James, the Lord’s Brother

“You are My friends if you do whatever I command you” (John 15:14, NKJV).
I was so excited! I was about to celebrate my 18th birthday, and with that came a whole new life. I was going to be a college student with an ID, plus I was finally going to get my driver's license. No longer would I have to ask my mother to take me where I wanted to go. Now I could offer to load the car with gas and then ride off into the fun during the weekends.

However, before I took the driving test, I had to study the driver's manual. It had all the information I needed to become a great driver: definitions of road signs, what to do in case of an accident, when to start turning, where I couldn't park, and so much more!

When I recall how the experience of learning to drive helped me to become a better driver, I think of the words James wrote for each of us who desires to become a better Christian through practical action. After experiencing Jesus, not only as his brother, but also as his own Savior, James felt deeply inspired to share with others what it meant to follow Him.

The message of James's letter can be summarized in chapter 1:25: “He who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does” (NKJV).

My driver’s manual had plenty of information that applied, not only to the written exam to get my license but to my daily driving experiences. Likewise, the book of James provides a great deal of insight on how not only to be hearers of God’s Word, but to be doers of that Word as well. Only when we hear and do can we enjoy the many blessings He has prepared for us.

If you look forward to God's blessings, then I invite you to dive into this practical Bible book this week. Learn from the life-changing experience of James and begin to transform your daily life through the various action plans that he will introduce us to this week.

Johann De Dier, Panama City, Panama

There are several people in the New Testament named James. The author of this letter must have been well-known in the church because it contains no specific information to who he is other than that he is “a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (James 1:1, NKJV).

Thus, we can narrow the options regarding his identity. 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 book.1

James’s letter discusses many aspects of life in which we are to grow as Christians.

To Whom Did James Write? (James 1:1, 13–15)

Due to persecution, many Jewish Christians were scattered across the Mediterranean part of the world. Out of fear, many of these converts were inclined to be Christian in intellect only, thereby failing to actually let their faith affect their behavior. They agreed intellectually with the doctrines of the Christian faith, but they did not live their lives according to those truths. True faith equals intellectually believing the truth as it is in Jesus and then living that truth by developing a Christlike character and living a life of service to others according to the example Jesus has set for us.

“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?” (James 2:14–20, NKJV).

James’s Ministry (Acts 21:17–19)

From the book of Acts we learn that James was one of the church leaders in Jerusalem. While there, he, Peter, and John preached to both Jews
and Gentiles. They preached with such passion and power that the people who listened went to different cities where they themselves established churches even though they were persecuted. They persevered because they recognized that there was a great deal of work to be done and many truths to teach.

**Themes Covered by James (James 1–5)**

Perhaps you have just accepted Jesus as your Savior. Or maybe you have known Him all your life. It doesn't matter how long you've been a Christian; Jesus wants all who believe in Him to share His Word with others. To that end, James's letter discusses many aspects of life in which we are to grow as Christians. “Emphasized throughout is the contrast between the manifestations, effects, or results of true religion and those of false religion. . . . The style is simple and direct, with the thoughts in groups clearly marked from one another. . . . James writes freely out of the fullness of his heart, touching upon subjects as they are suggested to his mind.”2 These subjects include the following:

1. In James 1:13–15, we learn how to have a living faith—a faith that works for the good of the people we know and for the world at large.
2. In his second chapter, James denounces favoritism and urges us not to resent any troubles that come our way. Instead, we should pray for wisdom and patience.
3. James teaches us in chapter 3 about genuine wisdom—wisdom that can help us to tame the tongue and to be peacemakers.
4. Chapter 4 urges us to submit to God, resist the devil, and purify our hearts. James also urges us in this chapter not to speak ill of others or judge them.
5. Lastly, in chapter 5, he warns rich oppressors about the fate that awaits them, and he urges believers to be patient in suffering and not to complain about one another.

**REACT**

1. Consider each of the five themes listed above. How can you apply them to your life?
2. What other themes do you find in the book of James? How can you relate these themes to your life?
3. Based on James, (a) What can we do when our family members are opposed to our beliefs? (b) How can we understand the will of God in our lives? (c) How important is it to rely on God’s Word when we share our faith with others or when we are dealing with someone who has left the church?

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2. Ibid., p. 500.

Marlon Moodie Jr., Panama City, Panama
“As Sabbathkeeping Adventists we profess to obey all God’s commandments and to be looking for the coming of our redeemer. . . . We should show by our words and works that we recognize the great responsibility laid upon us. Our light should shine so clearly that others can see that we glorify the Father in our daily lives; that we are connected with heaven and are joint heirs with Jesus Christ, that when He shall appear in power and great glory, we shall be like him.”

“We need to speak of . . . the matchless depths of the Saviour’s love.”

“Our words, our acts, our dress, our deportment, even the expression of the countenance, has an influence. Upon the impression thus made there hang results for good or evil which no man can measure.”

“When those who profess to serve God follow Christ’s example, practicing the principles of the law in their daily life; when every act bears witness that they love God supremely and their neighbor as themselves, then will the church have power to move the world.”

“Far more than we do, we need to speak of the precious chapters in our experience, of the mercy and loving-kindness of God, of the matchless depths of the Saviour’s love.”

“Every day of life is freighted with responsibilities which we must bear. Every day, our words and acts are making impressions upon those with whom we associate. How great the need that we set a watch upon our lips and guard carefully our steps!”

**REACT**

1. We are called to be witnesses for Jesus and His second coming. Why do you think Jesus and James call for our actions to testify to the people around us? Why do our actions have greater influence than our words?

2. Why do you believe the Bible teaches that works don’t save us while it also teaches that faith without works is dead? How is it that we are saved because of who we know, not because of what we do?

3. If you believe your actions influence others, how can your actions reflect Jesus today and always?

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1. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 16.
3. Ibid., p. 418.
5. Ibid., p. 348.

*Danilo Murillo, Panama City, Panama*
The book of James is an inspirational letter that addresses Jewish Christians who were scattered abroad.\(^1\) Literally, “scattered abroad” means “in the dispersion. . . . The dispersion of the Jews among the other nations is specifically referred to in the time of Esther (Esther 3:8) and at Pentecost (Acts 2:5, 9–11).\(^2\) Many Christians also were scattered around the world after Stephen was martyred. These believers shared the gospel along the way. There were Christians in Cyprus, Antioch, and Phoenicia (Acts 11:19). James greets them and identifies himself as a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ (James 1:1).

Let us pray for God’s help in our lives.

The book of James is a letter. It also can be compared to a manual filled with valuable information regarding hope, faith, endurance, and advice for our journey to heaven (James 1). The advice offered in this book is pointed and easy to understand: “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22, NKJV). In other words, if you hear the message and don’t obey it, you are like people who stare at themselves in the mirror but then forget what they look like when they turn away.

James emphasizes the importance of obeying the instructions Christ left for us. For James, faith is not abstract; it requires action. He stressed that the life of faith is comprehensive, impacting every area of our lives and driving us to truly engage in the lives of other people, no matter who they are. James discusses why our faith is tested and our attitude toward being tested. He also discusses hearing God’s word and obeying it, our temper, our relationship with others, and what to do if someone strays from the truth.

Christians everywhere are caught up in many trivial affairs. Pride gets in our way, and many times we forget our purpose in this world. The book of James is a great reminder of what Jesus desires from us. It is a book that gives us much hope and knowledge for the many trials and temptations we encounter. It discusses how our characters should be developed and what our actions should be in this world. James also emphasizes the necessity for believers to act in accordance with their faith. Let us be patient and kind. Let us pray for God’s help in our lives.

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2. Ibid., p. 503.
Remember when you bought that awesome electronic gadget you couldn't live without? You opened the box and turned it on. You looked for the manual and read it in order to understand how to use all of the gadget’s features. Likewise, the book of James provides quality instructions on how to maximize our Christian experience. So let's review some of James's instructions that will help us better serve God and represent Jesus.

**Make a choice to utter good words each day.**

*Rejoice under trials.* Usually the last things we want to celebrate are life’s hardships. James 1:3, however, reminds us that hardships should give us joy because the trying of our faith produces patience—a trait that was obvious in Jesus when He endured the trials that came with being the Savior.

*“Speak out” your faith through actions.* Being a Christian isn't only about saying that you trust God. It's also about practicing what you preach. “Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:17, NKJV). When Joseph was facing the wife of his boss, he not only said that he couldn't sin against God, he fled from the scene as well (Gen. 39:1–12). Now that's showing faith through deeds! Even though he was doing the right thing, he knew he was probably going to get in trouble because of her, but he also probably trusted God was going to see him through.

*Use your tongue for good.* Each time Jesus spoke, He made an impact in the lives of the people to whom He was speaking. In the same way Jesus said we can't serve two masters, James reminds us that good and bad can't proceed from our mouths (James 3:10). Make a choice to utter good words each day to positively impact peoples' lives.

*Hold on to prayer.* Jesus spent 40 days praying in the wilderness. He was weak because he hadn't eaten. Three times Satan tried to get Him to sin. However, because of His consistent prayer and connection with His Father, Jesus was able to resist this trial. This is why James wrote, “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray” (James 5:13, NKJV).

**REACT**

1. Do you believe that James's definition of rejoicing in trials literally means celebrating, or does it mean something else? Explain your answer.
2. How can you rejoice in your trials?
3. How are prayer, faith, and actions related? Do they work together or individually? Explain your answer.

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Victor Rivera, Panama City, Panama
“‘Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?’” (Mark 6:3, NKJV).

We all belong to some type of a family. Some of us belong to a small family, while others of us belong to families with several siblings, each one with different competencies and preferences which allow in one way or the other for one sibling to develop a greater bond with another.

As stated in this week’s Logos article, it is believed that James was the brother of Jesus. He was also the brother of Joseph, Judas, and Simon. So he experienced firsthand the transition Jesus made from being a carpenter’s son to fulfilling the divine mission given to Him by His heavenly Father.

Without a doubt, James chose the best Brother to imitate.

Have you ever wondered what James must have thought the first time he heard his brother Jesus say words like “I’ve come to this world to do My Father’s will”? Wasn’t his father, Jesus’ father as well? James decided to follow Jesus closely. A special bond must have awakened in his heart, a bond that helped him to believe that his brother was the Messiah, a bond that led James to imitate Him.

As James began to follow Jesus, he learned from His faith, patience, and love. He closely experienced the effects of these traits on a daily basis. He witnessed Jesus’ love and mercy flowing without measure to the sick, the poor, and the needy. He understood the secret to overcoming trials and temptations, which is holding on to the perfect strength of our heavenly Father. He learned to draw away from pride, evil desires, and lying lips. He experienced a revival because he spent time with the Source of all good.

Without a doubt, James chose the best Brother to imitate, an influence that made him different. He listened to the words of his Master and experienced the transformation that can only happen when we imitate the pure fruit of perfection, Jesus Christ.

In his writings, James gives us a clear guide about how to draw closer to God and how to show His love in our daily interactions with each person we encounter. Our challenge today is to decide to imitate Jesus as James did and to experience a complete transformation in our hearts.

**REACT**

1. What has been your experience as you walk with God? What changes have you noticed in your life?
2. What is the difference between belonging to a church and belonging to Jesus?

Zueidys Palacio, Panama City, Panama
CONCLUDE
As seen in today’s text, the book of James is a manual for practical action in the Christian life written to Jewish Christians scattered around the Middle East. It was likely authored by James, who was a church leader in Jerusalem and the brother of Jesus. In his letter, James talks about growing in Christ and how a living faith is expressed through action. He emphasizes wisdom, patience, self-control, humility, and submitting to God.

CONSIDER
• Composing an imaginary letter that James might have received from Jesus near the end of His ministry.
• Comparing/contrasting several topics from the book of James with the way those topics are addressed in the book of Proverbs.
• Creating a collage illustrating key words/phrases from James. Use a variety of fonts/colors, or letters/words cut from print sources.
• Writing (and possibly performing) a new verse or two to a favorite song or hymn using themes from the book of James.
• Interviewing three people of different Christian faiths. Ask them what they think about the book of James. Have they ever studied it specifically? How important or practical is this book for them? How do they think that the concepts in James relate to our salvation or relationships?
• Choosing several important ideas that James addresses about how we relate to others. Write a skit or a role-play that illustrates these ideas.
• Writing an “updated” version of a portion of the book of James. Focus on topics that you believe challenge today’s church community.

CONNECT
Matthew 5:48; James 1:4.
The Perfecting of Our Faith

“Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:1, 2, NKJV).
Have you ever asked why certain things are happening to God’s children? A while ago, our family faced a difficult situation, one which caused us to ask this very question. Our only consolation is that He does not let anything happen to us that will destroy us. Now when troubling incidents start to overwhelm me with doubts, I try to run to God for His wisdom. And this is always His response, “This is happening to perfect your faith.” Even Jesus, our greatest example, endured much more than any of us ever will—a physically torturous death and the horrendous fear that He would be forever separated from His Father.

Let us take courage by fixing our eyes on Jesus.

God allows us to pass through trials in order for our faith to be perfected. When we start our walk with Jesus, we usually have the “seeing is believing” type of faith. We ask for signs from God to help us. Later, He teaches us a stronger faith that demands that we believe without seeing (Heb. 11:1). We may go through several tests before attaining that kind of faith. I must admit that I, at times, still struggle to trust God’s promises when I see no way out. In such cases, I find it difficult to believe that He will heal when doctors have given up, to believe that heaven’s door will open when all earthly doors have closed.

Today, no matter how tough it gets, be encouraged by this thought: God is perfecting your faith! He wants you to attain the faith that says, “I believe in God, no matter what.” Let us take each step in faith like Abraham did, trusting God to take the lead. Let us trust God like Job, that when everything is lost, we are assured that He will bless us in His time. Let us make the decision to stand for God in faith like the three bold Hebrew men. Then He will stand with us during our trial. But most of all, let us be like Jesus, who as God Himself, endured the trials of this life, trusting in the divine care of His (and our) heavenly Father. Yes, God will perfect our faith and give us joy, glory, and eternal life. Let us take courage by fixing our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith!

Janet Henry, Brooklyn, New York, U.S.A.
Many times we hear people say that they believe this, that, or something else. But how much thought do any of us really give to understanding the properties of believing and how it comes about? There are many theories about how we process information. In James 1:6 it says, “Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.” Sometimes we place a petition before God, but our hearts and actions display hesitation when it comes to really believing in God’s promise to hear and answer our prayers. Jesus said that no matter what we ask for in prayer, we must believe that we have received it (Mark 11:24). Therefore, doubt hinders our walk with God.

In James 1:7, 8, we learn about the consequences that arise as a result of doubt. “Let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.” It is important to note that without faith it is impossible to please God. When we go to God in prayer, we must believe in Him and that He will reward those who diligently seek Him. Doubt prevents us from receiving the blessings God has for us and often results in discouragement.

However, due to our sinful nature, it seems that we often doubt God. We may ask Him for guidance in deciding which degree program we should pursue, what job we should take, or even whom we should marry. But then, after asking, we remain worried about how and when He will answer, or if He will answer at all.

How can we overcome these doubts? First and foremost, study God’s Word to learn about His promises. Knowledge is essential in order for us to adequately assess information being presented to us regarding our current situation. Lack of knowledge can cause us to doubt. Thus knowing and believing God’s Word, which is all truth, builds faith and helps us to deal with any doubts we might have.

**REACT**

What are some other ways one can overcome doubt?
Tribulation: A Necessary Evil (James 1:2, 3; 1 Pet. 1:6, 7)

Life often overwhelms us like ocean waves crashing on the shore. Trials and problems keep rolling in, constantly colliding against our resolve and faith. It is during such times that Satan attacks our convictions. Soon, the seeds of doubt germinate, and we begin to question God.

Consider the process of refining a diamond. When it is first discovered deep in the earth, a diamond looks like a greenish dark rock. Several steps are required to make it glitter and shine. First, a plan is created for how to split the diamond. Then lines are drawn on the diamond and the diamond is cut accordingly using a hammer and a very fine blade, or a laser or circular saw. The process of cutting the diamond is the most difficult and important part of creating a beautiful gem.¹

How we grow in Christ is a bit like how a rough diamond becomes beautiful. Tribulations and hardships bury us under a heavy load that threatens to crush our faith much like a diamond is trapped in a dirty rock. And just as a diamond must go through a refining process, so must God’s children undergo trials in order for their faith to become strong. First Peter 1:6, 7 describes the beautiful outcome of being tested by God’s fire so that our faith might be refined. We must be willing to endure the trials and God’s discipline if we want His character to be perfected in us. “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all” (Ps. 34:19, NKJV). Therefore, as James states, we should count it all joy when we are tested and tried.

Perfect Faith: A Work in Progress (James 1:2–4, 12)

Being thankful to God when we are tested doesn’t seem to make sense. So let’s take some time to consider it. Being thankful for trials helps us to look beyond the here and now to what God has planned for us. Thus our thankfulness becomes rooted in anticipation of God’s promises being fulfilled. When adversity comes, being thankful helps us to be steadfast, because we know that God will remain faithful to us.

As Christians, we can expect to be tested. While God tests us to bring out our best, Satan tempts us to bring out our worst. God’s tests and Satan’s temptations help us to develop patience and steadfastness, both of which strengthen our faith. “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:12, NKJV).

Faith, testing, and patience must always be a part of our Christian ex-
perience. God desires us to grow in the faith and to be ready for Christ's return. To that end, James wrote his letter. Therefore, let us not attempt to avoid trials. Instead, let us submit to them with patient endurance.

**Faith and Wisdom (Phil. 4:6, 7; James 1:5, 6; 19–22; 2:15, 16; 3:13)**

Philippians 4:6 encourages us not to be anxious about anything, but to make our requests known to God. James advises that if we faithfully ask God for wisdom, He will give it to us. We should never ask God to give us something He desires us to have, and then doubt that He will give us these things. When we do so, James says that we are like sea waves blown about by the wind. In faith, we should make our requests known to God, for without faith, we cannot please Him.

The “wise Christian is the one who views life in the light of God’s revelation (i.e., His Written Word).

“If we do not understand God’s view of life, James urged that we keep on asking . . . God to enable us to understand it. . . . The unwise Christian who repeatedly asks God to open his or her eyes and heart can count on God granting his or her request repeatedly. He will give this wisdom freely and graciously, as often as we need it. . . . What God promises in this context is the ability to see the importance of enduring trials and persevering in them faithfully.”

**Help Our Unbelief (James 1:6–8)**

Faith is the wings upon which our prayers soar to God. Without faith, our requests will not reach the Father’s ears. If our requests are shadowed with doubt, disbelief, and hesitancy, we may as well not pray in the first place. James writes that the person whose requests are tarnished with doubt should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Rather, he describes this person as being double-minded and unstable in all other areas of life.

Do you occasionally not have enough faith? Then pray the prayer of the desperate father in Mark 9:24: “‘Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!’” (NKJV). Faith is a process, not always an easy one, but with this prayer in our hearts, we can be certain that He who begins a good work in us will bring our faith to completion (Phil. 1:6). In Him our faith is made perfect.

**REACT**

1. Why is belief essential to prayer?
2. How do trials shape our character and faith?
3. What steps can you take toward perfecting your faith?

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“Trials and temptations may come; but the child of God, whether minister or layman, knows that Jesus is his helper. Although we may be weak and helpless in ourselves, all the forces of heaven are at the command of the believing child of God, and the hosts of hell cannot make him depart from the right course if he will cling to God by living faith. Temptation is no sin; the sin is in yielding to temptation. ‘Count it all joy,’ says the apostle James, ‘when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.’ God permits us to be placed under circumstances that will test us, to increase our love and to perfect our trust in him. Through self-denial and suffering with Christ, we grow in grace and in the knowledge of the truth. Trials will come, but they are an evidence that we are children of God. Paul passed through great trials, but he did not despair as though his Father in heaven were dead. He rejoiced in tribulation; for he desired, through participations in the sufferings of Christ, to be conformed to his image. Let this hero of faith speak for himself. He says, ‘I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake.’ 2 Corinthians 12:10.”

“The temptations of Satan are manifold; but those to which our attention is called in [James 1:3] are unbelief and impatience. . . . If we do not maintain the grace of patience, we shall never reach a state of perfection. Some of us have a nervous temperament, and are naturally as quick as a flash to think and to act; but let no one think that he cannot learn to become patient. Patience is a plant that will make rapid growth if carefully cultivated. By becoming thoroughly acquainted with ourselves, and then combining with the grace of God a firm determination on our part, we may be conquerors, and become perfect in all things, wanting in nothing.”

**REACT**

1. Think about the circumstances in your life that put your faith to the test. How have you seen God use them to increase your love and trust in Him?
2. Why do you think it is so important to cultivate the grace of patience?

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2. White, Signs of the Times, September 29, 1887.

Tina Aquino, Rapidan, Virginia, U.S.A.
How-to

Faith Is Our Victory!

Attraction and desire meet, producing an invitation to immediate satisfaction. Unfortunately, this enticement offers short-term gain that’s not worth the consequences. You are experiencing temptation. But rejoice! What matters is how you respond to temptation. If you give in to it, you have failed, but “if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). We can allow Christ to cover our sins with His blood. Thus we receive forgiveness. If we have faith that Christ is able to keep us from falling, then we will overcome sin. This constant fight may become wearisome, but we must be patient, believing that we can overcome the temptations of this world.

*Faith is not just a vague term that we throw around as Christians.*

If we remain faithful, our patience will one day be complete. What we have been patiently awaiting, the day of Christ’s appearing, will be realized. If we remain faithful, then at His appearing we shall be like Him. It is our faith and desire to see Him that helps us to be faithful and patient. When the work of patience is complete in us, we will be like Him—perfect (1 John 3:2, 3). So remember the following:

*Your faith is important!* Faith is not just a vague term that we throw around as Christians. It is our belief that God will do what He says He will do. Our relationship with God should begin with faith and end with perfection. Let this work begin now!

*God is patient!* Consider the fact that God created humans and this world thousands of years ago. He has patiently been waiting for thousands of years to eradicate sin and for us to become like Him (James 5:7). Knowing this, we should be patient all the more. God is doing everything He can to help us reach the perfection He desires to see in us.

*Are you afflicted? Pray!* As we face temptation, we must be in constant prayer with God. Keep your eyes and minds stayed on Him so that you may overcome (James 5:13).

**REACT**

1. The Bible tells us that Jesus has already overcome this world. So why do you think this is so hard for Christians to believe?
2. Do you think temptations and trials are strengthening your relationship with God or hurting it? Why?

*Nicole Rochester, Rosedale, New York, U.S.A.*
The term *acid test* refers to a series of tests that were performed during the late 18th century. These tests relied on nitric acid's ability to dissolve other metals more readily than gold. Gold prospectors and dealers were able to use this method to distinguish between genuine gold and base metals. To confirm that a metal was gold, it was given the “acid test.” The test sample was used to mark a touchstone, and the degree to which it dissolved when the acid was added determined whether it was gold.

We shall come forth as gold.

The trials and temptations that Christians experience while on earth are like the “acid test.” The gold is the priceless reward of a Christian character and an enrichment of our faith in God. Remember, God is more interested in changing our character than in changing our circumstances. How ironic that circumstances that cause us to question and wrestle with the Lord are the very things that draw us closer to Him. Logically, this makes no sense. How can pain, disappointment, anger, and discouragement lead us into a deeper relationship with Jesus? How do we become like Job and calmly admit, “He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).

One of God’s gifts that He extends to humankind is the gift of wisdom. We are told that if we lack wisdom, we should ask of God and He will give liberally. Wisdom expands our minds to a reasoning level that would have otherwise never been reached, and on this pinnacle, we now can agree with Job that “though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job 13:15). Wisdom helps us to view our tests and trials from God’s perspective. When we fail to understand the ministry of suffering in regard to shaping our character, we fail to benefit from the very thing that prepares us for heaven. God “knows that the journey to heaven is as much a journey to heavenly mindedness as it is to a location, and that it is more about a process than a place, more an experience than an end.”* Heaven rewards those who patiently endure, so as we go through the “acid tests” of life, let us ever remember that though it may burn, we won’t dissolve. Instead, we shall come forth as gold.

**REACT**

Think of a specific test you are currently experiencing. How can God use this experience to help you be more like Him?

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Monique Brown, Detroit, Michigan, U.S.A.
CONCLUDE

*Faith. Doubt. Trials. Trust.* These ideas seem inherently opposed to one another, yet they are intricately linked. Acknowledging our doubt helps us to see where we need to let God take over. Trials prompt us to trust God, compelling us to lean on Him when everything else fails.

The key is staying connected to Him. In love with Jesus and looking to Him who had endured the worst this world has to offer, the early Christians were able to face crises with courage. Trusting God to sustain them, they believed that trials refined their character, and knew that in God’s power, they, too, would “overcome the world.”

CONSIDER

- Reflecting and journaling on times in your life when, as challenges and pain were overwhelming, you could only trust God to see you through.
- Reading Greg Budd, *One Miracle After Another* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald®, 2010). This is about Pavel Goia’s struggle to stand for God while growing up in Communist Romania.
- Writing your own paraphrase of Hebrews 11, substituting the names of people you’ve looked up to who have demonstrated true faith.
- Praying through the problems that loom largest in your life, asking God for patience and perseverance.
- Debating with a friend the meaning and nature of faith.
- Meditating on where you see God leading you.
- Singing along to a rendition of “Blessed Be Your Name” or another song of encouragement: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=du0Il6d-DAk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=du0Il6d-DAk).

CONNECT

Enduring Temptation

“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love him”

(James 1:12, NKJV).
The serpent tempted Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Potiphar’s wife tempted Joseph to sleep with her. Joseph stood firm and rejected her offer. In fact, he ran from her. Eve, on the other hand, accepted the serpent’s offer of a supposedly tasty forbidden fruit.

In the New Testament, “generally speaking, ‘temptation’ refers to any trying experience that might conceivably weaken a person’s hold on God but which, patiently endured, strengthens faith and character. Thus, the Christian is to ‘count it all joy’ when he falls ‘into divers temptations’ (James 1:2), that is, when he encounters difficulties that test the reality of his Christian experience.”

Temptations are a part of our everyday lives, and as we walk along the Christian road, we realize that Satan has set up obstacles on every corner. Overcoming these obstacles, however, is a difficult task. But fear not, for the Lord is with us always, and He has given us His Word to help us withstand the wiles of the devil. Jesus was tempted, so He understands what it is like (Matt. 4:1–11; Mark 1:12, 13; Luke 4:1–13). Nevertheless, He overcame His temptation, and with His help, so can we. James 1:13 says, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone” (NKJV).

When temptation comes your way, remember that it is Satan who is trying to ruin your life. His tests can only injure us or lead into wrongdoing. Don’t give him the satisfaction of having trapped you. Rise up with the Word of God and stand like the brave with your face to the foe! Hide the Word of the Lord in your heart. “Lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21, NKJV).

Press on Christian soldiers!

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* The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Temptation.”
We experience temptation when we think thoughts or seek desires that are contrary to God’s thoughts and desires. We all have experienced temptations and what it is like to give in to those temptations. Ideally, we all have had a taste of what it is like to overcome. God helps us to resist. He thoughtfully weighs what He allows us to be challenged with. “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13, NKJV).

“For every particular temptation there is a particular provision made by God for escape. This ‘way out’ is not a way to avoid the temptation, but a way out of the tragedy of falling into sin, of being overcome by the temptation. At the same time that God permits the trial or temptation to come, He will also have in readiness the means whereby we may gain the victory and escape from committing sin. Jesus, the Christian’s example of right living, found that ‘way out’ in the written Word of God.”

Our defense is God’s love, mercy, grace, and kindness.

Will We Take the Door of Escape? (Matt. 4:1–11; Luke 11:4; 22:40; James 1:13)

Jesus’ experience in the wilderness is a good example of the ways of sin. The Holy Spirit directed Him to enter the wilderness where He would be tempted by Satan. The Spirit’s role in this was not to directly tempt Him, for God cannot tempt any person (James 1:13). “James’s caution is timely in every age, lest a man indirectly, and possibly unwittingly, charge his Maker with causing the enticements to sin that he faces daily.” Instead, the Holy Spirit led Jesus into a situation where Satan would provide the temptations. Jesus would not do this on His own. The person who willingly seeks temptation is a person who is not obedient to God. Yet, it was necessary that Jesus be tempted while on earth, so the Spirit directed Him to the wilderness. In every situation where we are being asked to go against God’s will, we either seek strength from God to say No, or we succumb to the devil. Which will it be for you?
How God Fortifies Us Against Temptations (Matt. 4:1–11)

Jesus Himself was tempted, which makes Him a merciful high priest. Because He was tempted, He is able to understand us and help us when Satan tempts us. The Bible reveals that we must surrender our lives to God and live as new creations. God wants us to live free of sin. It is not enough to know Bible verses about temptation. We must meditate on God's promises and trust these promises when we face temptation. Our only hope is to trust Jesus. If we sin against God, we must confess those sins and admit to Him that we cannot conquer temptations on our own.

We must lay our sins before God and ask Him for forgiveness. We must repent, turn away from sinful habits, accept His grace, and learn how to obey. It might be useful to find an accountability partner or mentor. God often makes available to us people who have overcome temptation and who can encourage us.

Along with the help of fellow Christians, we also have the Word of God. When Satan tempted Jesus, Jesus used the Scriptures to answer him (Matt. 4:1–11). Likewise, we also are to know and live God's Word so we can rely on it to save us from temptation. “Your word I have hidden in my heart, / That I might not sin against You!” (Ps. 119:11, NKJV).

Praying to God with a penitent, patient, humble, reverent heart leads to an outpouring of strength, courage, and clarity to overcome the greatest of temptations. Prayer is our lifeline to God. Through prayer, we tap into His power. “How can a young man cleanse his way? / By taking heed according to Your word. / With my whole heart I have sought You; / Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments!” (Ps. 119:9, 10, NKJV). In our bid to become pure and faithful, we need God's Word, and we need to have a prayerful lifestyle.

Finally we must bear in mind that our number one ally in our battle with temptations is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a divine gift who acts as our conscience. The Holy Spirit helps us discern what is of God and what is of Satan. In order to truly endure temptation, we first need to realize that all around us there is a battle taking place over our salvation. The Holy Spirit makes us aware of this battle and teaches us how to live a victorious life. Understanding the dynamics of the battle is vital if we want victory. The battlefield is our mind, our desires, and our emotions (hate, anger, lust, envy, etc.). Our defense is God's love, mercy, grace, and kindness.

REACT

1. In what ways does the Holy Spirit influence your everyday decisions?
2. What are some of the ways you can resist, overcome, and ultimately endure temptations?
3. What talents do you have, and how can they be used to advance the ministry of Christ?

1. The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 744.
2. Ibid., vol. 7, p. 509.

Dane Johnson, St. Catherine, Jamaica, West Indies
“What is temptation?—It is the means by which those who claim to be the children of God are tested and tried. We read that God tempted Abraham, that He tempted the children of Israel. This means that He permitted circumstances to occur to test their faith, and lead them to look to Him for help. God permits temptation to come to His people today, that they may realize that He is their helper. If they draw nigh to Him when they are tempted, He strengthens them to meet the temptation. But if they yield to the enemy, neglecting to place themselves close to their Almighty Helper, they are overcome. They separate themselves from God. They do not give evidence that they walk in God’s way.”

“Satan adapts his temptations to all classes. He assails the illiterate with a jest or sneer, while he meets the educated with scientific objections and philosophical reasoning, alike calculated to excite distrust or contempt of the Scriptures. Even youth of little experience presume to insinuate doubts concerning the fundamental principles of Christianity. And this youthful infidelity, shallow as it is, has its influence.”

One way to defeat the enemy in his attacks is by hiding God’s word in our hearts (Ps. 119:11). It was the Word of God in Christ’s heart that gave Him the victory over Satan when He was tempted in the wilderness after His time of fasting and prayer. It is through His Word that God impresses upon our hearts and gives us strength to endure temptations.

“The example of Christ shows us that our only hope of victory is in continual resistance of Satan’s attacks. He who triumphed over the adversary of souls in the conflict of temptation understands Satan’s power over the race and has conquered him in our behalf. As an overcomer, He has given us the advantage of His victory, that in our efforts to resist the temptations of Satan we may unite our weakness to His strength, our worthlessness to His merits. And, sustained by His enduring might under strong temptation, we may resist in His all-powerful name and overcome as He overcame.”

**REACT**

What are some of the teachings of Christ that warn Christians against societal and cultural pressures?

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Evidence

The “Honor That God Puts Upon Us”

The book of James “is one of practical Christianity, showing what results or works a genuine, living faith will produce in the life of a disciple. . . . James writes freely out of the fullness of his heart, touching upon subjects as they are suggested to his mind. There are many allusions to the Sermon on the Mount.”

Because the book of James explores important themes of life, his epistle is also often said to be the guide to Christian behavior. Two themes covered in James that assist in such guidance are trials and temptations.

Being tempted “is an honor that God puts upon us.”

“There is manifestly a vast difference between ‘falling into temptation,’ or ‘enduring temptation’ (James 1:2, 12), on the one hand, and ‘entering into temptation’ (Matt. 26:41), on the other. We do well therefore to have it clear and settled in our souls; for, as the one is blessed, the other is the utmost possible danger for the soul. There is nothing more strengthening than to ‘endure temptation,’ nothing more perilous than to ‘enter into’ it. There seems little difference in the words, and people might easily slur over the difference in their thought. But the difference is complete; for in the one case it is an honour that God puts upon us, and in the other a snare that Satan presents to us.”

In James 1:2–4, we are admonished to “count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (NKJV). Thus we learn that being tempted is an honor that God puts upon us, because when we endure temptation, we learn to persevere, thus becoming mature and complete. Though difficult to understand, facing temptations is a good thing because it helps us to grow in Christ.

REACT

1. What can you do to start looking at temptations as opportunities for growth?
2. How can you encourage others to do the same?
3. Read the book of James to learn about its other major themes.
4. What similarities can you find between Christ’s Sermon on the Mount and the instruction found in James’s epistle?

It is not enough to just avoid temptation, because avoidance does not garner all the strength we need to overcome our enemy, the devil. Avoidance is just staying clear of temptation. But what happens when a temptation comes along and you are unable to run? What happens if you can no longer avoid a specific temptation?

If what you learn is not put into practice, you will surely experience defeat.

With resistance, we garner the strength to overcome even more temptations. Think of it this way. We need to be exposed to various infections as we grow so that whenever our body encounters one of those infections it already experienced, it will be cleared from the body quickly compared to the first infection. Likewise, as you increasingly experience the resisting of temptation, you are better able to stand with your faces to the foe, not giving in or giving up, because you have a beautiful crown to claim and the opportunity to live forever with your Savior.

So how do we resist temptation?

Be practical. Read your Bible and pray. But if what you learn is not put into practice, you will surely experience defeat. This can be compared to learning how to drive. You can read over and over again how to do so, but until you get behind the wheel and put into action what you have learned, your reading will be in vain.

Learn from experience. We should garner strength as we learn from our mistakes. Doing so helps us to strengthen our weak areas and maintain, or even improve, our strong points.

Encourage others. In our Christian journey, we should seek to share our testimonies with others to help them also overcome. When we share our experiences as a church family, it binds us together and strengthens us both collectively and individually. There is no way Satan can defeat a united church family.

Praise God. Whenever you are being tempted, praise God, for He is “mighty in power” and “His understanding is infinite” (Ps. 147:5, NKJV).

**REACT**

1. Do you have a testimony about how you resisted temptation? If yes, have you shared it with anyone? If not, consider the good you could do by doing so.

2. Why do we often tend to avoid rather than to resist temptation? Is avoidance the same as resisting temptation? Explain your answer.

3. Read Psalm 147. In what ways does this psalm inspire praise to God?
When I got out of graduate school, I decided I had to do something to stay physically fit. “But not running,” I said to myself. “That’s too much work.” Then I discovered that a quick run at noon was a good way to work off steam and get energized for the rest of the day. “OK,” I thought, “I’ll run, but I won’t be like those fanatics who run before dawn.” Then I realized that if I didn’t run first thing in the morning, I often didn’t have time to run at all. I used to like to stay up late, reading or watching television. Now I know that by 5:00 a.m. I have to be out the door for my morning run before I leave for the office. The temptation to stay up late is gone!

Soon, habits that are inconsistent with running faded away. So I’m careful with what I eat, when I go to bed, and how to keep my body in the best shape possible. What does this have to do with temptation? Everything! We often treat temptation as a spiritual test of wills. Will I resist the devil? Or will he get the better of me? The real issue in resisting temptation is motivation. Are we doing our best to honor Christ in everything we do? If so, it’s not that hard to develop habits that reinforce that desire. Reading the Bible, praying, and witnessing are tools that help us to be spiritually healthy. The idea is not so much to deny wrongdoing; it’s to nurture good, positive behaviors.

Spiritual strength doesn’t eliminate temptations. We still live in a world that’s alien to God’s values. But being spiritually disciplined keeps us from being kicked around by the devil. I like the way the apostle Paul put it: “Everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown” (1 Cor. 9:25, NKJV). There’s no “secret” to resisting temptation. It’s all about nurturing a relationship with Christ, focusing on serving Him, and developing habits that reinforce those things. The result, according to James, is happiness. “Blessed [happy] is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:12, NKJV).

**REACT**

1. True or false: Christians are generally too preoccupied with being victorious over temptation. Explain your answer.
2. What disciplines have you found most effective in being a positive, robust witness for Christ? How have these disciplines strengthened your walk with Christ?

*Stephen Chavez, Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.*
CONCLUDE

Temptation is a part of life on earth. God allows us to be tempted to test our faith and to remind us that we must rely on Him to provide a way out. When we accept His way out, God helps us develop perseverance, which leads to spiritual maturity. God helps us persevere during temptation as we hide His Word in our hearts, praise Him, and totally surrender our lives to Him. When we focus on strengthening our relationship with God through developing good spiritual discipline, the end result is greater happiness as we enjoy a closer connection with Him.

CONSIDER

- Contacting a friend who is willing to be your accountability partner. Share your struggles and pray together that God will provide strength to resist temptation.
- Reviewing the Bible verses in this week’s lesson and responding to them in a prayer journal.
- Memorizing several Bible passages that will help you when you are tempted. Ask for the Holy Spirit to guide you to the verses that will be most useful to you.
- Creating a sketch of images that represent different areas of your life. Prayerfully consider which areas of your life you may not have completely surrendered to God.
- Observing the stars and thinking about what heaven will be like after God has put an end to evil and temptation.
- Writing lyrics to a song that tell about complete surrender to God in every area of life. Then ask for His strength in overcoming temptation.

CONNECT

First Corinthians, chaps. 9 and 10, in a translation that is most understandable for you.


Being and Doing

“Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22, NKJV).
“Why are you so ‘ard-eaz’?” This is one of the rhetorical questions that Jamaican parents often ask their children while scolding them. And the smart children know that they don’t dare to respond.

In Jamaican Creole (patois), “ard-eaz” describes someone who refuses to act with appropriate urgency or not to act at all to a command or set of instructions. Loosely translated, the term means “hard-eared” in the same sense as someone is hard-headed. This is different from the term “hard-of-hearing” because it is not that the person does not hear or has difficulty hearing but rather that the person, upon hearing and even showing that he or she has heard, still refuses to act appropriately. Simply put, the person is stubborn. The results, as reflected in several Jamaican proverbs, are that such children are going to “bite or eat a stone,” “suck salt through a wooden spoon,” or “die of sunburn.” In other words, nothing good is ever going to result from their refusal to heed instructions.

James urges us to move from being mere hearers of God’s words to actually doing what His words say. He is telling us that a mere intellectual assent to God’s instructions is not enough to save us, and if that’s what we believe, then we are deceiving ourselves.

This is the same concept alluded to by Paul when he says that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17, NKJV). Faith implies action. It is the act of placing confidence in and acting upon something that was said, heard, or read. “God has given us His word, not to speculate upon it, or discuss it; but that we may obey it. And it is as we, through grace, yield a hearty and happy obedience to our Father’s statutes and judgments, that we tread the bright pathway of life, and enter into the reality of all that God has treasured up for us in Christ.”* The faith that saves is an active faith, a faith that permeates every aspect of our lives and thus influences everything we do and say.

As you study this week’s lesson, pray that God will help you to have not just a mere intellectual understanding of His words but that He also will help you to obey them. Pray that you will truly become better acquainted with Christ, for to know Him is to love Him, and to love Him is to obey Him.

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Although the book of James is one of the earliest of Christian writings, the message is extremely relevant to us. As we walk with God, we aim to lead lives that are pleasing to Him. This is achieved through being pure. One of the ways purity is shown is through our works.

“Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (James 1:26, 27, NIV). In the New Testament, the Greek terms *katharos* refers to purity of heart¹ and *amiantos* means “undefiled.”² Together, they give us the standard of purity we should aspire to.

**When we serve others, we are, in fact, serving Jesus.**

We need to understand that being a Christian is not just about outward actions, such as praying and Bible study. It is also about the works we do for others—works that come from the heart. We need to care for people who are more vulnerable than we are; we are to help those in need. If we do not, then we are not fully allowing God’s words to change hearts and lives.

Jesus says: “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me” (Matt. 25:35, 36, NIV). When we care for people in need without being proud or boastful, we show that we love the Lord and have been made holy by His Spirit. In fact, Jesus says that whatever we do for others, we do for Him (Matt. 25:40). When we serve others, we are, in fact, serving Jesus. Likewise, when we hurt others, we also are hurting Jesus. We cannot truly walk with Him if we are not living in the right way, if we are not keeping ourselves unstained from the world, if we are not helping others and treating them with kindness. Our lifestyle and the good deeds we do reveal our faith and commitment to Him.

**REACT**

How can you personally help people who are more vulnerable than you?

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Observing Our Reflections (James 1:22–25)

In James 1:22–25, the law of liberty is compared to a mirror. Consider what use a mirror is to everyday life. Most of us observe ourselves in a mirror to make sure that we look presentable to be in public. We want to correct any flaws before we leave home! Likewise, Christ's character and the inspired Word of God act as mirrors to help us determine the state of our lives. In light of Christ and the Bible, we should observe our reflection with great care and thoughtful honesty. As we consider what Christ and the Bible show us about our lives, we are presented with two decisions: (1) we confirm that how we are living is according to God's Law, or (2) we recognize our character defects and ask God to help us change.

When we live by the Law of God, our hope, our trust, our peace, and our safety are all resting in the hands of Christ.

A Law of Love (Deut. 28:1–14; Matt. 5:3–12)

The law of liberty is the law of heaven. It is also a law of love to be manifested by God’s people in this continuously evil world. Though the work to be done at many times contradicts the statutes and common standards and ideologies of this world, Matthew 5:3–12 and Deuteronomy 28:1–14 describe what blessings will be ours as we actively live God's law. As we seek to put Christ first in all that we say and do, every action and every word will be rooted in the law. Thus we fulfill the law.

There will be times on this earth when we won’t immediately see the effects of our living for Christ. Even if we do not receive the more immediate rewards that often come from living God’s law, we must remember that “now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8, NIV).

“The Greatest Gift of All” (Rom. 12:9–21)

Once we see that change is needed in our lives, we need to remember that part of that change includes how we interact with other people, and that how we interact with people is motivated by a change of heart, mind, and character (Phil. 2:3–7). Another “real world” expression of this law can be found in Romans 12:9–21. In these verses, Paul instructs “believers in
the exercise of the greatest gift of all and the basic principle of all true Christianity—love. As in 1 Cor. 12:13 Paul follows his discussion of spiritual gifts by a reference to love. The virtues that he lists in Rom. 12:9–21 are but the outworking of genuine Christian love.”1

“He Has Showed You . . . What Is Good” (Mic. 6:8)

In living within the bounds of the law, some pose the idea that we are free. But how can this be? How is it that restricting our lives to a set of rules and guidelines correlates with freedom? Micah breaks it down like this: “What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic. 6:8, NIV). How much clearer can it be? Micah 6:8 is all about keeping the Ten Commandments. The first four commandments are about our love for God. The last six commandments are about our love for our fellow human beings. “Love expressed in action with respect to God and to our fellow men is ‘good’; it is all that God requires, for ‘love is the fulfilling of the law’ (Rom. 13:10).”2

Living by these principles frees us from several things. First of all, we are free to act in God’s name. And when we are free to act in His name, we are not burdened by the many cares and worries that burden people who are not Christians. When we are free to act in God’s name, we are free from fear, need, and want. We are free from mental pain and slavery. And we are free from those things that could quite easily wear down the average individual. And finally, when we live by the law of God, our hope, our trust, our peace, and our safety are all resting in the hands of Christ.

REACT

1. When you look into your heart and mind concerning your relationship with Christ, what does your “reflection” tell you about who you are?

2. Think of some times when you were convicted to do or say something but did not. Do you regret having done nothing? If not, why not? If you do have regrets, what should you do if a similar situation comes up again?

3. Consider how you are currently living. Do your findings match up with what God has laid out in His Word? If they do not, what can you do about it?

1. The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, 2nd ed., vol. 6, p. 620.
2. Ibid., vol. 4, p. 1028.
“True religion means living the Word in your practical life. Your profession is not of any value without the practical doing of the Word.”  

“The reason why our people have not more power is that they profess the truth, but do not practice it. They have but little faith and trust in God. . . . The Lord claims the strength of brain, bone, and muscle; but it is too often withheld from Him and given to the world. The service of God is made a secondary matter, while worldly interests receive prompt attention. Thus things of minor consequence are made important, while the requirements of God, things spiritual and eternal, are treated in an indifferent manner, as something which may be taken up at will and let alone at pleasure. If the mind were stayed upon God and the truth exerted a sanctifying influence upon the heart, self would be hid in Christ. If we realize the importance of the truth which we profess to believe we should feel that we have a sacred mission to fulfill, a responsibility involving eternal results.”

“Practical religion breathes its fragrance everywhere.”

“What if we were to go out into the streets and soil our clothes with mud, and then come into the house and, beholding our filthy garments as we stand before the glass, we should say to the mirror, ‘Cleanse me from my filth’; would it cleanse us from our filth? That is not the office of the looking glass. All that it can do is to reveal that our garments are defiled; it cannot take the defilement away.” So it is with the law of God. It points out the defects of our characters. Therefore, it is our responsibility, through the strength of God, to act rightly so we can be righteous before God and man. “Practical religion breathes its fragrance everywhere. It is a savor of life unto life.”

**REACT**

1. Why is it so easy to hear and study God’s Word but so difficult to apply it to our lives? As you reflect upon what you need to do to actually live God’s Word, consider the story of the vine and the branches recorded in John 15:1–8.

2. Think of how you can display practical religion. For example, how can you help others with the resources God has given you?

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4. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 1157.

**Peter Bailey, St. Catherine, Jamaica, West Indies**
Satan desires to sift us as wheat (Luke 22:31). He is so clever that no human can successfully resist his influence without Christ's help. Consequently, the key to resisting the devil is to prayerfully, sincerely, and consistently draw near to God so that He will draw near to us (James 4:8). God's Word assures us that if we resist the devil, He will flee from us (James 4:7). This promise, however, is clearly directed toward those who are willing to submit to God. As we prepare for Christ's return, we must not think as Satan thinks or act as he acts. Material possessions and “the pride of life” (1 John 2:16, NKJV) will become insignificant when we submit to God.

The Word of God gives us power, strength, and perseverance to overcome the devil.

How can we submit our lives to God?

_We must obey God's Word._ David wrote, “How sweet are Your words to my taste, / Sweeter than honey to my mouth!” (Ps. 119:103, NKJV). “Your word I have hidden in my heart, / that I might not sin against You!” (Ps. 119:11, NKJV). Job exclaimed, “I have treasured the words of His mouth / More than my necessary food” (Job 23:12, NKJV). If by faith we take God at His Word and prayerfully claim His promises, the devil will have no choice but to flee from us.

Do you remember how Christ resisted Satan in the wilderness (see Luke 4:1–14)? The same power that Jesus used to resist the devil is available to us today. “It is written” (Luke 4:4, 8) can also be our weapon against the devil. The Word of God gives us power, strength, and perseverance to overcome the devil.

_We must submit to God._ Through the prophet He says, “Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, / ‘This is the way, walk in it;’ / Whenever you turn to the right hand / Or whenever you turn to the left” (Isa. 30:21, NKJV). Such guidance is the work of the Holy Spirit, who guides us and corrects us when we wander off the path of righteousness. “All who will may hear . . . if they will but listen.”*

**REACT**

1. Explain in your own words, as if you were talking to a friend, why it is important to submit to God.
2. If God’s Word is so vital to our salvation, why is it that so many young people don't read it as often as they should?

* The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 4, p. 220.
James 1:22–26 warns us of our most vicious, mysterious, and many times, undetectable enemy—ourselves. We are not called to simply hear and quote Scripture; we are called to live it. We are not just “to talk the talk”; we are also to “walk the walk.” We cannot simply quote Scripture. We are to live it. To whole-heartedly serve God, we must not only believe His Word, we are to do it.

God doesn’t have to promise us anything, yet He does so because He loves us!

In my opinion, though, being a doer is a bit tricky. To be a doer you have to both know the Bible and live it. The young ruler who visited Jesus found this especially hard. He was able to quote Scripture without hesitation, but when Jesus told him to sell all of his possessions, he couldn’t do it. He was able to “talk the talk,” but he was unable to “walk the walk.” Even Peter denied Christ and succumbed to his enemy because of fear. If Peter, who walked with Jesus, could deny Him, why would we be any stronger?

If we are able to trust God to help us become “doers” of His word, then we will receive great blessings (James 1:25). James connects the art of hearing Scripture with doing what Scripture says we should do. God doesn’t have to promise us anything, yet He does so because He loves us! Likewise, we must serve Him because we love Him, not for what we can get out of it, but because we love Him. James wrote that in following the law, we will be set free from sin to follow and serve Jesus. We each will serve Him differently, with whatever gifts and talents we have been blessed with (1 Pet. 4:10).

“Walking the walk” and “talking the talk” is a bit challenging. However, if we surrender our lives to Christ and allow Him to guide us, we can become doers through the power of His love.

REACT
1. Do you have to be asked to serve, or do you simply do so? Do you serve with a cheerful heart, or are you reluctant to help?
2. Serving others does not need to be a huge undertaking. Holding a door open for someone, saying a silent prayer, or simply smiling are all ways to serve! Can you think of other simple, yet meaningful ways to help others?
3. Do you warm the church pew or your neighbor’s heart?
CONCLUDE
Wholehearted living is having a healthy harmony between being and doing. Because beliefs and values are important, they need to translate themselves in how you live your life. It is easy to fall into just focusing on what you believe. However, true faith is active and penetrates deep into your heart and soul, transforming the way you live. Yes, faith is transformational. Faith moves you to fulfill God's purposes for you. Faith leads you to compassion; and compassion always leads to action. Faith will make your life count.

CONSIDER
• Using a concordance to look up Bible verses that have the word compassion in them. How do these verses inspire you to be compassionate? Memorize one or two of these verses.
• Making a list of needs in your community and mobilizing people to meet those needs.
• Meditating on the words to the hymn “Trust and Obey.” You can find them online at http://www.hymnsite.com/lyrics/umh467.sht, or in the Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal, hymn no. 590.
• Writing a short essay on the topic “Faith That Works.”
• Keeping a journal of decisions you’ve made that required a special trust in God. How did prayer and Bible study assist you with making those decisions? How did your answered prayers and study make your faith stronger?
• Going on a short mission trip and giving a report to your church that includes how the trip increased your faith in God and your love from Him and people in need. If you cannot go on such a trip, find a project in your community, such as serving in a soup kitchen or tutoring a child who is struggling with math or reading.

CONNECT
Isaiah 58, note especially verses 5–11.
Love and the Law

“For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment”

(James 2:13, NKJV).
The sirens scream as the panic-stricken wife follows the ambulance. Tears stream down her cheeks. She is unable to see her injured loved one on the stretcher, and she no longer can hear his loud, persistent coughing. In her mind she shouts, *You have to live, John!* Unable to pass the restricted area of the hospital once she arrives there, she anxiously paces up and down.

After a few hours, the doctor comes to meet with her, and even though a spark of hope glimmers in her heart, she immediately fears the worst based on the television and online reports she saw while she waited. The doctor sits with her and calmly reassures her that John will be fine, that her life-threatening diagnosis was way over the top. Her husband would be receiving treatment that would allow him to live a long and healthy life.

You would be relieved, too, if this were your loved one. Yet spiritually, how many times have we “diagnosed” the spiritual health of our friends and family members without taking them to the “hospital” known as “church”? As we use the law of God like a hammer against that which is worldly and secular, we miss the fact that the point of the matter is to “fear God and keep His commandments” (Eccles. 12:13, NKJV) and that mercy “triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13, NKJV). What God wants from us as we experience His amazing grace is to love Him, follow His commands, and be merciful to others.

This week’s lesson looks at what the book of James has to say about the transformational relationship between genuine love and God’s law. Are these two entities the same? Or are they different? Just as the wife in the story above was hopeful even though she had concluded the worst through her own diagnosis, we also need to “cry” for sinners and bring them to the Great Physician. Then He reassures these patients (an expression of love), accurately narrows down their ailment (uses the law to reveal the sin), and finally provides the appropriate treatment (acceptance of His death on the cross). This treatment not only heals the patients, it also gives hope to the people who love them. Bear in mind, however, that because sin manifests itself differently in each patient, each patient will therefore have his or her prescribed treatment based on the combination of God’s law and love.

*Iphithule Mhlanga, Dublin, Ireland*
The Man With the Gold Ring (Mark 2:16; Luke 11:43; James 2:1–4)

It was August 28, 1963, when Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his famous “I Have a Dream” speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. He stated that his desire was for people to no longer be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.

Since then, racism has somewhat diminished in parts of the world, but the sad reality is that many people still continue to be judged by their clothes, the type of house they live in, their level of education, and yes, the color of their skin. James 2:1–4 gives us an example of two men who were treated differently when they arrived at a meeting. The difference in treatment was not based on the content of their characters but on their outward appearances. The man wearing the gold ring and the expensive clothes was asked to sit in one of the chairs reserved for the VIPs. The other man, wearing cheap, shabby clothing, was told to sit on the floor.

Perhaps the most admirable characteristic about God is that He leads by example.

One commentary has this to say about what occurred in James 1:2–4: “To discriminate between persons because of their social or financial status is to pass judgments from evil motives, to become judges with evil thoughts. Life according to the Christian faith and life according to worldly standards are in sharp contrast here. The faith which originates in Jesus Christ disavows distinctions based upon birth, race, property, or sex (cf. Gal. 3:28).”

This week’s lesson teaches us that all people are important and that everyone needs to be treated with respect. Even though we might have more money than our coworkers, even though we might have a better understanding of the gospel than our classmates, we should not be proud or disrespectful. Why? Because the blessings we have attained and our knowledge of the Scriptures have not been given to us as a result of our righteousness but because God has entrusted them to us through His grace.

Be the Change You Want to See (Lev. 19:17, 18; Matt. 5:43–45; James 2:8, 9)

A young man once called the police to report that his apartment had been broken into and that his expensive camera had been stolen. When the police recovered the camera and checked its serial number, they discovered that it had been stolen two weeks earlier from a photo studio.
situated a few blocks away. The man was seeking the return of an item he had stolen in the first place!

We should ask ourselves how often we do the exact same thing. For example, we want our friends to forgive us for being dishonest with them, but we often refuse to forgive people who have lied to us. The best way to change the world is to change the person we see in the mirror. We need to stop trying to change others; we need to start looking at ourselves to see what it is that we need to change in us.

In Leviticus 19:18, God commands us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Perhaps the most admirable characteristic about God is that He leads by example. He will never ask us to do something that He Himself would not do. John 3:16 reminds us that God gave His one and only Son to die for our sins. Jesus was treated as we deserve so that we may be treated as He deserves. The word neighbor generally refers to someone who lives in our neighborhood or who lives in close proximity to our house. This social interaction is therefore based on geographic location. Yet, in essence, our neighbor is anyone who genuinely needs help regardless of where they live or who they are. “A Christian's conduct must be consistent, for it is presumably under the control of a single dominant motive; therefore, love for one cannot involve disparagement of another.”

Often, God places each of us in certain places at certain times so that we might help someone in need. It is important for people to hear the Scriptures, but it is even more important for them to see the Scriptures acted out in our lives. Love and kindness toward others is often the best witnessing tool.

**All or Nothing at All (James 2:10, 11)**

The wages of sin is death, and sin is the transgression of the law. As humans, most of us classify the severity of our sins according to government courts of law. The severity of those sins is, in turn, reflected by the magnitude of the sentence given to us by the judge. We often comfort ourselves by saying that the sins we have committed are not as big as the sins committed by our neighbors. However, James 2:10, 11 informs us that if we are guilty of one sin, we are guilty of them all. A sin is a sin. On the other hand, God’s love and grace is God’s love and grace—for all of eternity.

**REACT**

1. How do you justify the sins you commit?
2. Would you be happy if God treated you the same way you treat your ex-boyfriend/girlfriend who cheated on you? Why or why not?
3. What are the motives behind your acts of kindness? Do you help others even when you don’t expect anything in return?

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2. Ibid., p. 38.

Solwazi Khumalo, Cape Town, South Africa
The law of God is based on love regardless of the spiritual condition of any individual, nation, or group of people. When the law of God rules in our heart, we will not steal for our neighbors, murder them, or covet their possessions.

“The law was not spoken at this time [at Sinai] exclusively for the benefit of the Hebrews. God honored them by making them the guardians and keepers of the His law, but it was to be held as a sacred trust for the whole world. The precepts of the Decalogue are adapted to all mankind, and they were given for the instruction and government of all. Ten precepts, brief, comprehensive, and authoritative, cover the duty of man to God and to his fellow man; and all based upon the great fundamental principle of love.”

“Both these commandments [loving God and loving your neighbor] are an expression of the principle of love. The first cannot be kept and the second broken, nor can the second be kept while the first is broken. When God has His rightful place on the throne of the heart, the right place will be given to our neighbor. We shall love him as ourselves. And only as we love God supremely is it possible to love our neighbor impartially.

“Both these commandments are an expression of the principle of love.”

“And since all the commandments are summed up in love to God and man, it follows that not one precept can be broken without violating this principle. Thus Christ taught His hearers that the law of God is not so many separate precepts, some of which are of great importance while others are of little importance and may with impunity be ignored. Our Lord presents the first four and the last six commandments as a divine whole, and teaches that love to God will be shown by obedience to all His commandments.”

For Christ Himself admonishes us, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

**REACT**

1. In some parts of the world, people are dying for their belief in Christ. If you lost a loved one this way, would you find it easy to forgive their murderers? Why or why not?

2. In light of God’s command that we should love even our enemies, how would you help a friend who is prejudiced against someone?

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After the death of King Solomon, Israel divided into two kingdoms. “The northern kingdom, called Israel, established its capital first at Shechem, a revered site in Jewish history, and later at the hilltop city of Samaria. In 722 B.C. Assyria conquered Israel and took most of its people into captivity. . . . Meanwhile, the southern kingdom of Judah fell to Babylon in 600 B.C. Its people, too, were carried off into captivity. But 70 years later, a remnant of 43,000 was permitted to return and rebuild Jerusalem. The people who now inhabited the former northern kingdom—the Samaritans—vigorously opposed the repatriation and tried to undermine the attempt to re-establish the nation. For their part, the full-blooded, monotheistic Jews detested the mixed marriages and worship of their northern cousins. So walls of bitterness were erected on both sides and did nothing but harden for the next 550 years.”*

From the time the Israelites journeyed into the wilderness, God had set apart priests to be His ministers in the sanctuary (Exodus 28). Wearing special robes made according to God's specifications, the priests were highly revered as men who stood between God and His people. The Levites had been set apart to take care of the vessels in the tabernacle. They were commissioned to take it down and set it up again when they traveled (Num. 1:47–51). Both the priests and the Levites were in sacred service and were knowledgeable in the Scriptures.

When Jesus told the story of the good Samaritan, it was in response to a question asked by a lawyer who wanted to know who his neighbor was (Luke 10:25–37). Jews did not regard heathens, strangers, or Samaritans to be in the same category as “neighbor.” They hated Samaritans and had no dealings with them (John 4:9). They were well versed in the requirements of God’s law, yet their bigotry and self-righteousness blinded them to the very nature of that law, which is love. In their fear of defilement and sense of self-importance, they walked past the wounded man, leaving one of their own to die.

An injured Jew, a priest, a Levite, and a loathed Samaritan. Which one of these lived up to the law’s standard of love? Jesus lived a life that demonstrated the law of love.

One of the most basic commandments in the Bible is to love God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind (Matt. 22:37). How can we do this?

We must know God. “We know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life” (1 John 5:20, NKJV). Unlike other knowledge, knowing God is as much a matter of the heart as it is of the mind. So how can we be open to the Holy Spirit? How is it that we will want to do God’s will?

What God desires from us is self-sacrificing love.

We must desire the fruit of the Spirit. These fruit are “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control” (Gal. 5:22, 23, NKJV). “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17, NKJV).

We must be pure in heart. Jesus said that the pure in heart will see God (Matt. 5:8). They also will have the fruit of the Spirit. What God desires from us is self-sacrificing love, the underlying principle of God’s character. Christ’s followers can receive this wisdom only from above.

We must sit at the feet of Jesus. One day, a woman with an alabaster box of scented oil anointed Jesus’ feet (Luke 7:36–50). She desperately wanted the Savior to intervene in her life. Jesus forgave her sins and told her, “Your faith has saved you” (verse 50, NKJV). When we humbly sit at the feet of Jesus, we are assured of our salvation, and our sins are erased.

The law condemns. Because we all have violated the law, we now need the saving righteousness of Jesus credited to us by faith. “Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth, / Who have upheld His justice. / Seek righteousness, seek humility. / It may be that you will be hidden / In the day of the Lord’s anger” (Zeph. 2:3, NKJV).

REACT
1. In your own words, what does Zephaniah 2:3 say about what is right before the Lord?
2. How can we perfect our image while living in a sinful world?
In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked His disciples to watch and pray with Him. But when He returned to them, He found them sleeping. So He asked Peter, “‘Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?’” (Matt. 26:40, NIV).

“The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt. 26:41, NIV).

Is there new light about Christ’s return? Sometimes Christians get side-tracked by the questions surrounding the law and the second coming of Jesus. However, our assurance should come from the fact that He is by our side, ready to answer our questions and address our concerns. We must be aware and pray so that He can give us understanding.

“The great principles of God’s law are embodied in the Ten Commandments and exemplified in the life of Christ. They express God’s love, will, and purposes concerning human conduct and relationships and are binding upon all people in every age. These precepts are the basis of God’s covenant with His people and the standard in God’s judgment. Through the agency of the Holy Spirit they point out sin and awaken a sense of need for a Saviour. Salvation is all of grace and not of works, but its fruitage is obedience to the Commandments. . . . It is an evidence of our love for the Lord and our concern for our fellow men.”*

Christians must not be tired of watching and praying. God will reveal to us what we need to know when we need to know it. Prophecies concerning the second coming of Jesus are found in Scripture and illuminated through the Spirit of Prophecy. Prophecies about His return from any other source are false. Let us trust Him and everything He explained about His return. There is no other truth about this glorious event in addition to what has been revealed in the Bible and in the prophetic writings of Ellen G. White.

**REACT**

Is it reasonable to seek truth when you are not living truth? Explain your answer.

*Seventh-day Adventists Believe, 2nd ed. (Silver Spring, Md.: Ministerial Assn., General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005), p. 263.*
CONCLUDE

Jesus loves everyone for whom He died. So who are we to place the law and judgment over the love He bled for us? If we try to force-feed the law to our neighbors, all they’ll end up with is sore throats. Instead, we need to show our love by feeding them grace and mercy. That must be first and foremost. That is what Jesus did. We need to follow His example and stop leaving love out of the equation. The law is meaningful only if love is backing it up. James 1:22 reminds us not to “merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (NIV). The Bible is spelled L-O-V-E. So go out and do so!

CONSIDER

• Picking a random day of the week to reach out to the needy instead of conveniently visiting a local homeless shelter on a Sabbath afternoon. We, as Christians, weren’t intended to minister only once a week. This disruption to your schedule may give you a deeper satisfaction and understanding of what “giving of your time” really is.
• Making a 30-day challenge to help or encourage one individual each day. Report your daily “kindness encounters” on Facebook or in a blog.
• Walking or running a 5K race to help raise money for your community or a worldwide foundation or organization. Invite some friends to join you.
• Starting a community garden on your church grounds and encouraging your church family to spend time together tending the plants. This team-building activity will place your love for one another and God’s nature in clear view for all to see. Literally.
• Praying extra for those who never share prayer requests with you when you offer to pray for them. Just because church members, close friends, or relatives may not ask for prayer doesn’t mean they aren’t hurting inside. They may be just the people who need prayer the most.
• Conversing with your coworkers during lunch about the difference between love and the law. This world has many everyday “parables” you can use to compare the two (wars, government, famine, film plots, etc.).

CONNECT

Romans 9:16; 1 Corinthians 13.
Ellen G. White, Reflecting Christ, p. 46.
Elyse Fitzpatrick and Jessica Thompson, Give Them Grace: Dazzling Your Kids With the Love of Jesus (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2011).
Faith That Works

“As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26, NKJV).
What is more valuable to you: (1) your belief in God, or (2) your experience with God?

Now that you’ve pondered that question, here is a similar one: Which half of your heartbeat is the most important: (1) the one that pumps blood out of your heart, or (2) the one that takes blood into your heart? My guess is that you view the second question as absurd. Why? Because both sides of your heart’s *lub-dub* are equally necessary for life. They are intrinsically linked together. As for the first question, it, too, poses the separation of a whole reality. In other words, our faith in God is linked to our works.

One summer, my family enjoyed visiting Silverwood, a theme park. Among the many offerings in the waterpark portion were three slides. The first slide was fully enclosed and curvy. The second one opened with a large hump in the middle, while the third slide was a straight, six-story, 55-mile-per-hour drop. I made a deal with my 13-year-old son that we would rocket down this slide together. For some, this is may be no big deal. For me it was, because I’m not particularly fond of heights!

Did I believe that the slide’s design would keep me safe as I turned myself into a wet human missile? How would you know? If I told you I believed I would travel the slide injury-free, would you believe me? Or must I “take the plunge” for you to believe me? You know the old saying that “actions speak louder than words.”

The link between belief and action may seem like common sense. Yet despite the apparent obviousness, God nudged James to include this life principle in his letter to believers: “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26, NKJV). So what’s the bottom line? Our actions portray our faith. Another way to say it is that faith is visible. I find this statement covertly made in how Matthew, Mark, and Luke used the same phrase in their stories about the men who lowered a paralytic man through a roof so that Jesus could heal him. They each wrote, “When Jesus saw their faith . . .”

As we study this week’s lesson, may we grow in our understanding and experiences of faith. And by the way, at Silverwood, this “chicken” flew. I want to do the same in my journey with Jesus.

*Michael Demma, Bonney Lake, Washington, U.S.A.*
The book of James is a letter to God’s children scattered outside the boundaries of Palestine. James is not discussing justification or salvation by faith and works. Rather, he is writing about a living faith, a faith that works. “Do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?” (James 2:20, NKJV).

We are powerless to save ourselves.

The devil is intent on luring us to his side by getting us to believe that we can work out our own salvation. Jesus, however, made it clear that we are powerless to save ourselves when He said “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6, NKJV). And Peter said that “there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” except the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12, NKJV).

Yes. We are powerless to save ourselves because it is impossible for us to keep God’s law. If it were possible for us to keep God’s law, Christ would not have needed to come to Earth to show us how to live. Neither would He have had to die for us. Only by trusting in His righteousness can we claim holiness. Only by accepting His death on our behalf can we be saved.

When we are saved, the Holy Spirit resides in our hearts, helping us to develop a Christlike character and to do what is right according to God’s holy law. Thus we develop the fruit of Christ’s character (Gal. 5:22, 23). And thus we become “His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10, NKJV).

Like clay in the hands of a potter, we are to surrender ourselves to Christ, because only He can save us. So let the Holy Spirit strengthen your faith and compel you to do good works.

**REACT**

1. How can Bible study, prayer, service, and meditating on God’s Word help to strengthen your faith and trust in Him?
2. What are the good works mentioned in Ephesians 2:10?
3. Read Galatians 5:25. This verse teaches us that every part of our lives should be dedicated to God. Consider all the various aspects of your life. Which parts have you dedicated to God? Which parts do you have yet to dedicate to Him?
My grandmother had dozens of expensive candles that she bought over the years, saving them to burn on special occasions. When she passed away, we found boxes of unused candles in her shed. Although her life was full of special events and memories, several candles were left unused. Fortunately, she had a faith in the Lord that was visible in the way she lived her life. However, like the candles stored in the shed, it is sad that some people hide their faith so that no one else can enjoy it.

What Kind of Faith? (James 2:18–24; 5:19, 20)

“You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder” (James 2:19, NIV). Have you ever thought about the faith of demons? When Christ cast out demons, they listened. When the apostles, in Christ’s name, attempted to do the same work, they were successful. Even Satan worked in God’s service before he rebelled. What does it mean for our faith if even demons acknowledge the presence of Christ and obey His commands? What, then, should our expressions of faith look like? What kind of faith do we need to be counted as disciples of Christ?

James points to an answer in the story of Abraham. When the patriarch was called upon to exercise his faith by killing his own son, he obeyed. However, we must remember the context of his faith. Repeatedly, God promised him that He would make him the father of many nations. However, that covenant seemed to grow increasingly empty as Abraham and Sarah continued to wait for the longed-for infant. Finally, the birth of Abraham and Sarah’s legitimate son Isaac heralded the fulfillment of God’s covenant. Therefore, the Lord’s command to sacrifice Isaac was not only a call to murder Abraham’s beloved son but a direct threat to the very covenant that miraculously had been fulfilled. The Lord literally asked Abraham to sacrifice his son and destroy God’s promise to him. However, he was willing to obey even when it seemed that the Lord was abandoning him. He had faith that something greater was afoot, and he acted.

Paul defines Abraham’s ordeal in Romans 4:2, 3. “If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works. . . . ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness’ ” (NIV). Abraham didn’t have a shallow belief in the existence of God. He didn’t obey God out of fear as do the demons. Instead, he oriented his whole heart, his whole mind, and his whole soul toward serving the Lord through his faith-motivated actions. Isaac lived. And many nations were fathered through Him.
The Work of the Lord (James 5:19, 20)

It is ironic that one of my favorite Christians in history was not a Christian. When Mahatma Gandhi rose to lead his people to freedom against the British Empire, he chose to do so nonviolently. He strove for “complete harmony of thought and word and deed.” He desired to let his faith in God shape his life.

What many people don’t know about Gandhi is that he had a lifelong admiration and friendship with the Christian author Leo Tolstoy. They often corresponded with each other, and mentored one another in their respective faiths. Gandhi, a disciplined student of the Bible, loved Christ and His message. So when he stated that “you must be the change you wish to see in the world,” he was calling his listeners to active expressions of faith. Even across cultural and religious borders, a true faith in the person of Christ can be seen in the works of the faithful.

Genuine faith in the Lord awakens the believer to action. We know that the Lord’s work in this world is to help humanity through the earthly clash with sin, and to deliver us to our destiny in His kingdom. James 5 defines the purified heart—a heart in which faith and works operate harmoniously to help people accept Christ. In 1 Peter 1:22, Paul characterizes this formula by describing people who, through obeying the truth, have pure and loving hearts. After his description of faith and works leading to a loving heart, he offers this prescription for life: “Love one another deeply, from the heart” (NIV). Yes. The work of the Lord is love.

True Followers of Christ (Eph. 2:8–10)

A successful doctor, who was also an active member in his church, was found dead in his condo from an overdose of recreational drugs. He also had been viewing pornography. This is disturbing not only because of the man’s total lack of sincerity but also because of the horridness he harbored in his heart. Such hypocrisy is so sad. Hypocrisy in Christians turns many people away from God. Our works should reflect the works of Christ. True followers of Christ will live lives of service.

REACT

1. What metaphor can you think of to explain the relationship between faith and works?
2. Who in your world needs to experience genuine Christian sincerity?
3. Dwell on the fact that the moment you accept the grace of Christ, you are saved and your sins are permanently blotted out of your history as if they never were committed. What does this truth make you want to do?


Craig Mattson, Lake Tapps, Washington, U.S.A.
“The so-called faith that does not work by love and purify the soul will not justify any man. ‘Ye see,’ says the apostle, ‘how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.’ James 2:24. Abraham believed God. How do we know that he believed? His works testified to the character of his faith, and his faith was accounted to him for righteousness. We need the faith of Abraham in our day, to lighten the darkness that gathers around us, shutting out the sweet sunlight of God’s love, and dwarfing spiritual growth. Our faith should be prolific of good works; for faith without works is dead.”

“True faith will be manifested by a holy life.”

“Genuine faith will be manifested in good works; for good works are the fruits of faith. As God works in the heart, and man surrenders his will to God, and cooperates with God, he works out in the life what God works in by the Holy Spirit, and there is harmony between the purpose of the heart and the practice of the life. Every sin must be renounced as the hateful thing that crucified the Lord of life and glory, and the believer must have a progressive experience by continually doing the works of Christ. It is by continual surrender of the will, by continual obedience, that the blessing of justification is retained.

Those who are justified by faith must have a heart to keep the way of the Lord. It is an evidence that a man is not justified by faith when his works do not correspond to his profession. James says, ‘Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was his faith made perfect?’ (James 2:22).

“True faith will be manifested by a holy life. ‘Since God has saved us, let us so order our works that they may be acceptable to Him. Art thou rich? let thy goods administer to the necessities of the poor. Art thou poor? let thy services be acceptable to the rich. If thy labor is useful to thyself alone, the service that thou pretendest to render unto God is a lie.’”

**REACT**

1. Develop a daily activity that publically and directly expresses your faith in God. Over time, let this habit grow into a faith tradition.

2. What individual inspires you in your Christian walk? What about that person most inspires you? Do you see those characteristics in yourself?

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M. Lizzette Mattson de Harper, Lake Tapps, Washington, U.S.A.
I awoke one day to a paradoxical truth that has really helped me to understand myself and to explain God’s Word to others. Here is the question: When two texts in the Bible seem to contradict each other, which one is right? I have found that the answer is “both.” God never says something that isn’t true. So why then do we have “the salvation by faith versus salvation by works” debates? Who is right? My answer? Both! That’s exactly what verse James 2:26 says. We need both faith and works to fulfill God’s plan for our lives, for faith without works is not really faith at all.

So how do we apply this to our lives? God created us to do good works. Never let your works be self-serving.

He wants us to be doers and not just seekers. But to be both doers and seekers, we must first have complete faith in Him. That’s the point of it all. Our Lord sees the beginning from the end. He knows the paths that will be placed before us and the directions in which we will choose to walk throughout our lives. When submitting fully to Christ, the work He has planned for us will be a natural outflowing of this surrender. The Holy Spirit will empower and inspire us to make good works a daily, worshipful experience with God.

Now let’s get to work! You can go to school, pass your courses, and become overwhelmingly wise in your chosen field, but if you don’t apply for a job after you graduate, what use is the knowledge you have gleaned? This is the exercise of faith and works. Rest on your foundation of faith in the Lord, but then get to work in His service.

Don’t go rogue! Never let your works be self-serving. Doing good feels great! Your good works may gain you recognition and even fame, but therein lies the temptation to become boastful and proud of the things you have done. Never lose sight of the fact that your good works are a cooperative effort between you and the Lord. When someone praises you for what you do, remember to give credit to the One who is your Guide.

REACT

Look around you. What opportunities do you see for being of service to others? What does God want you to do about it?
The Bible clearly teaches us what values should prompt our behavior. Our salvation depends on our repentance and faith in Christ. When James was alive, some people were preaching that faith was all you needed to be saved. James, however, knew better, for he wrote, “Someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works” (James 2:18, NKJV).

“To show faith apart from works is an impossible task because faith, being a principle, an attitude of the mind, will always reveal its nature in outward behavior. But one who exhibits an absence of good works thereby also demonstrates a lack of genuine faith.”

One day, a man came to Jesus and asked, “‘Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?’ So He said to him, ‘Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments’” (Matt. 19:16, 17, NKJV).

“Consider the parable of the bomb. One day while preaching a sermon a pastor got a message that some one had planted a bomb in the church. He told everyone that the bomb was set to go off in five minutes. Everyone said they believed and would leave immediately. Five minutes later you could tell by their works that those who were still in the building sitting and laughing obviously didn't believe. Those who left the building obviously did. One person decided because of his experience in the military he would find and deactivate the bomb. Those outside, not knowing this, concluded he didn't believe because he didn't act as they did. The point is he is a believer or he would not have acted at all. . . .

“In conclusion we can state that salvation begins at the moment of belief. True belief will produce fruit of some kind, which can be seen by people. We are to look for this fruit, not for what the person hasn't done or shouldn't be doing.”

True Christians will not abandon God’s precepts. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, they will seek to do what He says. Because they love Him, they will keep His commandments.
CONCLUDE

What do you think people noticed about Jesus as He interacted with others? What do you want your journey with Jesus to look like? When people look at you or watch you from afar, what do you want them to see or notice about you? Will they see a faith that is without works and therefore a faith comprised of mere dos and don'ts? Or will they see a faith vibrant with good works that are influenced by the indwelling Holy Spirit? Your answers to these questions will determine whether your faith is dead or alive!

CONSIDER

• Reading Isaiah 58:6–11 or Micah 6:8 every day for a week. What new thoughts come to mind each time you read the passage you chose? What good works does the passage inspire you to do?
• Doing research on the Internet about the health benefits of doing good deeds.
• Watching the sun rise each day for a week. As you do so, pray that God will show you how you can help someone during that day.
• Helping an elderly couple with their yard work or a single parent with housework.
• Listening to either one or both of the following renditions of the song “Because I Have Been Given Much”: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vuyld4VToTA; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9X23r4ATIUA. How does this song inspire you to have a faith that works?
• Writing notes or sending cards to church members who are in the hospital or other types of extended-care facilities.

CONNECT

Matthew 5:22; Galatians 6:1, 2.


Taming the Tongue

“By your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matt. 12:37, NKJV).
I lost it. I couldn't take it any longer, and I cracked. I'd been holding in the anger for so long that this little thing pushed me over the cliff of my pent-up frustration. My roommate had used the “wrong” bag for our trash. I grabbed it and shouted, “This is not a trash bag!” It’s always the dumb little things that break our temper.

Time passed, and I avoided talking about my ill feelings toward her. Not understanding why I was constantly in a bad mood, one evening she confronted me about how I was treating her. I ended up saying things that I regretted afterward. In my anger and frustration, I had allowed my words to become daggers. After that experience, I realized so much more clearly that I needed to learn how to cultivate words of healing—first for myself, and then for my roommate and housemates who had suffered from the words I’d thrown out carelessly. James 3:6 reads: “The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell” (NKJV).

Those are strong words for such a tiny member of our body. But this verse perfectly describes what took place that evening between my roommate and me. Our once happy friendship was set ablaze by a fire that didn’t bring us closer. Instead, it destroyed our trust—all because I hadn’t yet learned the importance of taming my tongue.

Thankfully, Christ works as a healer, even when our words work to destroy. Through counsel and lots of prayer, my roommate, housemates, and I were able to reconcile. It wasn’t overnight, but our friendship and trust started building up again. And words are what played a role in our coming back together. I still remember the night clearly when I shared my heartfelt words with her—words of apology for what I’d done and admiration for who she was. She, too, expressed her inner thoughts. We were in the same room we’d fought in, but this time our words didn’t harm each other. Instead, they healed our broken friendship.

Learning to tame our tongues is probably one of the greatest lessons we as humans will ever have to learn in life. I thank God that my lesson didn’t come at the loss of a dear friend and sister in Christ.
The Power of God’s Word (Ps. 119:105)

We read in Psalm 119:105 that the Word of God helps us to navigate through life. Even though the Scriptures were written thousands of years ago, the wisdom found in them transcends time.

Meditating on the Word of God is an important way to nurture a growing relationship with Christ. It is not mindlessly reading a chapter every now and then. It is taking to heart what we read and applying it to our lives. Meditation can be done through song, prayer, or simply walking in nature on a Sabbath afternoon.

One of the many rewards for purposefully seeking out a relationship with God is that through His Word we know that whatever happens in life, God is there to guide and protect us in good times and bad.

Being Accountable for What We Say (James 3:1, 2)

James warns that those who are leaders in the church will be held to a higher standard. He makes it clear that not only are leaders to teach the truth, they must also live it out in their daily lives. Many seek out leadership positions with good intentions. But as time passes, they let pride and power take the place of peace and prayer. Continuously seeking out the will of God and maintaining a humble attitude is important for those who are in important church positions.

James points out that we will all at some point stumble and be judged, not only by God, but by others as well. This is why it is important for us to be intentional with how we conduct ourselves. We specifically need to show Christ to those who don’t know Him. We may be the only example that they will ever see. As Christians, we are automatically held to a higher standard. Even if we are not in a high position in the church, we will be held accountable for how we treat others and present Christ. “From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded” (Luke 12:48, NRSV).

Control Your Tongue (James 3:2–5)

James continues to explain the power of the tongue. He first uses two analogies to help us understand how powerful the tongue is despite being only a small part of our body. Just as a horse can be steered by a bit
and a ship can be steered by a rudder, the direction of our lives can be heavily influenced by the words that come out of our mouths. The words we say not only affect ourselves, but those around us. The tongue, a small muscle in the mouth, relays our thoughts and feelings which can either be detriments or blessings.

It is important to remember that often the little things in our lives can have the biggest influence. We should try to exemplify Christ in all that we say and in how we say it. “The forest’s being large is no guarantee against the destructiveness of a little flame. So also the most important affairs of an individual, or of the whole church, may be endangered as a result of the forces set in motion by only one critical tongue.”

The next time you are tempted to gossip about someone, remember that little things often become a big deal in the end.

Blessings and Cursing (James 3:9–12)

Have you ever acted a certain way in front of a certain group of people and a drastically different way in front of others? In James 3:9–12, we learn that God can see through the act we put on for others. We cannot fool Him. As Christians, Christ expects us to treat everyone with love and kindness. God cannot bless those who don't show the love of Christ to those who don't know Him. He can see through the whitewashed walls of our hearts.

“Notwithstanding the difficulty of taming the tongue, the Lord will work for us if we yield our will to Him. Actually, the thoughts must first be subdued before the tongue is tamed, . . . but to control the thoughts a man must first yield his heart to God.”

The next time you are tempted in the heat of passionate anger to say a hurtful word to another one of God's children, remember that that person is just as much a child of God as you are. Challenge yourself in the coming weeks to speak well of your brothers and sisters in Christ. Instead, let us praise God together in our words and actions.

REACT

1. Do you think James’s description of the tongue is accurate? Why or why not?
2. In our world today, standing up for ourselves and being assertive to the point of aggression is expected. How can we, as Christians, be assertive in a kind and humble way?

2. Ibid., p. 527.
One of the hardest life lessons to learn is to accept criticism, especially if it’s from the person you are critiquing. As Christians, it is very difficult to admit that we have chosen the wrong words. Sometimes we can’t handle when we’re misunderstood by the people who aren't in the same faith group as we are. On the other hand, sometimes we can learn from others who don't believe the same way we do. We should try to be cognizant of when it's all right to quote from the Bible or not, depending on the situation and the audience.

“Speech is one of the great gifts of God.”

Jesus is probably the best example of choosing words wisely when it comes to speaking to different types of people. He was around tax collectors, thieves, prostitutes, men, women, children, and the Sadducees and Pharisees. Although He was God, He never used words in an arrogant way.

“Speech is one of the great gifts of God. It is the means by which the thoughts of the heart are communicated. It is with the tongue that we offer prayer and praise to God. With the tongue we convince and persuade. With the tongue we comfort and bless, soothing the bruised, wounded soul. With the tongue we may make known the wonders of the grace of God. With the tongue also we may utter perverse things, speaking words that sting like an adder.

“The tongue is a little member, but the words it frames have great power. The Lord declares, ‘The tongue can no man tame.’ It has set nation against nation, and has caused war and bloodshed. Words have kindled fires that have been hard to quench. They have also brought joy and gladness to many hearts. And when words are spoken because God says, ‘Speak unto them My words,’ they often cause sorrow unto repentance.”*

It’s time for us Christians to stop giving spiritual advice with our eyes closed. We need to open them and look back at what God has done for us because we all have been delivered from something. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

**REACT**

1. What does “choose your words carefully” mean to you spiritually?
2. How can certain things we say affect someone who is a non-Christian?

* Ellen G. White, The Voice in Speech and Song, pp. 17, 18.

Lauren Foster, Arlington, Texas, U.S.A.
Tough, but small, the tongue is a powerful muscle that can cause great damage. It can turn your day upside down and cause strife in your relationships. James 3:5, 6 informs us of how the tongue is like fire. I'm quite sure that many of you have heard your parents, grandparents, or even your friends tell you to “think before you speak” or to “be careful what you say because you can’t take it back.” I can attest that these sayings are both true.

Sometimes it’s best to say nothing at all.

When you’re angry at someone who has done you wrong or who has said some unkind things to or about you, should you retaliate and say something hurtful back? No! “Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse” (1 Pet. 3:9, NRSV). Sometimes it’s best to say nothing at all. Don't let your anger get a hold of you, because you'll end up saying things you'll regret later. What do you gain or accomplish when you say something back? Absolutely nothing.

A young woman was born with a disease that didn't allow her to gain weight. As she browsed the Internet, she came across a link that had her picture on it. The link was an eight second video of her at the age of 11. It had over four million views and thousands of hurtful comments. She read every single one and was tempted to reply back in anger. “I didn’t know what I was going to tell them, but I wanted to make them feel bad,” she said. She realized, though, that she wouldn't gain anything by doing so. Instead, she left everything up to God.*

As Christians, we will face the challenges and hardships that occur when others speak negatively about us. We will have to learn to say nothing and leave everything to God. Although it's easier said than done, we can learn from Jesus about how to handle such situations. “When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly” (1 Pet. 2:23, NRSV). Entrust yourself to Him, and He will help you tame your tongue.

REACT

1. Why do you think it’s easier to say something negative than positive about a person?
2. How much of a struggle is it to not lash back at someone who’s been nasty to you?

How many times have you said something you did not mean during the “heat of the moment”? How many times have you replayed in your mind the hurtful words someone said to you? It repudiates the saying “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” James warns about the dangers of the tongue. He describes it as evil and poisonous (3:8).

It is important to stop, think, and pray before we answer.

Words produce a power that can either build a person up or break a person down. Provocative words can kindle a fire and cause a simple disagreement to turn into a raging inferno. If negative words leave a bitter taste, why do we speak them? When we say something, we cannot take it back.

So just how can we tame the tongue?

1. It is important to stop, think, and pray before we answer. Remember that a “soft answer turns away wrath, / But a harsh word stirs up anger” (Prov. 15:1, NKJV). When Christ was on earth, He was careful in His manner of speech. He never gossiped or spoke a negative word, and He always glorified His Father with well-chosen words. The Word of God is reassuring and calming. It soothes the soul and enhances wisdom.

2. Always remember that when we speak, we should choose our words carefully, thus bringing glory to God. Let us adopt the motto of David in Psalm 34:1: “I will bless the Lord at all times; / His praise shall continually be in my mouth” (NKJV). It is counterproductive to praise God and curse others with the same tongue (James 3:8–10).

3. Remember that our words are the products of our thoughts. Christ was tempted in all areas as we are, yet He was without sin. That means an impure thought never crossed His mind. When we feel a negative thought arising, we must consciously redirect our thoughts to Him. “Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (Phil. 4:8, NKJV).

4. Ask God to help you dwell on Him. Ask Him for guidance. Our prayer should always be, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart, / Be acceptable in Your sight, / O Lord, my strength and my redeemer” (Ps. 19:14, NKJV).

**REACT**

How can our choice of words affect our salvation?

Sarah Andrews, Mount Dora, Florida, U.S.A.
Are you familiar with the saying that “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me”? I don’t know where this came from, but using it can sometimes offset the way we feel when others verbally hurt us. The irony, though, comes when we realize that words actually do hurt us and that the harm that comes from cruel words can be detrimental to our family, our friends, and even our enemies.

However, as Christians, we have been called to a higher standard. Those of us who claim to follow Christ need to display that proclamation with our lives. Christ’s greatest commandment is for us to love both God and people (Matt. 22:36–40). This week’s lesson has shown us how powerful words can be and that no matter how hard we try, after the words have left our mouths, we can’t take them back.

If you happen to believe that words aren’t as powerful as people claim, think back to the beginning of Creation and of how God created the earth by the power of His words. Then consider that He desires for us to create life in His children by speaking words of encouragement, loving rebuke, and helpfulness. How counterproductive does it seem for us to bless God but then with the same mouth curse His people? Christ desires that we love each other and help each other to become more like Him with each new day. Whenever He spoke in harsh tones, He wasn’t being hurtful. He was rebuking His family in love. We should take lessons from the Master and use our words to direct more people to Him.

Think about it. Do you want to be around people who claim to be Christians, but then every time you see them they are saying mean things to people or about them? Let your words be a conduit that leads people to Christ. Use your words not only to express to God your love for Him but also to bless His people.

**REACT**

1. How are you using your words on a daily basis?
2. How can you rebuke individuals in love instead of cursing them?
CONCLUDE
This week’s lesson has reminded us that, although it is small, the tongue has great power. As children of God, it is our responsibility to represent Him through every interaction. It is vital that we learn to tame our tongues so that we can be true ambassadors of the King.

CONSIDER
• Writing a letter or making a phone call to a friend with whom you have had a disagreement, using words for good to heal your friendship.
• Evaluating the words you use where you work and when you’re with your friends. Make a list of ways to modify your words and actions so that you reflect God through them. Then begin to make those changes.
• Memorizing a passage from Scripture that reminds you of the power of your tongue. (There are many examples in this week’s lesson.) Any time you are tempted to use your tongue for evil, recite that passage to yourself.
• Praying for a relationship in your life that has been damaged by a sharp tongue. Ask for specific ways you can heal this relationship, and try to do so based on what the Lord reveals to you.
• Singing the hymn “A Diligent and Grateful Heart,” no. 639 in the Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal, or just reading the lyrics. How can a “diligent and grateful heart” (verse 1) prompt us to keep our tongue from evil? How can ministering through the type of speech we engage in be a form of stewardship (verse 3)?
• Creating a skit or play that demonstrates the importance of controlling your words. Have your Sabbath School class perform it. You could also videotape it and post it online for others to see. (Be sure you have permission from the people in the video to put it online.)

CONNECT
Matthew 12:33–37; James 4; 1 Peter 2.

Allison Sauceda, Dayton, Ohio, U.S.A.
The Humility of Heavenly Wisdom

“Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you” (James 4:10, NASB).
Recently, an immigrant taught me something about my nation’s history. It was an interesting fact, but not an earth-shattering revelation. Nevertheless, my associate seemed perturbed that I was unaware of the trivia. She subscribed to the idea that intimate knowledge of one’s national history is strongly connected to one’s identity. From one viewpoint it seems to make sense. Understanding historical events can help prevent future mistakes. From youth to adulthood, we continuously seek to form and establish our individuality through asserting our fashion choices, hobbies, likes and dislikes, opinions, and careers. Why not link our identity to patriotism through knowledge?

Is God going to judge me based on my political party?

I’ve never been much of a patriot. Though I am content with my country of birth, it does not define me. I am a stranger in this land, and I pray I will see my true home in the kingdom of heaven. But what do I know?

I know I am not always right. Actually, I’m often wrong. When sharing my thoughts, I attempt to acknowledge that I may err while keeping an open mind regarding other perspectives. When people ask about my political beliefs, I always wonder, “Why?” It seems more often than not that they are looking for an argument. However, I am not. I do not need to exalt myself with the “in crowd” while verbally bashing another person’s creed. Is God going to judge me based on my political party? No. I believe He will judge my relationship with Christ and my faithfulness to Him. But what do I know?

One of my buddies thanked me for some good advice I had given him a few days prior. I do not actually remember what I said, but I believe that if any good passed from my lips then it came from God and not really from me. I pray when I give advice that it does not steer people away from God but toward Him, and that any wisdom I declare is not of myself but of the Lord. We do not know our own hearts, and subconsciously the advice we give may be self-seeking. We must relinquish our desires to God and take ourselves out of the equation. Some people may seem wise, but if they do not fear God and have faith in Him, then how wise can they really be? But what do I know?

I know that Christ, our Lord and Savior, will return and cast His final judgment. That is what I know. As we study this week about the humility of heavenly wisdom, be asking yourself how well you know Christ, your Lord and Savior.
“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom” (James 3:13, NKJV). Everyone at certain moments of his or her life wants or pretends to be wise. However, at that moment, the last thing in the person’s mind is humility. It seems that these terms are mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, according to James, godly wisdom goes hand in hand with humility.

The Hebrew word *kana’* means “to be humbled, be subdued, be brought down, be low, be under, be brought into subjection.”¹ This can seem quite negative at first except when it is used in reference to being humble before God or being subject to Him (2 Chron. 7:14; Isa. 57:15).

In Hebrew, the word *chokma* means “wisdom.”² It refers to the “quality of sound judgment developed by experience, observation, and reflection. Wisdom is a function of the trained mind, which Bible writers set forth as coming from the Lord (Job 28:20, 23, 27; Ps 111:10) and which they connect with obedience to His commands (Ps 37:30, 31; Prov 2:1, 2).”³ Such wisdom is necessary when it comes to making any type of decisions.

When we consider *kana’* and *chokma* under the umbrella of godly service, we realize that we are called to demonstrate humility and wisdom in our words, in our lives, and in our actions. Godly wisdom and humility help us to accept salvation, and our humbled hearts will lead by example at work, church, home, and school.

A humble wisdom will make us truly wise. It will be revealed in our convictions and in the kind, yet firm way in which we conduct our lives and business. It will permeate our spirit with softness, allowing us to think and do what we need to do in calm and thoughtful ways. It will not allow us to be arrogant or mean. A humble wisdom will dwarf any trace of self.

**REACT**

1. Do you believe that it is necessary to know God in order to have wisdom and be humble? Explain your answer.
2. Evaluate how you are demonstrating humble wisdom at work, school, and home.

². The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary, s.v. “Wisdom.”
³. Ibid.
The Meekness / Humility of Wisdom (James 3:13)
The question found in James 3:13 deserves close attention. The word wise used in this verse is not the wisdom that God refers to as foolish (1 Cor. 1:20). Rather, it refers to moral insight that results in practical behavior. People who are truly wise do not merely talk about wisdom and think of themselves as wise. Instead, they demonstrate their wisdom in their daily lives. The same people who possess wisdom also have understanding—the ability to comprehend the wisdom of God, an ability that can be obtained only from experiencing Him in a personal relationship. Such wisdom is permeated with humility. It is not self-seeking, arrogant, or proud. Instead, it is submissive to the power of God. As one author put it, “Humility, the place of entire dependence on God, is, from the very nature of things, the first duty and the highest virtue of the creature, and the root of every virtue.”

Two Types of Wisdom (James 3:13–18)
The wisdom described in James 3:13–16 is from Satan. Such wisdom is self-seeking and encompasses bitterness and envy. Lucifer was cast down for having such wisdom. “Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; / You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. / I cast you to the ground” (Ezek. 28:17, NKJV). Such envy can cause us to deny Jesus. Such envy caused the religious leaders in Jesus’ day to kill Him (John 11:47–53). In contrast, God’s wisdom is “first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17, NKJV). Such wisdom is a shower of blessings upon anyone who receives it. It yields good fruit. It talks the talk and walks the walk. It is free from self-interest and conflict.

The Cause of Conflict and Quarrels (James 4:1–3)
Because of people’s desires, conflict and quarrels can occur even among believers. The Greek word translated “desires” is related to the English word hedonism, the philosophy that the chief purpose of living is to satisfy one’s self. Luke 8:14 uses the same word when describing people who hear God’s Word but then “go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity” (NKJV). Believers struggle through this, but thanks be to God who can deliver us from this behavior.
“Lust” refers to wanting something badly or coveting something you can't have. Quite often it is something that is not good for us. In verses 2 and 3, James summarizes two astounding truths: (1) “you do not have because you do not ask,” and (2) “you ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures” (James 4:3, NKJV). When asking God for something, our request should be in accordance with His will. Otherwise, He cannot answer our prayers (1 John 5:14, 15).

**Submitting to God (James 4:7–10)**

Submitting to God requires that we subject our will to His will. We will do so when we believe with all of our heart and mind that He is more powerful, wiser, and more experienced than we could ever be. Resisting the devil means that we will surrender to God our impulse to sin. Obeying His Word and meditating on it every day will help us when Satan tempts us. Jesus stood His ground by stating, “‘It is written’” each time the devil tried to attack Him with his cunning ways (Matt. 4:1–11).

Drawing closer to God means that we approach Him with humility, honor, and praise. As we draw closer to Him, He draws closer to us. As this process occurs, we learn to walk in newness of life, for by beholding we become changed (2 Cor. 3:18). God's holiness helps us to understand that we need to be cleansed of sin. The psalmist wrote, “Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? / Or who may stand in His holy place? / He who has clean hands and a pure heart, / Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, / Nor sworn deceitfully. / He shall receive blessing from the Lord, / And righteousness from the God of his salvation” (Ps. 24:3–5, NKJV). James reminds us to cleanse our hands and purify our hearts, which is only possible when we submit our lives to God.

James concludes this section with the command to humble ourselves “in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift [us] up” (NKJV). The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector vividly demonstrates this command (Luke 18:9–14). The tax collector, who was frowned upon as a sinner, was humble and submissive to God, and thus proved to be wiser than the Pharisee, who even though he was considered by all to be a religious man, could not find it in his heart to be humble. Pride was his downfall. Thus, the tax collector was the wiser of the two men, because he was willing to draw near to God with humility and submission.

**REACT**

1. In what ways can you demonstrate godly wisdom?
2. How does submission to God lead to a change of character?

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Juan Cabrera, Burtonsville, Maryland, U.S.A.
“With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” ‘He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy.’ God grants no pardon to him whose penitence produces no humility, and whose faith does not work by love to purify the soul. We need to study the example of Him who was meek and lowly, who, when he was reviled, reviled not again. A vindictive spirit will not be indulged by a true Christian. Parents should teach their children to be patient under injuries. Teach them that wonderful precept in the Lord’s prayer, that we are to forgive others as we would be forgiven. He who possesses the Spirit of Christ will never be weary of forgiving.”

I present before you the life of self-denial, humility, and sacrifice of our divine Lord. The Majesty of heaven, the King of glory, left His riches, His splendor, His honor and glory, and, in order to save sinful man, condescended to a life of humility, poverty, and shame; ‘who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame.’ Oh, why are we so sensitive to trial and reproach, to shame and suffering, when our Lord has given us such an example? Who would wish to enter into the joy of their Lord while they were unwilling to partake of His sufferings? . . . The language of my heart is: Let me be a partaker with Christ of His sufferings, that I may finally share with Him the glory.

“The truth of God has never been popular with the world.”

The truth of God has never been popular with the world. The natural heart is ever averse to the truth. I thank God that we must renounce the love of the world, and pride of heart, and everything which tends to idolatry, in order to be followers of the Man of Calvary. Those who obey the truth will never be loved and honored by the world. From the lips of the divine Teacher, as He walked in humility among the children of men were heard the words: Whosoever will be My disciples, let him take up his cross, and follow Me.”

REACT

Research suggests that people are more afraid to do public speaking than they are to die. Are you willing to speak for God as well as to die for Him?

1. Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, May 7, 1895.
One of the hardest things for us to do is avoid the desire to always be lifted up in the eyes of others. The Bible describes this tendency as being “puffed up” (NKJV) or to be proud (1 Cor. 4:6; 13:4; Col. 2:18). When we allow ourselves to be influenced by the values, opinions, and ideas of this world, we are driven to feed on pride and to forget that “pride goes before destruction, / And a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18, NKJV). If we are to avoid all the negative results that James has described in chapters 3 and 4, then it is important for us to seek “heavenly wisdom,” because it admonishes us to be “humble.” How should we seek such wisdom?

Be humble without a grumble—moral values will not crumble!

*Learn all you can about God through His Word.* The more we learn what the Bible says about God and His Son, the more we learn about our true selves and about what influences us for good. We also will learn about our sinful nature.

*Own up to the fact that without God we are nothing.* Our sinful nature, when left unchecked, is an open arena that Satan can easily access in order to destroy us.

*Decide each day to surrender yourselves to the Holy Spirit.* Let Him help you to develop the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23). This is the only way we can live so that God will bless us.

- Be humble without a grumble—moral values will not crumble!
- Be humble without a grumble—good opportunities you will not fumble!
- Be humble without a grumble—space in your world will not be in a jumble!
- Be humble without a grumble—negative opinions of you will be less than a mumble!
- Be humble without a grumble—spare yourself of relationships that are a constant rumble!
- Be humble without a grumble—Satan’s traps and snares will not easily cause you to stumble!
- Be humble without a grumble—be in God’s kingdom before things of this world finally tumble!

**REACT**

1. What can you do to ensure that each day you spend quality time in God’s Word?
2. What are you doing to break free of the worldliness around you?

*Marcus L. Taylor, High Point, North Carolina, U.S.A.*
People have a natural tendency to gravitate towards others who have interests similar to theirs. There's an old saying “birds of a feather flock together” and there is a sense to be with people who share things in common with us. But what happens when our search for inclusion leads to the exclusion of others? Far too often, at our jobs, our schools, and our churches, we can experience the feeling of loneliness that comes with being excluded. Coworkers may opt to spend lunch time together without you. Or fellow classmates may choose to get together for a particular activity and not invite you.

What about me? you wonder. Aren’t I good enough to be included? Such questions may go unspoken, but they are important. We might not consider the exclusion as a personal slight, but we still can't help but feel the bite of loneliness in our spirits when we’re left out. One would think that exclusion would not occur in the church. Sadly, however, it does. Even there, we see segregation. The justification for leaving someone out comes all too easily among God’s people. We, at times, consider it fair to say yes to this one, and no to that one, because of the way they dress or talk, because of the neighborhood they do or don’t live in, or because of the quality of education they do or don’t possess.

Behaving in such a manner does not reflect well upon our Creator, nor does it help the church in its mission to draw people to Jesus. In fact, excluding others can very well lead them to feel anger and resentment toward those who leave them out. It can even lead to them to retaliate in a number of different ways. Consider how the disciples asked Christ if they could deny a certain man from doing the work of God because he wasn't one “of them” (Luke 9:49, 50). Also consider how the religious leaders of the day ridiculed Christ because of the company He kept (Matt. 9:9–13). In each case, He sought to show that God’s plan is inclusive. He doesn’t want anyone to be left behind.

**REACT**

1. What do you think Christ meant when He said that He has “other sheep” He must call?
2. How often do you find yourself following the world's example of how to treat people rather than Christ’s example?
CONCLUDE
True wisdom defers to God's judgment. A close companion to godly wisdom is humility: recognizing that each of us is ultimately subject to and dependent upon God. James contrasts society's ideas of “wise” behavior with God's concept of “wise” behavior. He emphasizes the results of drawing close to God and submitting to Him: avoiding the pitfalls of pride, accepting others, treating them with respect, and enjoying healthy relationships among believers.

CONSIDER
• Prayerfully listening to “Give us Clean Hands,” by Charlie Hall, and/or Bob Hudson's “Humble Thyself in the Sight of the Lord.” (You can find them on YouTube.)
• Comparing/contrasting the biblical wisdom discussed in James with The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People (Steven Covey), How to Win Friends and Influence People (Dale Carnegie), or other popular self-help processes. (Information is available via Web search or Wikipedia.)
• Creating a poster that shows the characteristics of godly wisdom as described in James 3:17. Look up the passage in several different Bible versions to get additional descriptive words, and show how the attributes build on one another.
• Listing and debunking five or more myths about humility, such as “being humble means never standing out because you've done something well.” Provide Bible examples where possible.
• Asking a few friends (or posting on your Facebook page) the following question: “What connections do you see between being wise and being humble? Who are modern examples of wisdom and/or humility?”
• Trying out a variety of prayer postures throughout the week: kneel, prostrate, raise hands, etc. How do you think each one affects your mind-set as you approach God?

CONNECT
Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:5; 3:7; 19:7.
Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings, chap. 1.

Sharon Wright, Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.
One Lawgiver and Judge

“There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?” (James 4:12).
There was once a young couple who moved into a house across the street from an elderly widow. One morning, as the young woman was doing the dishes, she looked out her kitchen window and noticed this neighbor hanging her laundry out to dry.

“Come look at the laundry our neighbor is hanging up—it’s still dirty!” the young woman called to her husband. “She obviously didn’t wash it properly. Why would anyone hang dirty laundry out to dry? Maybe she’s getting senile.” Her husband chuckled but said nothing.

This went on for nearly three weeks. Every week, the younger woman would make the same comments as she watched her neighbor hang out her dirty laundry. And each time, her husband would laugh and remain silent.

One morning, the younger woman happened to glance out the window and immediately noticed that something was different. “Look!” she exclaimed to her husband. “It appears our neighbor finally learned how to wash her clothes properly. I wonder who helped her?” Her husband laughed. “Honey, I got up early this morning and finally cleaned our kitchen window.”

Have you ever had an experience like this? Have you ever judged someone based on all the information given to you by your senses, yet later you found out how off the mark you really were? When we try to judge others from our own perspective, we are judging through dirty windows, because we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Our memory text this week says it best: “There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?” (James 4:12, NKJV; emphasis added).

This week we will be exploring the different ways we relate to the law and our Lawgiver, and how this affects our relationship with other people. What is the biblical model of righteous judgment, and how does this affect how we judge others? In considering lessons from the Old Testament and by looking at Jesus’ example, we will explore what the Bible has to say about judging others and being judged.

As you read through the lesson, take some time to reflect on the current relationships in your life: your relationship with God, your friends, and your family, and even the relationships you have with your acquaintances. When you see that these people are living contrary to the law, is your first instinct to pass judgment or to lift them up to Christ?
The Original Faultfinder (Gen. 3:1–6; Ezek. 28:17; 1 Tim. 3:6)

“Lucifer, a high-ranking being in the angelic world, became proud. . . . Dissatisfied with his position in God’s government, . . . he began to covet God’s own place (Isa. 14:12–14). In an attempt to take control of the universe, this fallen angel sowed seeds of discontent among his fellow angels, and won the allegiance of many.” Thus God was forced to expel Lucifer and his followers from heaven. However, this did not stop Lucifer from doing even more damage. So in the form of a serpent, he convinced Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. She, in turn, shared some of the fruit with Adam, and the rest is history.

Lucifer fell because of his pride. Adam and Eve fell because they trusted their senses rather than God’s law. They incorrectly believed that He was keeping something good from them. And so the principle of love upon which God’s law is based was violated.

Judging the Law (James 4:11, 12)

“Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge” (James 4:11, NKJV).

A person who judges another person “infers that the law does not apply in his case. He is virtually saying that there is no law to protect the maligned brother and that no law condemns his critical spirit. . . .

“Each church member should feel a personal obligation to be controlled by the spirit of the law of God regardless of the nature of the outward provocations he may suffer. . . .

“By disregarding the law’s jurisdiction over all men the critical faultfinder aspires to be a lawmaker rather than a lawkeeper. Frequently the cause for faultfinding is found in the critical member’s own private standards of conduct, or in his own interpretations of the Bible, which lead him to condemn all who do not agree with him.”

In James 4:12, “James emphasizes the absurdity of one man’s attempting to judge another, in view of the fact that man cannot discern
motives. In one way or another all men are violators of the same law, and it is selfish pride that impels one man to depreciate and hurt another by his words.  

We render God's law invalid or irrelevant when we substitute our own opinions for it. Questioning God's law is to question the credibity of the One who is our Creator and Redeemer, the One who sits upon the very throne of heaven.

**Breaking the Devil’s Empire (Genesis 3; Heb. 3:12–14; James 4:8, 12)**

As we read Genesis 3, we cannot help but notice that searching the intent of another person’s heart was never given to us by God. Rather it was instituted by the serpent. So when we judge another person, we are allowing Satan to control our minds and hearts. This is totally opposite of what God intended. “God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing” (1 Thess. 5:9–11, NIV).

James 4:8 says that when we draw closer to God, He will draw closer to us. Drawing closer to God “is the secret of successful resistance against Satan. . . . Though God is ‘not far from everyone of us’ (Acts 17:27), He nevertheless expects us to seek Him. . . . We draw nigh to God by faith . . . and by true repentance.”

Following Jesus involves self-denial. This means giving up our opinions about how life should be and living according to His teachings. Living this way causes our dealings with others to be like a sweet fragrance. Thus, people are attracted to the teachings of Christ and to His saving power.

**REACT**

1. Take an inventory of how you live. Based on what you find, do you think other people can see Jesus in you?
2. In what ways can we change to being what God wants us to be? What role does the Holy Spirit play in effecting this change?

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3. Ibid., p. 534.
4. Ibid., p. 532.
“The father represents the divine Lawgiver in his family. He is a laborer together with God, carrying out the gracious designs of God and establishing in his children upright principles, enabling them to form pure and virtuous characters, because he has preoccupied the soul with that which will enable his children to render obedience not only to their earthly parent but also to their heavenly Father.”

“All members of the family center in the father. He is the lawmaker, illustrating in his own manly bearing the sterner virtues: energy, integrity, honesty, patience, courage, diligence, and practical usefulness. The father is in one sense the priest of the household, laying upon the altar of God the morning and evening sacrifice. The wife and children should be encouraged to unite in this offering and also to engage in the song of praise. Morning and evening the father, as priest of the household, should confess to God the sins committed by himself and his children through the day. Those sins which have come to his knowledge and also those which are secret, of which God’s eye alone has taken cognizance, should be confessed. This rule of action, zealously carried out by the father when he is present or by the mother when he is absent, will result in blessings to the family.”

“The coming of Christ is nearer than when we first believed.”

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“The coming of Christ is nearer than when we first believed. The great controversy is nearing its end. The judgments of God are in the land. They speak in solemn warning, saying: ‘Be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.’ Matthew 24:44.”

God’s law “is a mirror which shows the perfection of a righteous character and enables him to discern the defects in his own.” Take courage, then. Accept God’s strength and pray that He may help you to put self aside. As you continue to look upon the Lawgiver, may your love and faith grow.

**REACT**

1. How can you put God’s law above all earthly laws?
2. As you look at God’s mirror, what changes will you make?
3. How can you encourage someone who doesn’t know how the judgment will take place?

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2. Ibid.

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Kevin K. Wakangu, Walsall, England
In the Old Testament, the original definition of a judge was a person who would hear the complaints or concerns of people, bring them before God, and relay His judgment to the people. As the book of Judges describes, “When the Lord raised them up judges, then the Lord was with the judge” (Judg. 2:18). In this way, judges relayed judgments based on God's wisdom and love. For example, Moses described how if there was “a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, that the judges may judge them; then they shall justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked” (Deut. 25:1; emphasis added).

Later, however, the Bible describes a time period where “every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 21:25; emphasis added). No longer were judgments a direct transcript of God's judgment, but were human judgments based on people's perceived “wisdom.”

We also often find ourselves far from hearing God's audible voice telling us how to judge people or situations. Like the people James wrote to in James 4:12, we place ourselves as gods on a throne “sifting” between people, condemning some and accepting others. However, when Jesus was on earth, He gave insight to how He made judgments. “My judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me” (John 5:30). Like Jesus, this is how our judgment can be just: if we seek to do the will of the Father.

What, then, is the will of the Father? Paul tells us, “Warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men” (1 Thess. 5:14). Ephesians adds, “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph. 4:12, 13). What a life-changing verse. Take a moment to reread it and reflect on it.

We should focus on edifying one another and helping each other develop Christlike characters. When we have a mindset like that of Jesus, like what Paul describes in the above verses, we will return to the real definition of judgment: judgment that wants the best for others, that seeks to strengthen the feeble, that hopes to grow along with others into the perfect character of Christ.

**REACT**

Think of someone you criticize a lot. How can Ephesians 4:12, 13 help you to change your attitude toward this person?
Would you run around holding a mirror to show peoples' defects in their appearance? Unfortunately this is what we tend to do with God's law. God's law is a mirror that points out defects in our character, but many times we use it as a mirror to point out defects in others. In doing so, we are usurping God's work as the only rightful judge.

As humans, we have the natural tendency to exalt ourselves. This does not magically go away when we become Christians. At times, because of our social status or church position, we may feel we are above others. Jesus pointed out this problem when He told the parable of the Pharisee and publican. He knew that unless we understand our real condition and humble ourselves, we would be trusting in our own righteousness.

What are some steps we can take to realize that we are in need? Remember that we are all in the same boat. There is never a point at which we will be able to save ourselves. When we truly understand this, we will cease all self-exaltation (Jer. 13:23; Rom. 3:23).

We don't know it all (1 Cor. 2:11). At times we may see people pass through difficult situations and maybe even fail. Yet even then we are in no position to judge their motives. Do you know the thoughts of your fellow neighbor? Do you truly understand their situation? Only God can see the whole picture. Understanding this will keep us from discouraging our fellow Christians with our criticisms.

Focus (John 21:21, 22; 2 Cor. 3:18). Many times we find ourselves focusing on other people. This does nothing to edify the church and our spiritual lives. However, as we focus on Christ, the Holy Spirit will empower us to live as Christ lived while He was on Earth. As we become more like Him, we will encourage our fellow Christians instead of criticizing them.

REACT
1. Why do you think social status or position makes us feel that we are above others?
2. Why do we tend to focus on others' deficiencies rather than building them up?
3. How does our constant criticism of other believers affect not only their spiritual lives but ours as well?
James 4:14 states that life “is a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (NIV). That is especially so if you fail to include God in your plans. Having a plan for your life is important because it gives you goals toward which to work. But it is also important to remember two things about your plan: (1) make sure that your plan includes God, and (2) always keep in mind that there most likely will be times when God will redirect your plan.

“To every nation and to every individual of today God has assigned a place in His great plan. Today men and nations are being measured by the plummet in the hand of Him who makes no mistake. All are by their own choice deciding their destiny, and God is overruling all for the accomplishment of His purposes.”*

At a young age, I decided that I wanted to go attend a university. However, this was something that I could not achieve without a plan. The first step was to pray for God to help me study hard so I could get good grades. The next step was to ask Him if attending a university was what He really wanted me to do. Soon my plans fell into place, and praise the Lord, I was able to go.

Planning is good, but planning without God is a pathway to disappointment. We need to ask Him, “Is this what You really want me to do?” When we take our plans to God in prayer, life will turn out better than we could have ever imagined. He is never late in answering our prayers. He gives us patience when we need it. As our Lawgiver and Judge, God knows what is best for us. Through the prophet Jeremiah, He gave the following message to the Jewish people when they were captives in Babylon: “I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (Jer. 29:11, NIV). This promise is for us today as well.

**REACT**
1. How can you involve God in your daily plans?
2. How can you make sure that your plans are God’s plans?
3. How has God kept His promise to help your prosper?


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Pauline W. Wakangu, Scarborough, England
The gospel shatters elitism, favoritism, and self-centeredness. We recognize that, apart from Jesus, “‘There is no one righteous, not even one’” (Rom. 3:10, NIV). Though Christianity has a reputation for looking down on and judging others, the Bible insists on humility. Peter proclaimed that God does not play favorites (Acts 10:34). James asked, “Who are you to judge your neighbor?” (James 4:12, NIV). The reality is that, without Jesus, we would all be lost. We must love others unconditionally—as Jesus loves us. We must build up and encourage others—as the Holy Spirit does for us. We must watch out for each other, for though we are not each other’s judges, we are each other’s keepers.

**CONSIDER**

- Listing ways people categorize and discriminate against others.
- Writing a skit exploring favoritism.
- Exploring ways to reach out to people whom society and the church have marginalized, and then putting at least one of those ways into practice.
- Getting to know personally someone you’ve looked down on. How does your opinion of that person change as you get to know each other?
- Thinking how people have surprised you in life.
- Pondering how much of yourself you hide from others, what you emphasize, and how you can live more authentically.

**CONNECT**

Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 70–75; *Help in Daily Living*, p. 35.
Weep and
Howl!

“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”
(Matt. 6:21).
Introduction

Who Wants to Be a Happy Heir?

Have you ever wished that one day you could wake up and not have to go to work or pay your bills? What if you woke up one morning to the sound of your phone ringing, and when you answered it you discovered that you had just won a million dollars? Wouldn't that make you happy?

We get so sidetracked that we fail to realize what truly matters in life.

A while ago I saw a delivery van pull up to my neighbor’s house to deliver a mattress. So the critically inquisitive side of me decided to go over and investigate. My neighbor told me that he had purchased the latest memory foam mattress. So I went home and hardly slept in anticipation of what this mattress would feel like. I woke up the next morning and rushed back to my neighbor to ask him how the mattress felt. He exclaimed, “It was the best night’s sleep I’ve ever had!” So the very next day I went out and bought myself the very same mattress thinking that if it brought my neighbor so much happiness, it would make me happy, too. But in the end, it didn't.

We spend our lives chasing after wealth and material objects that will one day turn to dust. The things we grab on to and strive after are nothing greater than the wealth of a foolish person. We get so sidetracked that we fail to realize what truly matters in life—love, peace, faith, hope, forgiveness, and contentment.

Throughout the Bible, we find stories of great men and women who themselves sought after happiness in selfish ways. David committed murder because of his lust toward Uriah's wife. Samson disobeyed his parents' wishes for him to have an Israelite wife when he chose Delilah. But ultimately he paid the price with his own life. Then there was Solomon, King David’s son. When he became king, Solomon was a deeply spiritual person. His only desire was for wisdom to serve both God and his people. “However, his wealth and luxury . . . corrupted him so that he finally became and idolater.”* Throughout this week’s study, we will focus on how greed is burdened with horrible consequences.

*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, s.v. “Solomon.”

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Soloman Daniel Kuppusamy, Phoenix, Durban, South Africa
“Once you get beyond a million dollars, it’s still the same hamburger,” said Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft. In this world, monetary wealth is one of the most sought after commodities. It’s almost as if when we are youngsters we are programmed into believing that more money equals more happiness.

The love of money creates a vicious cycle of dissatisfaction.

Things weren’t much different during Bible times. James points out in chapter 5 of his epistle that even then people were fooled into believing that their hoards of wealth could buy them long-term happiness. Ecclesiastes 5:10 says, “He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; / Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. / This also is vanity” (NKJV).

James warns us against some major pitfalls—trying to find security and happiness in wealth rather than with God and turning to devious ways to acquire more money. Many of us have fallen into the trap of trying to satisfy deep emotional needs by purchasing things. A typical example can be seen in people who go on a shopping spree in an attempt to fill the void created by a broken relationship or negative emotions. Such behavior is called “retail therapy.”

However, the only way to acquire deep, long-lasting happiness and fulfillment is found in God alone. This is a simple yet profound truth that James was trying to teach God’s children. Having money isn’t a problem, and God certainly is not against monetary blessings. The Bible mentions many wealthy people without attaching any negativity to their wealth, for example Abraham, Job, and Solomon. There is nothing wrong with working hard and sincerely enjoying the fruits of your labor without guilt. However, the people in the time of James had taken it a step too far. When people become consumed with the thought of increasing the wealth by any means available, it shifts their attention away from God, who is able to supply all of our needs. The love of money creates a vicious cycle of dissatisfaction. The more you have, the more you want. As was the case in the time of James, people still go as far as to exploit their workers who assist them in acquiring their wealth. Those who make money out of robbing others of what rightfully belongs to them may gain monetary wealth, but they lose their integrity. What a steep price to pay for fleeting happiness!

REACT

1. What are some of the biblical ways of differentiating between need and greed?
2. How can we learn to appreciate the truly important things in life?
Justice Will Be Done (James 5:1–12)

Some of the signs of the last days are greed, the love of money, and self-interest (2 Tim. 3:1, 2). Today we see great inequalities in the living conditions of many people, of which the love of money is often the root. When blessed by God with any type of good resource, it is our Christian duty to help people who are less fortunate. Should we fail in this responsibility, we will hear the words, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41, NKJV). Thus, it is important that the comforts and luxuries we experience do not cause us to forget that we are mortal beings.

The Holy Spirit always reveals the will of God to us.

Read James 1:1–12. In these verses, “James attempts to contrast the exceeding riches of the mercies of God with the transitory nature of earthly possessions (see 1 John 2:16, 17). There is more security in a mature Christian experience than in all the wealth of the world. Those who have learned to look at the problems of life from God’s point of view, who have acquired the ‘wisdom’ of which James speaks (v. 5), rise above whatever trials may come to them.”

When Wealth Becomes Worthless (James 5:2, 3)

Money can’t buy everything. But these days, credit cards seem to be able to. Acts 3:2–10 testifies to the fact that money cannot buy healing. The story of Nabal shows us that without wisdom, money can cost you your life (1 Sam. 25:1–38). As seen in the case of Hezekiah, wealth did not guarantee protection for Israel (2 Kings 20:12–17). These are some real-life examples which remind us that wealth can become worthless, and most certainly so without God.

Riches “are worthless because they foster self-gratification and are acquired at the expense of the personal rights of others (see James 5:4). With all this earthly wealth, the unconverted rich man is ‘not rich toward God.’”

Cries of the Poor (James 5:4)

James 5:4 “vividly pictures one method by which some of the ‘rich’ have amassed their fortunes. Dishonesty or delay in the payment of wages is specifically forbidden in the OT. . . . The rich think they are treasuring up ‘gold,’ when in reality they may be storing up ‘fire’ for themselves in the day of judgment.”

The earnest prayers of the poor, either in spirit or when it comes to earthly needs, are most likely rendered to God when they are the most desperate—desperate for physical healing, desperate when facing persecution for keeping the Sabbath, or desperate when praying for money to pay the bills or to buy
food. In Deuteronomy 24:14, 15, God teaches us to be mindful of the day-to-day lives of the poor. Leviticus 19:13 further expounds on the importance of not cheating the poor.

**Wanting for Nothing and Happy for Now (James 5:5)**

The less dependent we are on God for our daily needs, the easier it is to depend on ourselves. It therefore becomes easier to forget God all together, to gratify ourselves with life’s luxuries, and to neglect our Christian duty to help others (Matt. 25:25–30). The people of Sodom lacked nothing. They were filled with pride. There was fullness of bread and abundance of idleness. Furthermore, they did not help the poor (Ezek. 16:49). For a short time, its citizens thought they were living the good life. However, their destruction is for eternity.

Let us learn a valuable lesson from the life of Paul, who wrote: “I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:11–13, NKJV). As with Paul, so it is also in our lives—Christ protects us from being proud.

**Blame the Victim (James 5:6)**

As humans, we have a tendency to think that if an act is not resisted or rebuked, it is in essence correct. However, we find that at times, an incorrect act may not be resisted or rebuked because the victim chose to turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:38–42). As Christians, our point of reference for right and wrong should not be based on the reactions from victims or on the opinions of any one person. Rather, our point of reference should be based only on Christ, through the conviction of the Holy Spirit. “Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, / ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ / Whenever you turn to the right hand / Or whenever you turn to the left” (Isa. 30:21, NKJV). The Holy Spirit always reveals the will of God to us.

**REACT**

1. What does it mean to you to turn the other cheek? Does it involve our behavior and thoughts toward the person who has wronged us? Explain how there might be a time when we should not turn the other cheek.

2. Is turning the other cheek something to be done in silence? Explain your answer.

3. If you are an employer, how has this lesson influenced your perception of how some of your employees may view remuneration and benefits?

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2. Ibid., pp. 536, 537.
3. Ibid., p. 537.
“God does not compel anyone to love Him and obey His law. He has manifested unutterable love toward man in the plan of redemption. He has poured out the treasures of His wisdom, and has given the most precious gift of heaven that we might be constrained to love Him, and come into harmony with His will. If we refuse such love, and will not have Him to rule over us, we are working our own ruin, and we shall sustain an eternal loss at last.”

“We are not to use riches in a selfish way.”

“The followers of Christ are not to despise wealth; they are to look upon wealth as the Lord’s entrusted talent. By a wise use of His gifts, they may be eternally benefited, but we are to bear the fact in mind that God has not given us riches to use just as we shall fancy, to indulge impulse, to bestow or withhold as we shall please. We are not to use riches in a selfish way, devoting them simply to our own enjoyment. This course would not be doing right toward God or toward our fellow men, and would bring at last only perplexity and trouble. . . .

“The world favors the rich, and looks upon them as of greater value than the honest poor man; but the rich are developing their characters after the manner in which they use their entrusted gifts. They are making manifest whether or not it will be safe to trust them with eternal riches. Both the poor and the rich are deciding their own eternal destiny and proving whether they are fit subjects for the inheritance of the saints in light. . . .

“Why is it that riches are called unrighteous mammon [wealth]?—It is because Satan uses worldly treasure to ensnare, deceive, and delude souls, to accomplish their ruin. God has given directions as to how they are to appropriate His goods in relieving the wants of suffering humanity, in advancing His cause, in building up His kingdom in the world, in sending missionaries into regions beyond, in disseminating the knowledge of Christ in all parts of the world. If the God-entrusted means are not thus applied, will not God surely judge for these things? Souls are left to perish in their sins while church members who claim to be Christians are using God’s sacred trust of means in gratifying unholy appetites, in indulging self.”

**REACT**

How can you use your riches to advance God’s cause?

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2. Ibid., p. 133.

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Yovan Govender, Tongaat, Durban, South Africa
Wanting to be wealthy is not a bad thing, but what we have now and what we gain later will in the end lose all of its value. We may say that we need to be successful in whatever we do, that we need to earn $x$ amount of money because that is the only way we can survive. However, in doing so, we may compromise in small ways that will eventually add up. It may be working on just that one Sabbath, or plagiarizing that one paper just so we can get a good grade. We need to be more attentive to the details in our lives that may throw us off track. “The rich and the poor have this in common, / The Lord is the maker of them all. / A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, / But the simple pass on and are punished” (Prov. 22:2, 3, NKJV).

**Give of your time to assist someone.**

How can we focus on eternity rather than on the things of this world?  
*Spend quality time with God.* Ask Him to guide you. This may be difficult at first, because during our busy daily lives we tend to forget that the only reason we are alive and breathing is because of God (Jer. 29:11).

*Pray.* Ask God to help you decide about the big decisions you need to make. Ask if it is His will that you get what you are asking Him for. When He doesn't give it to you, it is because He has a greater plan.

*Be a helping hand.* During the upcoming Christmas season we may be looking forward to spending time with our families and enjoying the luxurious food that we will spoil ourselves with. However, be sure to remember people who are need. There are many in your community who need the bare essentials. Even if you can only give them a small amount, it would probably mean the world to them.

*Dedicate your time.* Give of your time to assist someone. Many elderly people find it difficult to get to doctors' appointments or to clean their yards and houses. Babysit for a single mother who has gone back to school to get a degree. The possibilities for being helpful are endless.

**REACT**

1. In what other ways can you personally focus on eternity rather than on the things of this world?  
2. What comfort can we take from James 5:7, 8 when we see the rich exploiting the poor?  
3. How else can we learn to store our treasure in heaven?
Wealth Versus Success

Most people associate success with beautiful houses, expensive sports cars, and designer clothes. The multimillion-dollar movie and music industries try to convince us that success means being the best, having the most, and living the largest. It should come as no surprise that the Word of God contradicts such vain beliefs. Read Matthew 6:24; 19:24; and James 5:1.

First Timothy 6:10 warns us that the love of money is the root of all evil. Then verse 11 urges us to follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and meekness. In Matthew 6:19–33, we learn that when we seek these things first and foremost, all the earthly things we need will be added. Second Chronicles 1:11, 12 also suggests this.

The gifts of success given by the Holy Spirit are priceless.

“Too often we are prone to make [material things] the main object of our search in life, in the vain hope that God will be indulgent with us, and, at the close of life's journey, add to our brief span of threescore and ten years the eternal kingdom. Christ would have us make first things first, and assures us that things of lesser importance and value will be supplied to each according to his need.”

Could the difference between wealth and success be seen as external happiness versus internal joy? While the gifts of wealth have definite value, the gifts of success given by the Holy Spirit are priceless. How can a person evaluate love, peace, faith, and godliness? Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote my favorite definition of success: “To laugh often and much; to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty, to find the best in others; to leave the world a little better; whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is the meaning of success.”

REACT

1. Note that Emerson makes no mention of money. Might this suggest that even a poor person can be successful? Explain your answer.
2. The Bible warns us about the pitfalls of being rich. So how do we explain the fact that many Christians in certain parts of the world are wealthy?


Riley Pillay, Cape Town, South Africa
CONCLUDE

Money in itself is not a bad thing. It becomes bad when it grows into the most important thing in our lives. Money can sidetrack us from what is really important—living close to Jesus and serving Him. Focusing on getting more and more money is never satisfying. It causes us to rely on ourselves to fulfill our needs instead of relying on God. He wants us to be content with whatever we have. He wants us to use our resources, not for our own happiness, but to point people to Jesus—the One whose love and friendship bring true happiness.

CONSIDER

• Taking a financial planning class with a Christian perspective so you can learn to do more with the financial resources God has given you.
• Reflecting on how God takes care of nature and how He also will take care of your financial needs. Read Matthew 6 in a beautiful and safe natural setting.
• Making a hot meal for a family who doesn't have much in the way of financial resources.
• Discussing with your friends what you can do to lighten the load of someone in your community who is in need.
• Journaling about your attitude toward money and prayerfully asking God to bring you closer to His perspective and farther away from the perspective of the world.
• Reading a book or article about the blessings that come from giving to others. As you read, consider strategies to increase your giving. One suggestion is The Power of Half: One Family’s Decision to Stop Taking and Start Giving, by Hannah Salwen and Kevin Salwen.
• Deciding on a family giving project and creating a box or other receptacle to put in your home to collect spare change to fund this endeavor. If you are in college, do this with your roommate or suitemates.

CONNECT

First Timothy 6, in a translation that is most understandable for you.
Getting Ready for the Harvest

“You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand” (James 5:8, NKJV).
Remember the excitement you felt as a small child when you were looking forward to Christmas? Not just its religious significance, celebrating when Jesus came to Earth, but the Christmas lights, the tree, the carols in church, all leading up to the grand climax, the final event of Christmas Day itself? Children find it impossible to go to sleep early on Christmas Eve. They want to stay awake to make sure they don't miss anything. They want to savor every moment.

That must have been how the followers of William Miller felt when they heard him preaching that Jesus would come again on October 22, 1844. Many sold their homes and left their crops in the fields, confident that they would have no further need of worldly possessions.

Now imagine waking up on Christmas Day to find that it’s been canceled. Maybe it will happen at some point in the future, but no one knows when. How do you feel? My guess is you would feel disappointed, angry, and frustrated.

And that’s how people felt on October 23, 1844. It’s known as “the Great Disappointment.” Ellen White lived through this difficult and discouraging time. She wrote, “The disappointment of God’s waiting people was great. The scoffers were triumphant and won the weak and cowardly to their ranks. Some who had appeared to possess true faith seemed to have been influenced only by fear, and now their courage returned with the passing of time, and they boldly united with the scoffers declaring they had never been duped to really believe the doctrine of Miller, who was a mad fanatic. Others, naturally yielding or vacillating, quietly deserted the cause.”*

Ever since Jesus came to earth, Christians have waited more or less patiently for Him to return. Sometimes we’re tempted to give up or give in to impatience and frustration. But in this week’s lesson, we’ll hear from the apostle James about another way—learning to wait. Patiently.

**REACT**

1. How would you have reacted to the Great Disappointment?
2. Is it possible to be excited by the prospect of Jesus’ Second Coming without also being frustrated by the delay? Explain your answer.


Jenny Waller, Reading, England
Jesus Will Come Again (Jer. 14:22; Hos. 6:3; Joel 2:23; James 5:7, 8)

Whatever else is uncertain in this world, James tells us that we can be sure about one thing—that Jesus will return (James 5:7). Furthermore, he tells us that “the Lord's coming is near” (verse 8, NIV). We may think that he is mistaken about this. After all, we have been waiting for 2,000 years for Jesus to come. But James is not talking about the literal date of Jesus’ return. He means that the Second Coming is as much a spiritual reality as it is physical. If we believe this, it frames our present experience at all times and gives us a different perspective on our lives.

The Example of the Farmer (James 5:7)

James compares the situation of a Christian waiting for Jesus to return with that of a farmer growing his crops. Once the farmer has planted his seeds, he does not expect the harvest to happen straight away. He knows he has to wait for the rains to come so the grain can grow. In Palestine, this refers to the early rain that arrives in October and the latter rain in the spring, close to harvest time. Meanwhile, the farmer guards his land, pulls out the weeds, removes harmful insects, and fertilizes the soil. Finally, the “precious fruit of the earth” (James 5:7, NKJV) is ready to harvest.

Adventists, along with many other Bible scholars, believe that “the image of the early and latter rains could be applied to at least two different powerful works of the Spirit within the church: one related to the experience of Pentecost, and the other to events shortly before the return of Christ.”

As we wait for the latter rain, we need to keep working hard like the farmer. We need to be confident that the harvest will come.

The Example of Job (Job 2:10; 14:13–15; 19:23–27; James 5:10, 11)

James gives us additional examples of people who knew how to wait patiently for God. The Old Testament prophets in general are good examples of “patience in the face of suffering” (James 5:10, NIV). And then there is Job (James 5:11). Even when Job loses his wealth, health, and family, he keeps his faith in God, saying, “‘The Lord gave, / and the Lord has taken away; / Blessed be the name of the Lord’” (Job 1:21, NKJV). When his wife loses patience and suggests that he curse God and die, Job replies, “‘You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we

Now is no time to be distracted by quarrels.
indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?’” In all this Job did not sin with his lips” (Job 2:10, NKJV).

In the end, Job’s faithfulness is rewarded and his fortunes restored. His story adds two additional dimensions to the example of the farmer: (1) Job is enduring, as well as patient. He suffers, as well as waits. James is reminding us that waiting for Jesus to return is not going to be easy. (2) There is a significant time element in the story. Just as Job had to wait until he was an old man before he regained his wealth and family, so we must wait for the Second Coming.

**The Problems of Waiting (Job 3:1; Luke 7:36–50; James 5:9–12)**

As well as providing us with role models of people who understood how to wait and endure, James also deals with some of the problems of waiting. He tells Christians who await Christ’s return to be tolerant and transparent in their dealings with each other. In James 5:9, he addresses the problem of grumbling about fellow church members, or what we sometimes call “church politics.” We are living in the last days, and the Judge is standing at the door. James reminds us that now is no time to be distracted by quarrels.

James also urges us to remember Job’s patience, but that even he had moments of despair: “After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth” (Job 3:1, NIV). However, it is important not to give in to feelings of frustration and resentment. Jesus is always present, taking note of the wrongs committed and promising to put things right at the judgment. In effect, James is saying, “Do not let your irritation and soreness at outside oppression vent itself in impatience and grumbling towards one another.”

In chapter 5, verse 12, James urges us to be transparent and honest in our dealings with others. Although swearing oaths was commonplace at the time, James sees it as inappropriate for Christians. The important thing is for us to be trustworthy—for our “yes” to mean “yes” and our “no” to mean “no.” The reality of our faith in Jesus’ return will be evident in the words we use, as well as in all other aspects of our lives.

**REACT**

1. What are the things you would say are most “at hand” in your life right now? Does your list include the Second Coming?
2. In what ways do you share Job’s attitude toward suffering?
3. Do you always mean exactly what you say? Explain.

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“Christ says, ‘Occupy till I come’ [Luke 19:13]. It may be but a few years until our life's history shall close, but we must occupy till then.”

“Some who were newly brought into the faith had fallen into errors in regard to those who had died since their conversion. They had hoped that all would witness the second coming of Christ; but they were in great sorrow as one after another of the believers fell under the power of death, making it impossible for them to behold that desirable event,—the coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven.

“Christ commits to His followers an individual work.”

“Some, who had fallen into the error that Christ was to come in their day, imbibed the fanatical idea that it was praiseworthy to show their faith by giving up all business, and resigning themselves to idle waiting for the great event which they thought was near.”

“Christ would have everyone educate himself to calmly contemplate His second appearing. All are to search the Word of God daily, but not neglect present duties. . . .

“Christ declared that when He comes some of His waiting people will be engaged in business transactions. Some will be sowing in the field, others reaping and gathering in the harvest, and others grinding at the mill. It is not God's will that His elect shall abandon life's duties and responsibilities and give themselves up to idle contemplation, living in a religious dream.”

“Christ commits to His followers an individual work—a work that cannot be done by proxy. Ministry to the sick and the poor, the giving of the gospel to the lost, is not to be left to committees or organized charities. Individual responsibility, individual effort, personal sacrifice, is the requirement of the gospel.”

**REACT**

1. Is there the possibility that you are “living in a religious dream”? Explain your answer.
2. Why is it not OK to wait passively for the Lord’s coming?
3. Can there be too many good works in your life? Explain your answer.
4. Does Jesus’ instruction to “occupy till I come” include looking after the environment? If the world is coming to an end anyway, does it matter that we do so? How does Revelation 11:18 support your answers?

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2. White, *Sketches From the Life of Paul*, p. 110.
James 5:7–12

Evidence

The Key to Paradise

James 5:9 reminds us that “the Judge”—or Jesus—“is standing at the door” (NKJV). This emphasizes the need for personal accountability and implies a wider context of “waiting for the correction of injustices.” Certainly the time in which James wrote had its share of inequalities. Most of the “brethren” he was writing to were probably poor, exploited workers. Political corruption was also widespread. In Jerusalem, the old regime of priests, once condemned by Jesus as hypocrites, whitewashed tombstones, and vipers, was still in charge.

James 5:7–12 may in a real sense be a call to action.

James puts his advice about living the Christian life in the context of “the Lord’s coming” (verse 7). In the Gospels, Jesus’ prophecies about the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world tend to merge together (see Matt. 24:9–14). As a result, “in all probability, not even the apostles and other New Testament writers understood until long afterward that the two events would be separated by a vast distance in time.” It is likely that James’ primary reference here is to the destruction of Jerusalem, to be followed shortly by the Second Coming. While this time frame does not undermine his advice, which applies to all generations of Christians, it does give it a special sense of urgency.

According to a Turkish proverb, “patience is the key to paradise.” But what exactly does patience mean in this context? James uses two different Greek words that are both translated as “patience.” In verse 7, he uses the word makrothymia, which in most modern English Bibles is translated as “be patient.” This word carries a sense of waiting and of not acting in haste. However, hypomonē, the other word James uses to refer to patience, does not suggest mere submission to circumstances. Rather, the authors of more than one commentary go so far as to suggest that James is actually advocating determination—even a sort of “militant patience.”

All in all, James 5:7–12 may in a real sense be a call to action, to stand against the corruption and injustice of the time, and to believe in the reality of a better world.

It's clear from the Bible that patience is a virtue. Paul calls patience one of the fruit of the spirit, along with love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22, 23). And God Himself is described by David as “compassionate and gracious, / slow to anger, / abounding in love” (Ps. 103:8, NIV).

We aren’t perfect. Stuff happens.

If we're patient, we're less likely to rush into things we're not ready for. Patience can prevent us from acting impulsively. It can help us to accept our limitations and to try again. And our patience is good for other people, as well. No one finds it easy to deal with someone who is always anxious and stressed out, with no time to spare.

However, it's not always easy to be patient. It's something we have to learn. Here are five tips for becoming a more patient person.

Work out what makes you impatient. Usually we're impatient because we're in a hurry or under some kind of pressure. Why are you impatient?

Learn to relax. If we're feeling impatient, we need to learn to breathe deeply, relax, and let go of all the things that are worrying us.

Keep positive. Remember that God has a plan for each of us. Things will work out.

See the big picture. People today talk about “first-world problems.” These are the problems that only privileged people have. We need to see the big picture and let go of trivial worries. For example, we may not like what we have for breakfast, but we're lucky to have breakfast at all.

Give yourself a break. This means two things. First, we need to take daily breaks to sit quietly and reflect. Second, we need to recognize that the world isn't perfect. We aren't perfect. Stuff happens.

Good things may not always come to those who wait, but most good things that do come don't happen right away. After all, the Israelites spent 40 years in the wilderness before they were ready to reach the Promised Land. Now that’s patience!

REACT

1. When was the last time you lost patience with someone or something? What will you do differently the next time you feel yourself losing patience?
2. How do you feel when people are impatient with you? How can this help you to be patient with others?
3. What are the “first-world problems” that make us so impatient?

Charlotte Waller, Reading, England
James’s emphasis on the need for patience and endurance reminds us of Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1–5), described by one preacher as “a discipleship class in gentleness up on the mountain.” This is the side of Jesus immortalized in Charles Wesley’s hymn written in 1742: “Gentle Jesus, meek and mild / Look upon a little child; / Pity my simplicity, / Suffer me to come to Thee.”

However, while the Jesus of the Beatitudes says, “Blessed are the meek, / for they will inherit the earth” (verse 5, NIV), the Jesus of Matthew 21 takes a different viewpoint. When He saw that the people making sacrifices at the temple were being taken advantage of, He ran out of patience and “overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. ‘It is written,’ he said to them, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it a den of robbers” (Matt. 21:12, 13, NIV). Here He is passionate about injustice. He is unwilling to stand by when others are being taken advantage of, even if it means putting His own life at risk.

So which is it—patience or passion? The truth is, both qualities are necessary for leadership. We need passion to take up a cause and fight for it and patience to see it through. There are many examples of long-suffering and persevering activists in our own time. Take for example Mahatma Gandhi, who fought for the civil rights of the people of India using nonviolent methods. Although he became a world leader, he continued to live modestly. Then there is Nelson Mandela, who was imprisoned for 27 years before becoming South Africa’s first democratically elected president in 1994. More recently, we have seen examples of whistle-blowers who are prepared to endure suffering for exposing inconvenient truths.

James urges us not to waste our time in pointless grumbling and frustration. Sometimes that means being patient. But sometimes it means taking action too.

**REACT**

Should we get involved or leave it up to God to change the world?

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CONCLUDE
To wait for something often means that we do nothing. However, while we are waiting for Christ to return, we are to be active for others. If we are not, we will become self-absorbed with our personal readiness to the point that we forget about the needs of others. As we wait, we can be actively involved in reaching out to a hurting world. Always remember that when Jesus does return, He will say to His people, “‘Come, you are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me’” (Matt. 25:34–36, NLT).

CONSIDER
• Volunteering in a local homeless shelter once a month.
• Writing a letter to a friend about your journey with God and how He’s leading and working in your life.
• Starting a soup kitchen in your church to feed the needy.
• Becoming involved in a small prayer group at home that meets weekly to pray for people in your community.
• Visiting the sick in a hospital or going to a nursing home to read to the residents or playing board games with them.
• Writing a short essay on what Matthew 25 means to you and what you hope the King will say to you when He returns.
• Answering these questions as you think about what the Second Coming of Jesus will be like: What do you see? What do you hear? What do you feel? Share your thoughts about this with your roommate or another one of your friends.

CONNECT
Ellen G. White, “The Least of These My Brethren,” in The Desire of Ages, chap. 70.
Dennis Smith, 40 Days: Prayers and Devotions to Prepare for the Second Coming (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald®, 2010).
Prayer, Healing, and Restoration

“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).
"In the quietude of dawn’s birth / I labour before my Maker. / A worn floor path. / Exhausted knees / And aching soul. / Salty rivers course the rise of cheekbone, / Descending into a cascading Niagara upon my pillow. / If only words flowed in like manner. / Perhaps a crumbling heart / Speaks more eloquently."

By the time I finished writing this poem, the sun had already brightened the early morning sky. The promised peace that “passeth all understanding” had held my fragile heart together. That day I needed to seek God’s face through earnest prayer. Faced with circumstances that threatened to unravel me, I found comfort and strength on my knees. The nineteenth-century Danish theologian, Søren Kierkegaard, wrote that “the function of prayer is not to influence God, but rather to change the nature of the one who prays.”¹ In seeking God, whether on our own behalf or for another person, transformation is inevitable. Power is available. But our prayers must be God-centered.

Chip Ingram states that when “we feel like we have it all together, we base our prayers on our situation and our needs. But when we see our own insufficiency in light of the holiness and power of God, we focus on his agenda and his character. . . . We base our prayers on who he is.”² Praying based on who God is “availeth much.” We are fickle, but God is constant. We are weak, but His strength knows no bounds. We are limited, but God is infinitely greater than we can possibly comprehend. When we recognize that this is the God we serve, our prayers take on new life, and time spent on our knees becomes a regular, sought-after experience.

We realize that circumstances cannot tax the Burden Bearer, that our needs should not be the only requests that fall from our lips, for intercession is equally important. We realize that being candid with God is better than lofty words and clichéd phrases; that sometimes it’s all right when words fail us, because the Holy Spirit interprets the pangs of our hearts and presents them in an acceptable manner before God. Grasping this wonderful truth about prayer positions us to take that step toward healing and restoration. Praying with this understanding charts our course and sustains us along the journey. The wholeness we experience when the Holy Spirit begins to mend and revive us goes beyond words. Start or restart your journey right where you are. Now. Today.

A few years ago, one of our church elders was diagnosed with cancer. Because he was deteriorating quickly, a well-known pastor, along with other pastors and elders, anointed him. Later, when he went for further tests, there was no trace of the cancer.

James teaches that we can expect to receive physical healing from our heavenly Father when we believe in God's Word and do as it says. “Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord” (James 5:14, NIV). The Greek word *proseuchomai* means to pray for and interact with the Lord by trading our wishes for His wishes as He imparts faith.¹ In a time of sickness, it is not cold and formal prayer that is effective, but the earnest prayer of faith. The great thing we should beg of God for ourselves and others in the time of sickness is the pardon of sin.

The Greek word *iaomai* means to heal or to be made whole.² It suggests healing from sickness as in the case of the elder from my church who was healed when prayer was offered on his behalf. However, this healing does not have to be physical. The prayer of faith can also obtain deliverance from the effects of sin. No matter how stained with sin our lives may be, the prayer of a righteous person can deliver us from all unrighteousness.

Sometimes we struggle to believe that God still heals. We wonder why He allows our loved ones to experience pain. Though He doesn't always answer our questions, we do know that complete dependence upon Him is essential. “When you are struggling to believe, that is not the time to avoid Christ or be ashamed of your struggle. You will never increase your faith by not going to Jesus! Rather, Jesus wants to help you with your belief. He can not only meet your need, but He will also give you faith to trust you to provide for you.”³

**REACT**

1. Why does James 5:15 say that the sins which the sick person may have committed will be forgiven?

2. How confident are you in the power of prayer for healing?

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The Essential Christian Tool Kit (James 5:13)

It is evident that as Christians we will not always be walking through fields of daisies. We will all face challenges, because we live in an imperfect world. However, God gives us the tools of prayer and praise to help us. He encourages us to bring everything to Him in prayer and to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17). When all is going well, let us never forget that because every blessing and every perfect gift comes from God (James 1:17), we should glorify His name and sing praises to Him (Ps. 47:7).

Prayer for the Sick (James 5:14, 15)

Because we live in a sinful world, we will be faced with diseases and disabilities. God, through His Holy Spirit, leads doctors to cure many medical conditions. However, there are times when only the Great Physician can bring about healing and restoration. James implores us to call upon the elders of the church to pray for the sick and to anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord (James 5:14). The elders of the church are to be righteous before God so that when their prayers will be lifted up with power, He will hear those prayers and answer them. It is important that those praying believe that God can do for us more than we could ever imagine (Eph. 3:20). Thus we are promised forgiveness of sins, even if physical healing does not take place.

Healing for the Soul (Matt. 13:15; James 5:16)

Sometimes we don't want to hear anything from God because we are more interested in living the way we want to (Zech. 7:11). Yet we must understand that the principles God has given us to live by have our best interest at heart. Therefore, if we choose to live contrary to these principles, we cannot expect to receive peace, healing, or any of God’s other blessings. When we are at peace, we will be happy. Sadness, however, drains our strength (Prov. 17:22). Because the devil desires to destroy us, he works tirelessly to separate us from God. We must choose to have our souls healed through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Doing so will even help us to be physically healthier. Let us love the Lord with all our hearts. Let us love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Let us apologize to those we have wronged and forgive those who have...
wronged us. Let us pray for unity. If we harbor any evil in our hearts, God will not hear our prayers (Ps. 66:18). “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (James 5:16, NIV). Righteousness, therefore, is the heart of the matter.

**A Model for Prayer (1 Kings 18:30–46; James 5:17, 18)**

Elijah was an ordinary person who believed in the power of prayer to turn the hearts of the people back to God. He prayed both publicly and privately. In one of his public prayers, he called the people to come near. He wanted them to witness the power of prayer and to bring glory to God. In rebuilding the altar, he showed his faith and a desire to correct anything that would hinder God from answering his prayer.

The time and place of Elijah’s prayer symbolized his desire to live according to God’s specific instructions. “Relying and counting on God as ‘I Am,’ the eternal, immutable, and independent God of the universe with whom all things were possible,” confirms that Elijah was a man of faith.1 When God’s people saw the results of Elijah’s prayer, they fell to the ground and cried, “‘The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!’ ” (1 Kings 18:39, NIV).

God promised Elijah that He would send rain (1 Kings 18:1), but that did not stop him from putting it before God in prayer. His faith is highlighted by continually sending his servant to look for the rain clouds. Our steadfast prayers bring glory to God’s name. When we confess our sins to Him, when we unite with each other and live according to His Word, He will forgive, heal, and restore us.

**Restoration and Forgiveness (James 5:19, 20)**

James 5:19, 20 teaches us that we are to play an integral role in bringing others back to God. We should encourage those among us who have fallen to seek forgiveness from God. Thus we share with Him in the saving of souls. “The binding thread of James’s epistle has been his tender concern for the eternal welfare of his beloved brethren.”2

**REACT**

1. How have you experienced the effects of prayer? How can you encourage others to have a vibrant prayer life?
2. Contemplate your relationship with the members in your church. What are you doing to help them stand with God?

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“Heavenly beings are appointed to answer the prayers of those who are working unselfishly for the interests of the cause of God. The very highest angels in the heavenly courts are appointed to work out the prayers that ascend to God for the advancement of the cause of God. Each angel has a particular post of duty, and is not permitted to leave for any other place.”¹

“God knows the end from the beginning.”

Many people are looking for both spiritual and physical healing, and even though they have prayed earnestly, they have yet to see the results. When praying for physical healing we must also pray for spiritual healing. “The paralytic found in Christ healing for both the soul and body. He needed health of soul and the body. He needed health of soul before he could appreciate health of body. Before the physical malady could be healed, Christ must bring relief to the mind, and cleanse the soul from sin. This lesson should not be overlooked. There are today thousands suffering physical disease who, like the paralytic, are longing for the message, ‘Thy sins are forgiven.’”²

As you pray for the healing of someone who is sick in body, also pray for that person to gain victory over sin. God is just as willing to restore the sick to health now as when the Holy Spirit spoke through David in Psalm 107:19, 20.

“Every open sin should be as openly confessed. Wrong done to a fellow being should be made right with the one who has been offended. . . .

“When wrongs have been righted, we may present the needs of the sick to the Lord in calm faith, as His Spirit may indicate.”³

“God knows the end from the beginning. He is acquainted with the hearts of all men. He reads every secret of the soul. He knows whether those for whom prayer is offered would or would not be able to endure the trials that would come upon them should they live. He knows whether their lives would be a blessing or a curse to themselves and to the world. This is one reason why, while presenting our petitions with earnestness, we should say, ‘Nevertheless not my will, but Thine, be done.’ Luke 22:42.”⁴

REACT

1. Why do you think God heals some people and not others?
2. Is it possible for a nonbeliever to be healed? Why or why not?

¹. Ellen G. White, Christ Triumphant, p. 368.
³. Ibid., p. 229.
⁴. Ibid., p. 230.

Tanisha N. Robinson, St. Catherine, Jamaica, West Indies
In a world marred by sin, healing and restoration are crucial to life. The healing and restoration God intends to bless us with is not only physical, but spiritual. James 5:13–18 highlights three things we can do in order to achieve these blessings:

**Call for elders of the church to pray.** Such prayer is a symbol of caring and of the church's desire to be there for its members when one of them is ill or experiencing another type of difficulty. Elders are some of the church's spiritual leaders who are called upon to serve as guides and intercessors. Their work does not in any way diminish the importance of personal prayer or the power any other individual church member has when she or he is connected to God. Instead, their work affirms the value of agreement within the church, for Jesus promised that agreement among His people would unleash the power required for answered prayer.

**Pray in faith.** Our faith should be in God alone. Faith in Him is needed in order for prayers to be effective. Faith is believing that God will hear our prayers and answer them even if we don't know how, when, or where.

**Confess your sins.** The Bible says that the earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results (James 5:16). In order for us to be righteous, we must be forgiven by God, and in order for us to receive that forgiveness, we must confess our sins and forgive those who have sinned against us (Matt. 6:12).

A connection between sin and illness is a possibility, the implication being that the guilt caused by sinning may cause a person to become ill. Perhaps the cure promised in James 5:16 seems to encompass both physical and spiritual healing. We are to pray as repentant sinners asking for radical spiritual and physical healing in our lives.

Instead of having a negative reaction to hardship and illnesses, James encourages us to engage in positive behavior and to establish a healing relationship between God and our brothers and sisters.

**REACT**

1. Are you able to call upon the elders of your church for prayer when you are sick or in a crisis? Explain.

2. What do you understand by the phrase, “radical, spiritual, and physical healing”? 

*Feleisha Simms, Kingston, Jamaica, West Indies*
A recurring theme in this week’s lesson is that of community—of love and working together as brothers and sisters in Christ. As we communicate with each other, we are often reminded of three important things: (1) that prayer is important during times of need, (2) that no matter how we feel, we are never alone, because God is always by our side, ready to be our Healer, and (3) that He means for us to care for each other as we travel onward to heaven.

If you were to go to YouTube and search for “animals taking care of other animals” you would find video clips of animals who “adopted” and cared for orphaned animals not of their species. There are many lessons we can learn from these clips. For example, many times we neglect to help someone because that person is not like us. In fact, many times we seek to exploit people who are different from us, or often we help someone only when it benefits us. But seeing others as God sees them means that we will display genuine love to whomever needs our help. “Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord” (James 5:14, NLT).

Another recurring theme in this week’s lesson is prayer. Not only are we encouraged to be one with each other, we also need to be one with God. “Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray” (James 5:13, NLT).

An important ingredient in having a community of love is forgiveness, being able to heal and move from the point of hurt. “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed” (James 5:16, NLT).

**REACT**

1. How often do you remember to “sing psalms” when God has blessed you? Or are you more apt to take your blessings for granted?
2. Prayer is an important way for Christians to bond with one another. How important has prayer been in your daily life in regard to connecting with other Christians?
3. Do you remember to pray even when all is well? Why is it good to remember to pray even then?
4. James 5:19, 20 remind us of the importance of restoration. Why are most of us not particularly eager to build up a fallen brother or sister in Christ?
CONCLUDE

Many things divide people—race, color, religion, poverty, income brackets. You can probably think of other things that drive wedges between individuals. What, if anything, has been a source of division among your family and friends? Yet when we kneel together in prayer before the God we serve, division ceases because He views us all the same—sinners in need of His grace.

CONSIDER

- Reading several entries on prayer that are listed in a Bible concordance. Which of these verses mean the most to you, and why?
- Writing an acrostic for either the word prayer, healing, or restoration. (For example, if you choose the word prayer, the first letter of your poem will begin with the letter p, the second line with r, the third line with an a, etc., until you come to the end of the word.)
- Drawing or painting a triptych (a work of art divided into three sections) that depicts prayer, healing, and restoration.
- Taking a walk through a park. As you do so, pray for people you know who are ill or who are facing a problem. Then consider the Creator’s handiwork and how marvelous it is that such a God cares so much for us that He longs to answer our prayers.
- Inviting some friends over for Friday vespers to share with one another times when God answered their prayers for healing and restoration.
- Singing “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” hymn no. 499 in the Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal or online at http://www.sdahymnal.net/.

CONNECT


Kurt Johnson, Prayer Works (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald®, 2001).

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Angela Alfonsi, New York City, New York, U.S.A.
The Everlasting
Gospel

“The Lord has appeared of old to me, saying: ‘Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; / therefore with loving-kindness I have drawn you’” (Jer. 31:3, NKJV).
Tom carried his new boat to the edge of the river. He carefully placed it in the water and slowly let out the string. How smoothly the boat sailed! He sat in the warm sunshine, admiring the little boat he had built. Suddenly, a strong current caught the boat. Tom tried to pull it back to shore, but the string broke. The little boat raced downstream. Tom ran along the sandy shore as fast as he could. But his boat soon slipped out of sight. All afternoon he searched for it. Finally, when it was too dark to look any longer, Tom sadly went home.

A few days later, on the way home from school, Tom spotted a boat just like his in a store window. When he got closer, he could see—sure enough—that it was his! And so he hurried to the store manager: “Sir, that’s my boat in your window! I made it!”

“Sorry, son, but if you want it, you’ll have to buy it for one dollar.”

Tom ran home and told his father, who gladly gave him the money. When he reached the store, he rushed to the counter. “Here’s the money for my boat.” As he left the store, Tom hugged his boat and said, “Now you’re twice mine. First I made you, and now I bought you.”*

Just like that boat, God made us and He also bought us. Yes, we were made in His image, but our sin separated us from God and thus a price had to be paid (1 Cor. 6:20). Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10, NKJV). On the cross of Calvary, He took the punishment that we deserved. He paid the price for our sins by dying for us. Today, He offers forgiveness and eternal life to all who will receive Him as their Savior.

This week we will study about the everlasting gospel—salvation by faith. As we do so, let’s pray and ask God to help us understand exactly what this gospel is and what it means, so that we can share this good news with others. God is offering us this perfect gift. It is ours for the taking. “Oh taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps. 34:8, NKJV).


Deandrea Smith-Richards, Trelawny, Jamaica, West Indies
The Problem With Not Knowing (Acts 17:28)

Are you familiar with the chorus “Everybody Ought to Know”? Since Adam and Eve’s fall, Satan has worked tirelessly to obliterate the knowledge of God from the minds of people. He wants more than anything else to usurp the place of God in our lives, because He knows that our existence is in God: “for in Him we live move and have our being” (Acts 17:28, NKJV). He knows that if he can remove the knowledge of God from our minds, then he will have destroyed the image of God in humanity and plunge the human race into a state of degradation that is beyond repair.

There is comfort and peace in the truth.

People who do not have a saving knowledge of God are doomed to perish forever. Hosea 4:6 says, “My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge” (NIV). Understanding the importance and authority of this knowledge above all other knowledge, the prophet Jeremiah warns, “‘Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, / Let not the mighty man glory in his might, / Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; / But let him who glories glory in this, / That he understands and knows Me, / That I am the Lord, exercising loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. / For in these I delight,’ says the Lord” (Jer. 9:23, 24, NKJV).

Of what significance, then, is a knowledge of God? Why is it so vital that every person obtain such knowledge? Because in Him we live, move, and have our being (Acts 17:28). Because salvation is found only in Jesus (Acts 4:12). Because He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6; 1 John 5:12). Because He is the Source of wisdom (James 1:5). Each of us needs all these, or we cannot truly exist. Yes, everybody ought to know who Jesus is.

The Knowledge of God Sets Us Free (John 8:32)

“Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). The gospel is relevant in our lives because it furnishes us with a knowledge of God—who He is, what He requires of us, His affections toward fallen man, and a knowledge of His will concerning us. “This is the will of God, even your sanctification” (1 Thess. 4:3).

Many “of the truths concerning the religion of Jehovah had been obscured by the inventions of the Jews. The minds of the people were blinded and a veil was over their hearts when they read the [Old Testament]. . . . Jesus came to set them free. He declared that His mission was ‘to preach
deliverance to the captives.’ . . . To those who accepted the truth He promised liberty.”

**Know God, Know Peace; No God, No Peace (John 10:10)**

There is comfort and peace in the truth, but no real peace or comfort can be found in falsehood. It is through false theories and traditions that Satan gains his power over a person’s mind. By directing people to false standards, he misshapes their character. “‘The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly’” (John 10:10, NKJV).

“Life’ includes the physical, intellectual, and spiritual. Physical life is regarded as abundant in a body that is full of vigor and in perfect health. Jesus’ miracles of physical healing gave an abundant physical life to those whose life forces were ebbing. But physical restoration was by no means the complete fulfillment of Jesus’ mission. Man also has intellectual and spiritual life, which must also be made alive and abundant, for ‘man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord’ (Deut. 8:3). Important as the physical and the intellectual aspects of a well-rounded life are, no life is fully complete unless the spiritual nature is nurtured.”

**Arise and Shine (Isa. 60:1)**

“Arise, shine; / For your light has come! / And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. / And the darkness shall cover the earth, / And deep darkness the people” (Isa. 60:1, 2, NKJV).

“I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water’” (Rev. 14:6, 7, NKJV). “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14, NKJV).

Yes, everybody ought to know Jesus. Yet millions are without a saving knowledge of Him and His Father. And that sums up the relevance of the gospel in our lives and in the lives of others.

**REACT**

If you know the relevance of the gospel in your life, what can you do to help others within your sphere to also obtain a saving knowledge of God?

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2. Ibid., p. 1005.
“It is impossible for us, of ourselves, to escape from the pit of sin in which we are sunken. Our hearts are evil, and we cannot change them. ‘Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.’ ‘The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.’ Job 14:4; Romans 8:7. Education, culture, the exercise of the will, human effort—all have their proper sphere, but here they are powerless. They may produce an outward correctness of behavior, but they cannot change the heart; they cannot purify the springs of life. There must be a power working from within, a new life from above, before men can be changed from sin to holiness. That power is Christ. His grace alone can quicken the lifeless faculties of the soul, and attract it to God, to holiness.

“His grace alone can quicken the lifeless faculties of the soul.”

“The Saviour said, ‘Except a man be born from above,’ unless he shall receive a new heart, new desires, purposes, and motives, leading to a new life, ‘he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ John 3:3, margin. The idea that it is necessary only to develop the good that exists in man by nature, is a fatal deception. ‘The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.’ ‘Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.’ 1 Corinthians 2:14; 3:7. Of Christ it is written, ‘In Him was life; and the life was the light of men’—the only ‘name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.’ John 1:4; Acts 4:12.”

“There are those who profess to serve God, while they rely upon their own efforts to obey His law, to form a right character, and secure salvation. Their hearts are not moved by any deep sense of the love of Christ, but they seek to perform the duties of the Christian life as that which God requires of them in order to gain heaven. Such religion is worth nothing.”

**REACT**

1. How does the imagery in Jacob’s dream of the angels ascending and descending on a ladder better help us understand Christ’s sacrifice (Gen. 28:10–17)?

2. How can sharing the wonderful news of Jesus help to enrich our own Christian walk?

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2. Ibid., p. 44.

Renor Cleghorne, Trelawny, Jamaica, West Indies
“In the ancient Hebrew words that are used to describe distance and direction are also used to describe time. . . . The Hebrew word olam means in the far distance. . . . The word olam is also used for time for the distant past or the distant future. . . . This word is frequently translated as eternity or forever but in the English language it is misunderstood to mean a continual span of time that never ends. In the Hebrew mind it is simply what is at or beyond the horizon, a very distant time.”*

The Bible records the everlasting gospel, the plan of salvation from Genesis to Revelation. It records the events of our distant past, our present, and our distant future. The gospel that is recorded in Genesis is the same in Revelation. Reading the Bible in its entirety shows us the need for the plan, the plan itself, and the end of it all.

“War broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought” (Rev. 12:7, NKJV). What caused this war between God and Lucifer? Lucifer wanted to make himself "like the Most High." In other words, he sought to be equal with the Creator (Isa. 14:12–14). He provoked God when he deceived Adam and Eve; and thus the plan of salvation was implemented (Genesis 3).

Revelation 20 and 21 record the grand finale, the end of it all. The devil will fight, but, of course, he will lose, and he will be cast into the bottomless pit where he will be bound for 1,000 years. Finally, those who have been faithful will rejoice. They will sing the song that only the redeemed will know. “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:12, NKJV). Yes, Lucifer will be defeated. There is hope after all.

We have much to look forward to. God loves us so much that He sent his Son to the cross—the altar of sacrifice—on our behalf. So let us believe (John 3:16)! Let us spread the gospel to the ends of the earth.

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“‘For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not con-
demned’ ” (John 3:16–18, NKJV).

Let us approach our earthly relationships with love and faith.

Have you ever wondered what you’ve done that God should love you? If you have, you are not alone. Surely most of us are at a loss as to why God truly loves us, why He has been showing His love for us from the beginning of Creation, and why He continues to do so today. His plan of salvation exemplifies His love. So as we receive love from God, we should share that love with our fellow human beings. How can we show each other that our love and God’s love are true? Following are a few practical steps:

Be calm and know that God exemplifies love. It is because of His love for us that we are still here and have hope. God loves us so much He sent His Son to die on our behalf (John 3:16).

Love each other as God loves us. Read John 15:12. To whom much is given, much is expected. Because God bestows His love upon us, we ought to share God’s love with others.

Share the good news. Salvation is good, is it not? So go out and share it (Matt. 28:19, 20).

Let us approach our earthly relationships with love and faith. Let us trust that God will help us to grow the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23). Let us pray that He will grant us the patience we need to endure life’s tests and trials. Satan will be ever vigilant in launching his attacks upon us, seeking to undermine our desire to spread the good news. Yet despite this, we must remain fervent in our desire to share God’s love with everyone.

REACT

1. Read Luke 6:27, 28. How does knowing that Jesus loves you in spite of your sins make it easier to love your enemies?
2. How does knowing that Jesus died on your behalf make a difference in your life?

Kyron Whittaker, Ada, Oklahoma, U.S.A.
We are to acknowledge our need to be rescued from sin and bad habits, accept Jesus Christ as our Substitute and Divine Healer, and in gratitude for salvation and with the help of the Holy Spirit, practice life-giving habits. Yet some people view all of this as being terribly legalistic. Their problem lies in the fact that legalists believe that to be saved one must earn salvation by keeping God's law. However, the Bible teaches that we are only saved by the grace of God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We cannot do anything that will earn our salvation. Jesus earned our salvation and gives it to us as a gift when we accept Him as our Savior.

At the foot of the cross we are all equal.

The charge is sometimes levied against us that we are legalists because we believe in the importance of keeping the Ten Commandments. We do not keep the Ten Commandments in order to be saved (Rom. 3:20). Instead, we believe that once we enter into a life-giving relationship with Jesus, we want to live according to the principles of His kingdom (2 Cor. 5:17). This is a natural and grateful response to the gift of His salvation. We do not earn any points by doing this (Eph. 2:8–10). Instead, we feel that it helps us to live the kind of life God has always intended for us.

But thank God for the fact that at the foot of the cross we are all equal. Kneeling at Jesus’ feet, no one is greater than anyone else. When sin entered the world, selfishness created an entirely different kind of life for us all. But Jesus’ love for us makes salvation available to anyone who will accept it, because none of us can earn it with money or good works (Matt. 19:23, 24).

REACT

1. If salvation is free, why is it so hard for people to accept it?
2. What role do you play in the plan of salvation?
CONCLUDE

In this final weekly lesson of the quarter, we focused on basic questions regarding “the everlasting gospel,” which is salvation by faith, a belief taught throughout the Bible, including 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 have seen how James fits the larger picture of God’s plan of redemption.

CONSIDER

• Reading this week’s memory text (Jer. 31:3) in several different Bible versions. As you do so, stop to consider how each version helps you to better understand the meaning of God’s everlasting gospel.
• Sharing the gospel with someone using the words when, where, why, how, and what. Start by sharing when in your life you accepted Christ as your Savior. Where were you spiritually and emotionally? Why did you decide to follow Him? How has your decision to follow Him affected your life? And what positive changes have occurred in your life because of your decision to follow Christ?
• Drawing a picture of yourself before you accepted Christ. Then draw a picture of yourself after you accepted Him. What notable differences do you see between the two pictures?
• Arranging a Communion service for your Sabbath School class. Discuss what part of the gospel the foot-washing ceremony represents. Discuss what part of the gospel the wine and bread symbolize.
• Reading John 3:1–16. As you do, consider how Jesus’ discussion with Nicodemus makes you feel. Reread the verses as if you were Nicodemus sitting there with Jesus, your Savior.

CONNECT

Romans 5:8; 1 John 4:9–12.

Ellen G. White, “Nicodemus,” in The Desire of Ages, pp. 167–177; or online at the Ellen G. White Estate.

If you have not yet received a copy of CQ for First Quarter 2015, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1 “The Call of Wisdom”

Logos: 1 Kings 3:5–13; Prov. 1:7, 8–19; Proverbs 2; Prov. 3:13–18.

Memory Text: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Prov. 1:7, NKJV).

Key Thought: From Eden onward, the root of human tragedy lies in wrong choices. The book of Proverbs is all about helping us to make right choices, to choose God’s way. Solomon, speaking to his son, warns him against wrong choices and encourages him to make right ones. This is important because the choices we make can be matters of life and death. The first three chapters of Proverbs illustrate this method of education. After having explained the purpose of the book: “to know wisdom” (Prov. 1:2), and having laid down the motto of the book: “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (verse 7), the author moves back and forth from warning us against listening to foolishness to urging us to respond to the call of heavenly wisdom.

Lesson 2 From Ears to Feet

Logos: Proverbs 4; Prov. 6:6–19; Prov. 17:9, 14, 17.

Memory Text: “Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; remove your foot from evil” (Prov. 4:26, 27, NKJV).

Key Thought: Science has demonstrated that hearing impacts how we walk, and that even our balance is influenced by how well we hear. So, instruction or education—that is, what we hear—is crucial to how we live. “Wisdom is the principal thing” (Prov. 4:7, NKJV). Yet no matter how good the instruction is, the student must pay attention. An ancient Egyptian teacher noted that the “the ear of the boy is on his back; he listens when he is beaten.” (In Egyptian art, the student was often represented with big ears on his back.) It’s not enough just to know about right and wrong; we need to know how to choose right. Training in wisdom consists in hearing proper instruction and in obeying what we have learned so that we won’t find ourselves walking in the wrong direction.