Kings.

“To wait patiently, to trust when everything looks dark, is the lesson that the leaders in God’s work need to learn. Heaven will not fail them in their day of adversity. Nothing is apparently more helpless, yet really more invincible, than the soul that feels its nothingness and relies wholly on God. . . .

“Trials will come, but go forward. This will strengthen your faith and fit you for service. The records of sacred history are written, not merely that we may read and wonder, but that the same faith which wrought in God’s servants of old may work in us.”—Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, pp. 174, 175.

Discussion Questions:

1. We all know the parable about the wheat and the tares growing together until the harvest (Matthew 13). But what does that mean in terms of church discipline? What does that mean in terms of dealing with outright rebellion or apostasy in our ranks? Are we just to sit by and do nothing, saying that it will all be taken care of when the Lord returns? Obviously not. How—in light of this parable, but also in light of examples in which discipline was needed in the early church, such as in Corinthians and Galatians—are we to deal with the tares, especially those whose sole purpose seems to be choking the wheat and nothing else?

2. Temptations and trials come to all of us. What promises from the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White have been comforting to you and have helped you to persevere in your faith? What Bible characters have been most meaningful to you in difficulties and/or in view of what lies ahead?

3. James tells us to “grudge not one against another” (5:9). Yet, people, even other Christians, can do things that bother and annoy us. How can we learn to love, to forgive, to endure, and to rise above many of the “petty” things in life that can make us moody, irritable, and, really, bad witnesses?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: James 5:7–11

The Student Will:

Know: Understand what it means to keep a patient vigil as we wait for the Lord.

Feel: Cultivate patience amid injustice and suffering.

Do: Strive to not lose heart in the face of evil as he or she waits for the Lord to return.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: The Patient Vigil of the Heart
   
   A Define what James means by keeping a patient vigil.
   
   B What are the characteristics of a patient person, as outlined by James?
   
II. Feel: The Patience of Job
   
   A In what ways do you suppose the trials that Job suffered shaped and strengthened his faith?
   
   B What can you take from Job’s example that strengthens yours?
   
III. Do: Watching and Waiting
   
   A How may we demonstrate to others patience in action?
   
   B According to James, how are we to respond to the corruption we see in the world?

Summary: As we wait for the Lord to return, James enjoins believers to strive to be patient in the face of evil and injustice and not to lose heart.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: James 5:7–11

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: As we wait for the Lord to return, James enjoins us to strive for patience in the face of evil and not to lose heart.

Just for Teachers: Use the following discussion activity to help learners to understand the need for cultivating patience amid injustice and suffering, resting in the promise that God will make everything right in the end.

Opening Activity: Discuss the trials that afflicted Job and some of the Old Testament prophets, focusing on what they suffered and how they handled persecution.

Consider This: If you were to paint a word-picture of patience in light of the story of Job, what would patience look like? How did Ezekiel show patience when asked to endure the death of his wife? What was Hosea’s response to God’s instruction to take an adulterous wife? How do these lives demonstrate patience in action, and what do they teach us about doing the same?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Help class members to deepen their understanding of not only what patience is but how it acts and what it looks like in action.

I. The Patient Vigil of the Heart (Review James 5:7, 8 with your class.)

James gives a homily on patience in 5:7, 8 that begins with the word so (vs. 7, Amplified). This word is another way of saying “therefore” and signals a conclusion as a result of previous meditation. That previous meditation, in James 5:1–6 on the corruption of the wealthy, establishes a context for what follows in verses 7 and 8 in which he exhorts believers to practice patience, furnishing examples to help them endure the
trial of waiting in the face of injustice.

One of the examples of patience that James says we are to emulate while waiting for the Lord to return is the farmer. “See how the farmer waits expectantly for the precious harvest from the land. [See how] he keeps up his patient [vigil] over it until it receives the early and late rains” (vs. 7, Amplified). Parsing the verse yields valuable insights into what it means to wait. Notice how the farmer waits: he waits (1) expectantly, and (2) his vigil is characterized by patience, until (3) he receives the early and late rains. To wait expectantly means that the farmer is waiting for something that he knows will happen with certainty. He expects a harvest in the same way that we are told that God will come to “put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe” (Joel 3:13, NKJV). The harvest imagery, as denoted by the early and the late rains, signals that this is the language of judgment. The farmer’s part in the work of the great harvest of souls is not to look at the corruption but to look at his field. Nor is he to look at another’s field—but only at the field he has been assigned. He is to keep watch over that field, waiting for the crop of souls to ripen so that it may be gleaned and brought into the storehouse of heaven. In order for that to happen, the early and the late rains must fall—clear symbols of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as Zechariah 10:1 and Acts 2:1–3 tell us.

Note that the farmer cannot really control the actual outcome of the harvest. He can only plant, pray, and wait, hoping for the rains that will water the earth and make the crop grow so that it will be ready for harvesting. His job, then, until the day of harvest is to work and to watch. Keeping vigil means just that. It is a watching that involves patient waiting for an expected and promised outcome. Remember that, in the scheme of things, planting and harvesting take place at the beginning and the end of the growing season. It is the long interminable work in between and all that it entails that occupy the greatest amount of time. Farming includes waiting, and so it is a perfect object lesson for the person who is tilling the soil of human hearts, planting seeds of the gospel, and watching for them to take root and cultivating them.

Like the farmer, we’ve all been given a field of souls to be vigilant over—whether it is the family circle, our friends, our co-workers, the church—wherever we find ourselves. We are to cast the seed of the gospel into the ground of each heart and wait patiently for results, “as those who must give account” (Heb. 13:17, NKJV). Keeping our focus on the field—instead of on the flaws and failures of the world around us or even our own—keeps our hearts hopeful and resolute.

Consider This: What is James’s solution for how we should respond to the corruption we see in the world? What does it mean that we are to keep
II. Blessed Are the Merciful *(Review James 5:9–11 with your class.)*

James additionally furnishes us with monumental examples of patience under fiery trial: the Old Testament prophets and Job. In the crucible of suffering and cruelty, they bore themselves with gentleness and humility, showing “pity and compassion and tenderness and mercy” of God *(vs. 11, Amplified).* Persecution is a necessary evil, so to speak, in this sin-twisted world. Why? We are all auditioning for heaven. Persecution permits us, before the stage of the universe, to reveal where our true allegiance lies—with Christ or Satan. To wait patiently is one thing. To do so in the face of persecution or at the risk of financial loss, social ostracism or the threat of death, when there is no hope of earthly gain, is to endure with the epic patience of Job and the prophets.

James distills in practical terms what this patience entails so that we can recognize it when we see it. “Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you [yourselves] may not be judged. Look! The Judge is [already] standing at the very door. [As] an example of suffering and ill-treatment together with patience, brethren, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. . . . You know how we call those blessed (happy) who were steadfast [who endured]” *(vss. 9–11, Amplified).*

Patience will be recognized by the following characteristics: (1) a refusal to indulge in criticism that is not constructive and uplifting, and (2) remaining calm and gentle in the face of cruelty and suffering. Such outward manifestations of grace are the result of the indwelling of the Spirit in the soul. When we presume to take on the prerogatives of the Judge, we are not only in danger of judging wrongly, we are in danger of being judged with the same spirit we show to others. James reminds us that “the Lord is full of pity and compassion and tenderness and mercy” *(vs. 11, Amplified)*, and the degree of mercy that we show to others, as we wait for the Lord to come, is the degree that will be shown to us. “ ‘Blessed are the merciful,’ ” as Jesus said in the Beatitudes, “ ‘for they shall obtain mercy’ ” *(Matt. 5:7, NKJV).*

**Consider This:** What does it mean to wait with the patience of Job? What did he and the prophets endure, and, more importantly, how did they endure? What are the characteristics of a patient person, as outlined by James? How do these qualities reveal God to others? Why does complaining against
others put us in danger of being judged, as James warns? What are the characteristics of God that James lists, and what do they reveal to us about His attitude toward His wayward and fallen children?

STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Help class members to apply the principles of patience, as outlined by James, to their everyday life situations.

**Application Questions:**

1. In light of the discussion on James’s exhortation for the need for patience, what are some of the areas in your life where you could exercise more patience?

2. List strategies you can use to help you remain patient instead of giving in to anger or frustration. For example, prayer, committing scripture to memory and reciting it, breathing deeply before answering with a retort, et cetera. How can these help both in immediate situations where patience is required and in long-term situations where you are waiting for a desired outcome or answer to prayer? (For example, waiting for employment or for God to help you to find the right house or to resolve family conflict.)

STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Use the following exercise to help learners create a broader understanding of what patience is in order to cultivate and to live out a life of patience in a relatively impatient world.

**Activity:** If patience in the Bible had a face, then arguably one could make a good case that it was Job in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New. Who are some of the other faces of patience, both modern and historical, that inspire you? Share who they are, and why they give you hope.
Prayer, Healing, and Restoration

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: James 5:13–20; 1 John 5:14; 1 Cor. 15:54; Heb. 12:12, 13; John 8:43–45; Prov. 10:12.

Memory Text: “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much” (James 5:16, NASB).

People are fascinated by the miraculous and the magical. They often are drawn to such things as spectacles or matters of curiosity and nothing more. So, when Jesus was asked to perform a miracle merely for entertainment (Luke 23:8, 9) or as a sign of His Messiahship (Matt. 12:38–41) or even to satisfy a legitimate need of His own (Matt. 4:2–4), He refused. The Spirit, by which Jesus taught authoritatively and effected miraculous healings, is not simply a power to be used; we are to be instruments in His hands. God would gladly heal everyone who is sick, but He is interested in a more substantial, lasting healing.

Thus, in this context, we will look at some crucial questions: How do we understand the words in James about the healing of the sick? Is there a relationship between healing and forgiveness in answer to prayer? Elijah is presented as an important model of prayer in a time of widespread apostasy. What can we learn from his life of prayer and his work of calling Israel back to God and true worship?

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 20.
Read James 5:13. What interesting contrast is he presenting here? How do we apply these admonitions to our own experiences?

Though dealing with two different things (suffering, cheerfulness), James links them with prayer and praise: pray when you are suffering, praise when you are cheerful. The two practices are not that different from each other, however, because many biblical psalms of praise are also prayers, and James begins the epistle urging readers to “consider it all joy” when falling into various trials, “knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance” (James 1:2, 3, NASB). The time to pray and the time to praise might be more intertwined than we generally think.

The word for “suffering” in James 5:13 (NASB) is from the same root as the word used earlier to refer to the suffering of the prophets (vs. 10). It refers to both physical and mental suffering—“first and foremost for the danger and toil of war” (Ceslas Spicq, Theological Lexicon of the New Testament, vol. 2, p. 239), but also to exhausting manual labor and costly effort. It is used in 2 Timothy 2:9 and 4:5, too, to describe “the hard apostolic labor that is not deterred by any difficulty or suffering.”—Theological Lexicon of the New Testament, vol. 2, p. 240. As Christians, we instinctively turn to God when trouble comes. Prayer is especially essential in facing difficulties, but singing or playing sacred music (the word used, psalletō, can mean either) is also helpful.

“Singing is as much an act of worship as is prayer. Indeed, many a song is prayer.”—Ellen G. White, Education, p. 168. How many of us have been depressed or lonely, only to have the words of a hymn come to mind and lift our spirits? There are many among us who are suffering or need encouragement and would be cheered by a visit filled with prayer and song. “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15, NKJV). It may lift our spirits, too, as nothing else can.

The book of Psalms especially is a treasure house of prayers and songs that can provide inspiration, encouragement, and direction when we do not know where to turn for help.

We all know how suffering can draw us closer to the Lord and how it can drive us to prayer. What, though, are the spiritual dangers that come when things are going well for us? Why, especially in those times, is praise so important? What does it help us never to forget?
Prayer for the Sick

Read James 5:14, 15. What are the essential elements James prescribes for anointing the sick, and what important spiritual components are found in these texts?

The fact that the sick person calls for the elders of the church to come and anoint him or her “with oil in the name of the Lord” and pray expresses the spiritual desire of the individual and the collective conviction that divine intervention is needed for healing (Mark 6:13). The reference to the forgiveness of sins shows that God will not, by means of a ritual, restore a person physically who does not also desire spiritual healing. “To those who desire prayer for their restoration to health, it should be made plain that the violation of God’s law, either natural or spiritual, is sin, and that in order for them to receive His blessing, sin must be confessed and forsaken.”—Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing, p. 228.

The request for divine intervention and the summoning of the elders of the church suggest that the illness is incapacitating and, perhaps, also too urgent to be done in connection with a regular church gathering. Two different Greek words are used for the sick here: the first (astheneō in verse 14) is also used of Dorcas who “became sick and died” (Acts 9:37, NKJV); the second (kamnō in verse 15) refers generally to the patient, but it is also used of those who are dying and, in this context, seems to mean someone physically worn out or wasting away. Miraculous healing may happen in answer to “the prayer of faith.” The desire for healing requires full surrender to God’s will, whatever it is (1 John 5:14). However, the references to “sav[ing]” and “rais[ing]” the sick (compare “shall save . . . from death” in James 5:20) point unmistakably to the resurrection as representing the only complete healing, the time “when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality” (1 Cor. 15:54).

Many of us have known about anointing services, or have even been involved in them, in which the sick are not healed but in fact die. Why, then, is the hope of the resurrection, implied in these texts, our only surety?
Healing for the Soul

More important than the healing of the body is the healing of the soul. Our purpose is not, after all, to make people healthier sinners but to point them to the eternal life found in Jesus. Perhaps that is why the only clear reference to healing in the passage for this week is our memory text in verse 16, which moves away from the hypothetical situations dealt with in verses 13–15. The word for healing in this verse (iaomai) can refer to healing that goes beyond the cure of physical illness (see, for example, Matt. 13:15). Having already in verse 15 hinted at a broader understanding of healing (the resurrection), James makes the connection between illness and sin, the latter being the root cause of all our problems—not that every illness can be traced back to a particular sin but that sickness and death are the results of us all being sinners.

Read Mark 2:1–12 (compare Heb. 12:12, 13; 1 Pet. 2:24, 25). What kind of healing do these passages describe, and what is the basis of this healing?

Faith in Jesus brings healing from spiritual weakness and sin. In a sense, every healing Jesus performed was a parable meant to draw people’s attention to their deeper need of salvation. In the case of the paralyzed man in Mark 2, spiritual healing was actually the man’s uppermost concern, which is why Jesus immediately assured him that his sins were forgiven. Yet, “it was not physical restoration he desired so much as relief from the burden of sin. If he could see Jesus, and receive the assurance of forgiveness and peace with Heaven, he would be content to live or die, according to God’s will.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 267. While God’s healers today should employ all available medical means to cure disease, efforts should be made also to heal the whole person, not just for this life but in view of eternity.

Healing includes the healing of relationships, which is why we are exhorted, “confess your sins to one another” (James 5:16, RSV), meaning those we have wronged (Matt. 18:15, 21, 22). That is, if you have wronged or offended others, confess to them. Then the blessing of the Lord will rest upon you because the process of confession involves a dying to self, and only through that death to self can Christ be formed within you.
Models of Prayer

Read James 5:17, 18. What do we learn about prayer from Elijah’s example? How is it connected with healing, forgiveness, and restoration?

These verses illustrate the assurance given at the end of James 5:16: “the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much” (NASB). Elijah was a “righteous” man and even translated to heaven, but he was not superhuman. He had the same passions and feelings that we have. The fact that God heard his prayer should encourage us that our prayers will be heard too. James says Elijah “prayed earnestly” that it might not rain (a detail not mentioned in the Old Testament), petitioning, apparently, for the fulfillment of Deuteronomy 11:13–17 (alluded to in James 5:18).

Israel’s worship of Baal, the god of storm and lightning, could not go unchallenged on the basis of this prophecy in Deuteronomy. Though we do not know how long Elijah prayed before his prayers were answered, his petitions were based on careful study of, and reflection upon, God’s Word in light of his present circumstances. It may be that he quoted Deuteronomy’s prophecy as part of his prayer, just as Daniel’s prayer for Jerusalem is based on his study of Jeremiah’s prophecy (see Dan. 9:2, 3). Our prayers, too, will be more effective when they spring from thoughtful consideration of our circumstances in light of God’s Word.

The period of no rain lasting three and a half years (also mentioned in Luke 4:25) is a significant time of probation in Scripture (like the prophetic period of “half a week,” or three and a half years of Jesus’ ministry in Daniel 9:27, and the “three and a half times” of apostasy in Christianity in Daniel 7:25 and Revelation 12:14). At the end of this period, God used Elijah to begin a work of revival and reformation to wake up Israel so that the people would recognize the depths of their apostasy. It was a work that typified both the work John the Baptist would do for first-century Israel in order to prepare the way for Christ’s first advent and the work that God has entrusted to His remnant church today to prepare people for the Second Advent (see Mal. 4:5, 6; Matt. 11:13, 14).

As a church, we are seeking revival and reformation. But it must begin in our own lives, with our own selves, on a personal and daily basis. What choices can only you, yourself, make that will determine the direction and, ultimately, the destiny of your life?
Restoration and Forgiveness

God’s Spirit worked through Elijah to restore the relationship between Israel and Himself. But most of Elijah’s work was not on Mount Carmel. That was just the beginning! He carried it forward in small villages and homes and in training future spiritual leaders through the schools of the prophets to multiply his work of revival and reform.


Often, we forget the tender and patient work done by Elijah year after year. John the Baptist’s work, too, focused on leading people back to the truth, inspiring repentance and baptism one person at a time. Jesus described His work in very similar terms: leading people out of error and back to the truth (see John 8:43–45).

This hypothetical situation described in James 5:19, 20 uses a conditional construction in Greek, making clear that apostasy is not definitely assumed to exist but is probable. Departure from the truth refers to apostasy not only in doctrine but in lifestyle, for very often the first leads to the second. Doubts begin to form about our beliefs, leading to double-minded behavior, and finally to outright apostasy. Turning back a “sinner from the wandering of his way will save his soul from death” (James 5:20, literally translated). Summing up all that has gone before, James appeals for his brothers in the church to do a work similar to that of Elijah in leading people back to God.

This work requires much patience, sympathy, tenderness, and humility: “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted” (Gal. 6:1, NIV). The work of Elijah is to turn hearts toward God and His people, not to turn them away. Often the person is well aware of his or her sin and does not need it pointed out. What is needed more is forgiveness modeled by Jesus and provided by His death. Saving souls from death is possible only through the “covering” of sins, by applying the gospel to our lives, and becoming instruments of mercy (Prov. 10:12).

Think of someone who has really done wrong and knows it too. What can you do, what can you say, to help draw this person back toward the Lord?

“Christ . . . asks us to become one with Him for the saving of humanity. ‘Freely ye have received,’ He says, ‘freely give.’ Matt. 10:8. Sin is the greatest of all evils, and it is ours to pity and help the sinner. There are many who err, and who feel their shame and their folly. They are hungry for words of encouragement. They look upon their mistakes and errors, until they are driven almost to desperation. These souls we are not to neglect. . . .

“Speak words of faith and courage that will be as a healing balsam to the bruised and wounded one.”—Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, p. 504.

Discussion Questions:

1. Think of a time when you really made a mess of things, hurting yourself, others, and the Lord by your sin. How much did it mean to you to have people who, although not condoning your actions (and who might have generally and rightly been appalled by them), nevertheless sought to encourage and uplift you? What do you remember most about those experiences, and how can those remembrances help you do the same for someone else who has made big mistakes, as well?

2. Read James 5:16 prayerfully and carefully. What important spiritual lessons are here for us? What does this tell us about the power of prayer and how important it is for our spiritual lives? Though prayer can and should be a very private matter, in class talk about what prayer does for you, how you have seen prayers answered, and how you have learned to trust the Lord when prayers aren’t answered as you wish. In the end, what would you say is the most important practical benefit that comes from “effectual fervent prayer”? 
The Lesson in Brief

**Key Text:** *James 5:13–16*

**The Student Will:**

**Know:** Recognize the importance of prayer and confession in the quest for divine healing and forgiveness.

**Feel:** Believe that God can restore and heal him or her of any malady, whether physical or spiritual.

**Do:** Trust completely in Christ as the Great Physician.

**Learning Outline:**

I. **Know: Praying for the Sick**

   A. What steps does James advise taking in our desire to be healed?

   B. What role do prayer and confession play in our quest for healing?

   C. Explain what the original meaning of the word *restore* reveals about God as Healer.

II. **Feel: A Matter of Timing**

   A. What strength and comfort do you derive from James’s instructions, in a time of sickness, to call in the elders and pray for the afflicted?

   B. What can you do to keep your faith strong in the face of delayed answers to prayer for healing?

III. **Do: Trusting the Great Physician**

   A. What kind of encouragement can you give to someone who is feeling discouraged because his or her prayers for healing seem to go unanswered?

   B. Suggest meaningful and loving ways to comfort someone who is grieving the loss of a loved one.

**Summary:** There is nothing that God cannot heal, transform, undo, bind up, or restore.
Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *James 5:13–16*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: There is nothing that God cannot heal, transform, undo, bind up, or restore.

Just for Teachers: Use the activity below to help learners relate to Jesus, not only as their Redeemer but as the Great Physician, who “heals all [their] diseases” (Ps. 103:3, NKJV).

Opening Activity: Ask a class member or two, whoever feels comfortable enough to share, to briefly relay a time when he or she sought healing from the Lord personally or on behalf of another. What was the nature of the ailment? What was the outcome? Did he or she receive the answer hoped for? If not, how did the class member cope? What questions did it generate? How did the experience strengthen his or her faith? What did it reveal to him or her about Jesus as the Great Physician?

Consider This: Based on the experiences shared and those that we’ve personally experienced, what role does “the prayer of faith” (vs. 15), as James puts it, play in healing? Describe what you have learned about this kind of prayer in your own healing journeys. How did it deepen your understanding of Christ’s role as Healer, not only of your sickness but of your sins?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Stress the importance of prayer and confession in the quest for divine healing and forgiveness.

I. Prayer for the Sick (Review James 5:14–16 with your class.)

When healing is needed, James advises calling for the elders of the church. “Is anyone among you sick? He should call in the church elders” (vs. 14, Amplified). This advice should not be interpreted to mean that James advocates foregoing medical intervention. Rather, it is simply meant to direct our attention to the fact that there is a spiritual dimension to our ailments that
must not be overlooked when healing is sought. Regardless of whatever route we choose to take on our healing journey, we should first seek the counsel and intervention of the Great Physician.

What, though, does James mean by the “sick” among you? It may seem like a fairly obvious question with an equally obvious answer. But a fever is one thing; a congenital defect, present since birth, is another. Does James’s injunction include the healing of such birth defects and long-standing maladies, incurable illnesses, paralysis, et cetera? These are crucial questions. Looking at the origin of the word *sick*, in an attempt to parse out its meaning, is of great benefit in guiding our understanding as we seek for answers. The word *sick*, found in verse 14, comes from the Greek word *astheneo*, which means to be diseased, impotent, sick, or to be made weak. It also carries the meaning of “to be feeble in any sense.”—Strong’s *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*.

Assertions or promises of this magnitude can be staggering, making many feel skeptical about claiming them. Moreover, if healing is sought but does not occur, the Christian community of faith is at risk for appearing to be a failure, or worse, fraudulent, raising doubts about the genuineness of the petitioner’s faith. All such fears and doubts are not from God.

The bottom line is this: the text covers or offers hope of healing for any ailment or condition. So, then, one may logically ask, why isn’t healing given every time a person seeks God in faith? The short answer is that every prayer for healing is always answered affirmatively—that is, with a Yes. The question is not *if* God will heal the sick but *when* He will do it. So, it is not a matter of twisting God’s arm but one of timing. Let’s explore that concept further.

There are three possible moments of timing for divine healing: (1) instantaneous or immediate (as in the case of the paralytic Jesus healed, in Matthew 9:1–6); (2) gradual (as in the case of Naaman the leper, in 2 Kings 5); and (3) at the resurrection (as in the case of Paul’s “thorn” in the side, or Jacob’s hip *(see 2 Cor. 12:7; Gen. 32:25)*). Thus, prayers for healing are always answered affirmatively; it is simply a matter of timing as to when. The decision of timing belongs to God alone as to what will bind us closest to Him and will bring the most glory to His name. Living with an ailment this side of heaven may be a special ministry to which God has called certain individuals in order that they may best serve Him and bless others.

Having said that, James outlines five steps that the physically afflicted should follow when divine healing is sought. The sick should (1) call the elders, (2) who “should pray over him, anointing him with oil in the Lord’s name” *(James 5:14, Amplified)*. It is worth taking a moment to note that the oil is translated from a word *elaion*, which means olive oil,
a symbol associated with the Holy Spirit. Olive oil was used in the sanctuary service to consecrate and set the priests apart for the service of God. It was used to anoint the kings of Israel. Thus, anointing the sick with oil implies the sick one, even in the midst of affliction, is being set apart so that the Holy Spirit can work. In essence, God is claiming him or her for His service.

We see this truth in the word for anoint itself, *aleiphō*, which is created from two words, one that has the sense of “union” or “unity”—in this sense with God—and the other from a word that means grease or fat, and contains within it the suggestion of something sumptuous—something utterly extravagantly opulent. This denotation suggests that God is generously and extravagantly pouring out His Spirit without measure upon His children in healing and blessing.

Moreover, James exhorts the elders to (3) pray, for it is the “prayer of faith” that “will save him who is sick and the Lord will restore Him” (*James 5:15, Amplified*). There are many modern examples of instantaneous healing. But not all are necessarily genuine. But whether God chooses to heal now or later, the restoration is sure, as an examination of the root word in the Greek illuminates. The word for restore, which is “raise” in the New King James Version, comes from *egeirō*, meaning “to waken, to rouse from disease or death,” literally or figuratively. This word is the same one used in Acts 26:8, where it talks about God raising the dead. Thus, the healing power to remove sickness that James speaks of derives from the same Source as the power used at the resurrection to bring the dead to life again. What a wondrous thought. The connection between healing and the resurrection should cause us to realize there is nothing God cannot heal, transform, undo, bind up, or restore.

Finally, James admonishes the sick to (4) “confess to one another therefore your faults (your slips, your false steps, your offenses, your sins)” and (5) “pray [also] for one another, that you may be healed and restored” (*James 5:16, Amplified*). The word *therefore* is significant. It signals a kind of causal relationship between confession of sin and healing. After all, sickness is but a bodily manifestation, or symbol, of the devastating ravages of sin. What God can do for the body, He can do for the soul. His gift of physical healing is meant to be an outward manifestation of His longing to heal us inwardly from all our sins.

**Consider This:** What steps does James advise taking when one is sick? What does it mean to be restored? What does the original meaning of the word reveal about God’s intention and power to heal? What hope does that give us? What is the relationship between confession and healing? Why is that a vital part of the healing process? Discuss the role of timing in healing and the
importance that it plays in the exercise of faith and our understanding of God’s will.

STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Help class members to apply to their everyday life experiences James’s advice about how to seek divine healing.

**Application Questions:**

1. Recall a time when you petitioned God for healing in behalf of another or for yourself. What was your mind-set: Desperation? Fear? Anger? Anxiety? How do the steps outlined by James help to prepare the sick and their intercessors to remain strong in faith and trust, regardless of the outcome? What strength and comfort do you derive from James’s instruction to call in the elders, confess one’s sins, and pray for the sick?

2. What would you say to someone who prayed for a loved one who is ill and is discouraged because he or she has gotten worse or has been laid to rest? Using James’s words as a guide, what kind of encouragement can you give without crossing the line from faith over into presumption?

STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** James exhorts us to sing in the midst of our joy *(James 5:13).* Song is a way of drawing us closer to the great Joy-Giver and serves as a potent reminder of the Source of all joy.

**Activity:** To close, pick a favorite hymn or song and sing it together. If there is time, sing two or three. Plan, as a class, to visit a nursing home, a hospice patient, someone bedridden with illness, or a shut-in, and share these songs of joy.
The Everlasting Gospel

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: Heb. 4:2; Ps. 130:3, 4; Luke 15:11–32; Rom. 3:24–26; Heb. 10:1–4; Rev. 14:12.

Memory Text: “The Lord has appeared of old to me, saying: ‘Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you’” (Jeremiah 31:3, NKJV).

In our study of James, we have looked at a number of issues connected with the gospel and made some comparisons with other biblical authors. It is not always easy to understand clearly how what James says fits with other parts of Scripture, especially when it comes to something as central as the gospel itself, but as we saw, it does. And this is very important, too, because the gospel is the foundation of our last-day commission to preach “the everlasting gospel . . . to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (Rev. 14:6).

In this our final week, we will focus on basic questions regarding “the everlasting gospel,” which is salvation by faith, a belief taught all through the Bible, including in the book of James.

The crucial point to remember is that the Bible does not contradict itself, especially on something as basic as salvation. By finishing the quarter with a look at how the gospel appears in the Bible, we can better see how James fits this larger picture of God’s plan of redemption.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 27.
The Gospel in the Old Testament

“For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith” (Heb. 4:2, NIV).

This verse is startling in its implications. Foremost is that the gospel, not simply “good news” but the good news, was preached in the Old Testament. Second, it was preached then just as in New Testament times. There is no hint that there was any difference in the message itself. The problem, therefore, was not with the message but with the way it was heard. Today, too, different people can hear the same gospel message very differently. How crucial, then, that we surrender ourselves in utter faith to the teaching of the Word so that when the gospel is preached we hear it correctly.

Look at the following verses and summarize the gospel message in each:

Gen. 3:15

Exod. 19:4–6

Pss. 130:3, 4; 32:1–5

Isa. 53:4–11

Jer. 31:31–34

Did you notice a common refrain? God intervenes to save us; He forgives our sins and puts “enmity” in us toward sin so that we can be “willing and obedient” (Isa. 1:19). One (Jesus) died for the many, bore their (our) iniquities, and justifies the undeserving. The new covenant is different from the old covenant because the law is written in the heart, and sins are “remember[ed] no more” (Heb. 8:12). In short, forgiveness and the new birth are a package: justification and sanctification represent God’s solution to the sin problem. These passages could be multiplied, for the message is the same throughout the Bible: despite our sin, God loves us and has done all that is possible to save us from it.

How can we, as people who believe in the importance of keeping the law, protect ourselves from the error of believing that law-keeping is what justifies us? Why is that not always so easy to do?
The Gospel Made Flesh

Some have a very hard time finding the gospel in the Gospels! The teachings of Jesus can seem legalistic but only if we fail to hear the rest of the story. Most people in Israel at the time of Jesus considered themselves to be in a good position before God. They supported the temple by paying the required tax and by offering the appropriate sacrifices. They abstained from unclean food, circumcised their sons, kept the festival days and the Sabbaths, and generally tried to keep the law as taught by their religious leaders. Then John came and cried “Repent,” and be baptized. Furthermore, Jesus said a new birth was needed (John 3:3, 5) and that “except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:20). In other words, Jesus was saying, “You need what you do not have. Your works are not good enough.”

Read Luke 15:11–32, 18:9–17. How do these parables illustrate the gospel?

In the parable of the prodigal son, the son is lost and does not know it. Eventually, he begins to see his father’s love in a new way and longs to return. His pride is gone. Hoping for acceptance as a servant, he is astonished to be lavished with honor by his father. The relationship is not just restored. It is transformed. A similar reversal of expectations appears in the second parable. The “righteous” Pharisee is ignored by God, while the “sinful” tax collector is not only accepted but leaves justified, forgiven, and free from guilt.

Both stories help us to see God more clearly, as a Father and as a Justifier of the ungodly. When He describes the cup of crushed grapes as “My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins,” Jesus suffers as the real Passover Lamb, the death that should have been ours (Matt. 26:28, NASB; compare Mark 10:45). Thus, salvation is free to us because He, Jesus, paid the full price for it.

What hope can you take from each of these parables for yourself? In what ways can you relate to some of the people in them, and what should your answer tell you about what you might need to change in your spiritual life?
The Gospel in Paul

Like many of his countrymen, Paul thought he was in good spiritual standing. But then he saw Jesus as “the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20, NASB). Suddenly, he saw himself not saved but lost; not God’s servant but God’s enemy; not righteous but the chief of sinners. The scales fell from his eyes, in other words, in his reading of the Old Testament. God’s revelation, to him personally and through the Scriptures, transformed his heart and changed his life forever. We will not understand Paul’s epistles until we recognize these basic facts, which produced them.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:14–16 in this light and then verses 2–6. What does Paul identify here as the crucial step?

The meaning of the old covenant becomes clear only “when one turns to the Lord” (vs. 16, ESV). Jesus is the way to salvation. It all begins and ends in Him. Israel—by trusting in their own obedience, as Paul did before his conversion—experienced the old covenant as a minister of death. Why? Because “all have sinned” (Rom. 3:23), including the people of Israel, and so the commandments could only condemn them (2 Cor. 3:7). By contrast, believers in Corinth were “a letter of Christ . . . written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (vs. 3, NASB).


The gospel is the power of God to save all who believe. Righteousness is based not on what we do but on what Christ has done for us, which we claim by faith. It is a belief that grows “from faith to faith” (Rom. 1:17). What Paul means by this is unpacked in the rest of Romans, the heart of which is found at the end of chapter 3. Through Christ we have redemption (God has bought us back by paying for our sins), justification (we are cleared of guilt and cleansed by grace), and forgiveness (God accepts us back and “forgets” our past sins). Amazingly, God, through the sacrifice of Christ, proves Himself to be just in justifying the ungodly who have put their faith in Jesus.
The “New” Covenant

The book of Hebrews describes the new covenant as “better” than the old covenant (Heb. 8:1, 2, 6, NRSV). The obvious question, then, is Why did God establish the old covenant if it was faulty? The problem, however, was not with the covenant but with the response of the people to it.

Read Hebrews 7:19, 8:9, 10:1–4. What problems with the old covenant are mentioned?

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The people “did not remain faithful” to the covenant (Heb. 8:9, NIV) but were disobedient and rebellious. This, together with the fact that the animal sacrifices of the old covenant could never take away sins (Heb. 10:4), meant that the sin problem remained. Only “the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” could atone for sins, including those committed under the old covenant (Heb. 10:10, NKJV; 9:15). And that was because “the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God” (Heb. 7:19) through the promise of the new covenant.

In one sense, the new covenant is not new at all because—since the promise in Eden of the Seed who would bruise the serpent’s head—the plan of salvation has always been predicated on the death of Christ, “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8; see also Jer. 32:40; Heb. 13:20, 21; John 13:34).

“...the covenant of grace is not a new truth, for it existed in the mind of God from all eternity. This is why it is called the everlasting covenant.” —Ellen G. White, The Faith I Live By, p. 77.

On the other hand, as we saw with Paul, something special happens when we turn to the Lord. God promised, in connection with the everlasting covenant, “I will put into their hearts reverence for Me, so that they do not turn away from Me” (Jer. 32:40, NJPS). Without faith, bringing animal sacrifices was almost like making payment for sins. Gazing at Jesus instead, who “endured the cross, despising the shame,” and “who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself” (Heb. 12:2, 3, NKJV), reveals the immeasurable cost of sin and the good news that the cost has been paid by Someone else “through the blood of the everlasting covenant” (13:20, NKJV). This “new” covenant transforms how we look at everything, such as the commandment to love one another. It’s not really new (Lev. 19:18), except in that we are not just to love our neighbor as ourselves, but “as I [Jesus] have loved you” (John 13:34).

How can we ever learn to love others as Jesus has loved us?
The Climax of the Gospel

“But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets” (Rev. 10:7, NASB).

Significantly, Revelation 10:7 is the only other verse in Revelation (besides Revelation 14:6) that specifically refers to preaching the gospel (the Greek word translated “preached” is euangelizō, “to proclaim good news”). These two chapters are special for Seventh-day Adventists, because we find our calling and commission described in them. In other words, God has specifically commissioned us, in a way He has no other group, to proclaim the “everlasting gospel.”

As we have seen, the gospel is the same from Genesis to Revelation. The law is the same. The covenant is the same. Jesus, Paul, and James all affirm that the gospel is the same one believed by Abraham (John 8:56, Rom. 4:13, James 2:21–23). Some have difficulty with this assertion only because they define the gospel more narrowly than Scripture. Abraham’s obedient faith, however, originated through his foreseeing Jesus’ sacrifice. We do not need to balance faith with works in order to be saved. Faith alone is sufficient, but it must not be an intellectual faith as the devils have, nor a presumptuous faith that claims the promises of God without complying with the conditions of salvation; rather, it must be a faith that works.

Why are the references in Revelation 12:17 and Revelation 14:12 to keeping the commandments, and to the testimony and faith of Jesus, significant in the context of the everlasting gospel?

The decisive issue at the end of time is: Whom will we worship and obey? The God who “made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters” (Rev. 14:7)? Or the beast and his image? Obedience to the commandments (including the Sabbath) through the faith of Jesus signifies those who remain faithful to the end. True religion demands both faith and obedience.

“Though often in the midst of reproach and persecution, a constant testimony has been borne to the perpetuity of the law of God and the sacred obligation of the creation Sabbath.

“These truths, as presented in Revelation 14 in connection with ‘the everlasting gospel,’ will distinguish the church of Christ at the time of His appearing. For as the result of the threefold message it is announced: ‘Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.’ ”—Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, pp. 453, 454.
**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Loud Cry,” pp. 198–202, in *Last Day Events*.

“We need to come up to a higher standard, to go forward and claim our exalted privileges. We should walk humbly with God, make no proud boasts of perfection of character, but in simple faith claim every promise in the word of God; for they are for the obedient, not for the transgressors of God’s law. We are simply to believe the testimony of God, and have entire dependence on him, and all possibility of self-glory or pride will be removed. We are indeed saved by faith, not by a passive faith, but by the faith which works by love, and purifies the soul. The hand of Christ can reach the veriest sinner, and bring him back from transgression to obedience; but no Christianity is so lofty that it can soar above the requirements of God’s holy law. This would be beyond Christ’s power to help, it would be outside of his teachings and his example; for he says, ‘I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love,’ and all who follow Christ will render obedience to God’s holy law.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, March 31, 1890.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Discuss the various gospel emphases in the teachings of Jesus, James, and Paul, including similarities and differences between them. How, by placing them together and seeing the whole picture, can we protect ourselves from falling into either legalism or a cheap grace?

2. When feeling discouraged about your spiritual state, what gospel promises can you claim to help keep you from discouragement? Why, even in the darkest times, must you never give up, and why is the promise of Christ’s righteousness as a gift to undeserving sinners the key to protecting you from giving up?

3. The three angels’ messages connect Creation very closely to Redemption and salvation. So does John 1:1–14. Why are these two topics so closely related? How does this close connection help explain why the Sabbath is such a central component of God’s law? How does this close tie help us understand the centrality of the Sabbath in the final conflict of the last days?
The Lesson in Brief

Key Text: Luke 15:11–24

The Student Will:

Know: Recognize that the parable of the lost son reveals God’s grace in action toward His wayward children.

Feel: Embrace wholeheartedly God’s gifts of mercy and grace.

Do: Relate to God as a loving Father, who is ever waiting with open arms to receive His repentant children back home again.

Learning Outline:

I. Know: A Son’s Sorrow

A Explain how the story of the lost son reveals the nature of God’s grace toward us.

B What must transpire in the prodigal son’s heart before he can return home, and why?

II. Feel: A Father’s Love

A What does the father’s response to his lost son, upon his return home, reveal to you about the depths and passion of God’s love for you?

B How can you permit God to live out His life within you, so that you are a conduit for loving and blessing others?

III. Do: A Brother’s Rage

A When those whom we trust fall away from God and return, how can we guard against giving in to the temptation of harboring bitterness, as experienced by the self-righteous older brother?

B How does the story of the lost son help you to love others as God loves you?

Summary: Every second of our lives, God is exerting all His power, grace, and mercy to reconcile us to His great heart of love.
Learning Cycle

STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: Luke 15:11–24

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Every second of our lives, God is exerting all His power, grace, and mercy to reconcile us to His great heart of love.

Just for Teachers: Emphasize to your class members the importance of relating to God as to a loving Father, who is ever waiting with open arms to receive us back again.

Opening Activity: Think of a time when you left home for an extended period of time. What was the reason? Perhaps it was for a family vacation, a business trip, or to study abroad. Using as many senses as possible, describe how you felt when you returned home again at last.

Consider This: How might this homecoming experience help you to imagine what it felt like to be the prodigal son at the moment of reunion with his father? How does this help you to understand more fully the Father’s unconditional love for you?

STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Emphasize the image of the father in the story of the prodigal’s return, rushing down the road to meet his son. Emphasize that God is always ready to embrace us with compassion, clothe us in forgiveness, and heal us with His mercy.

I. The Lost Son (Review Luke 15:11–24 and Romans 3:24–26 with your class.)

As fallen beings, with sin-scarred pasts and propensities toward falling back into sin, we are deeply and daily in need of the restorative and regenerative powers of grace. The story of the lost son in Luke 15 takes the exegesis of grace, as outlined in Romans 3:24–26, and fleshes it out in a deeply moving narrative of what it means for God to bestow grace upon the repentant sinner and what it means for the sinner to receive it. As the Standard Edition points out, the relationship between the father
and his wayward son is not simply restored; it is transformed. Let’s look at the key points in the story to identify those transformational elements of grace in action in order to understand better how God yearns to heal our wrecked relationship with Him, transform our lives, and restore us to Him in unbroken communion.

From the outset, it is important to note two things: (1) where the action begins and (2) what the relation is between the main characters. We note that the setting is on an estate and that the relation between the prodigal, or younger heir, and the older man is one of father and son. This paternal relation reveals that the young man is no stranger to the owner; rather, he acknowledges his authority over and his relation to him. So, the problem is not that the young man doesn’t know who the father is but that he knows and doesn’t appreciate the relation.

Notice, too, that the younger son does not give a reason for his demands; nor does the father ask for one. He simply divides the estate and gives the son what he requests. If we choose to leave Him, no matter how much it breaks His heart, God will not coerce us into staying. Proof that God is not indifferent to our leaving is seen in the fact that when the son returns but is still a long way off, the father rushes down the road to meet him.

But before that moment in the story can happen, the son must come to a place of self-recognition of his lost and fallen state. In order to realize he is lost, he must lose everything. A time of famine occurs; and in this sense the landscape of the story mirrors the inner landscape of the heart: there is a spiritual famine, as well as a literal one. The son is starving literally as well as figuratively for God’s grace. But the famine is only the beginning of sorrows, or catalyst, for what the son must endure to be transformed. In order to see that he is fallen, he must fall into utter ruin and despair. He loses his fortune through riotous living. He loses his friends when the money is lost. He loses his status, his self-respect, so much so that he “would gladly have fed on and filled his belly with the carob pods that the hogs were eating” (Luke 15:16, Amplified).

Wallowing in misery and mud with the swine, the younger son “came to himself, and he said . . . I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; [just] make me like one of your hired servants. So he got up and came to his [own] father” (vss. 17–20, Amplified). Notice the story says, twice, that the son literally “got up.” Sunken in sin, we can go in only one direction: up.

Romans 3:24–26, in its explanation on what grace is, uses similar language to describe our restoration, or vertical ascent, through God’s
unmerited grace: “[All] are justified and made upright and in right standing with God, freely and gratuitously by His grace (His unmerited favor and mercy) through the redemption which is [provided] in Christ Jesus” (vs. 24, Amplified). The use of the word *up* in the story of the lost son to describe his return to his father echoes the deeper notions of what grace in action does, as outlined in Romans: it is God’s redeeming mercy and grace that cleanses us, lifts us up out of the mire of sin, makes us righteous or upright before God, and permits us to stand up in His presence free from sin and condemnation.

But just as that grace is made possible only through the sacrifice of Jesus, as Romans tells us, the story of the lost son also shows that there can be no restoration to God apart from sacrifice. The fatted calf must die. It is killed for the celebration, and its flesh feasted upon. And while it dies in order that the reunited family may celebrate, its death is a sobering reminder that our joyous return to the Father in heaven is predicated upon the death of His Son on this earth.

One other detail of note in the story must not be overlooked: the older son’s fury at his younger brother’s return. Notice the language the heir uses to describe the prodigal; it is not “my brother” but “your son.” Adam used similar language about Eve when responding to God about his transgression. He did not refer to her as “my wife” but as “‘the woman whom You gave to be with me’” (Gen. 3:12, NKJV).

This language is intentionally distancing and accusatory. It is meant to segregate one’s fellow sinners from oneself, forgetting our relation to one another and our accountability to our brethren (the church) and neighbors (the world). It is the language of self-justification. The heir is furious, because the father’s actions of restoring the younger son destroy completely his cherished belief that somehow he has “earned” his inheritance through his good works, through his unblemished record of service. The fact that the younger son can come back and receive the trappings of inheritance again, after squandering his entire inheritance, dismantles forever the erroneous notion that salvation is by works.

**Consider This:** What does the younger son’s parting from the father represent? What first must transpire before he can come to his senses and return home? What is the father’s response when the son returns? How does this reunion demonstrate grace? What is his brother’s response to his return, and how does this demonstrate the danger in thinking that salvation is merited by works?
STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Help students to apply the principles of grace, as outlined in the story of the prodigal son, to practical situations in their own lives.

Application Questions:

1. The story of the lost son isn’t simply about God’s love for us, but it is also a rebuke against the hardness of heart of one brother or believer for another. How can your own experiences of return and repentance inoculate you against the kind of hardness of heart the older brother exhibits?

2. What are some of the ways you find yourself acting toward God like the reckless younger son? What are some of the ways you find yourself acting toward your fellow believers like the self-righteous older brother? What principles does the story give that can help you to return to the Father and let Him live out His life through you, loving others as He loves you?

STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Encourage your learners to remember that no matter how far we’ve sunken in sin, we’re never so low that God can’t lift us up and that He will never stop yearning for us to return to Him.

Activity 1: Close by singing “Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling” or some other song that captures Christ’s invitation to us to return to Him.

Activity 2: Finish the story: even though the household celebrates the return of the lost son, all is not happily ever after. The older son, at least, shows no desire to join the celebration. The last words are the Father’s. Imagine the rest of the story when the two brothers meet. Given how the oldest feels, seething with resentment, how could the Father’s words begin to melt his heart and bring about reconciliation? How would you tell it?