

Lesson Overview

1 Life Need:

Comprehend God's purpose in the testing of our faith.

2 Bible Learning:

Study James's words of encouragement.

Suggested Material:

- *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit:* Poster and reproducible sheet—The Wisdom of James

3 Bible Application:

Examine how God imparts His wisdom.

Suggested Material:

- *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit:* Reproducible sheet—Finish the Scripture
- Hymnbooks or songbooks

4 Life Response:

Place your trust in God in any difficult situation.

Suggested Material:

- Video and words to the song, 'The Perfect Wisdom of Our God'



Faith and Wisdom

Expect Problems—The Book of James was likely written by Jesus' half-brother James, who wrote this letter to the new and now persecuted Christians in the Roman world. Some call James the Proverbs of the New Testament because it outlines several practical principles for living a wise Christian life, especially in the face of difficulty. James started by saying to expect adversities and struggles. They may come because of personal circumstances, sickness, injuries, or persecution from your commitment to Christianity. Jesus Himself said, "In the world ye will have tribulation" (John 16:33, KJV).

Rejoice: God Is in Control—However, James said you can experience joy amid troubles. How is that possible? James outlined several ways. Joy is produced when the individual is convinced of the sovereignty of God. The Holy Spirit can give confidence in an extremely challenging situation that God's truth and strength will be shown. When James says to "count it all joy," he is using a financial term. It means to evaluate, to set new goals and priorities. The spiritual aspect of one's life becomes more important than the creature comforts. Trials bring about endurance and patience. When we allow God to work in us, it develops our maturity in Christ.

Wisdom from Heaven—James also advised the suffering believer to ask for God's wisdom in the middle of problems. That wisdom begins with reverencing God, committing to following His instructions no matter what and seeing Him and Him alone as the source of true wisdom. We also must not listen with one ear at heaven's door and the other tuned to the world: nothing but confusion will result. It is better to be rich with the wealth of God's wisdom because it cannot be lost or taken away. God is always ready, available and ever-present when we request His wisdom.

AS YOUR STUDENTS ARRIVE

Before class, write the words “The test will start momentarily” on a board or sheet of newsprint. Don’t give your students any information about the “test” as they arrive; tell them they will know the questions soon enough.

When everyone arrives, give them the “test,” something simple such as, “What are the names of the four Gospels?” or (a little harder), “What subject have we been studying the past several weeks?” (Wisdom). Tell them the anxiety they felt about the test is a small example of

the trying circumstances we will be discussing today as we look at the Book of James.

Link to Last Week: Give some time to share praises for the abundant life people felt this past week, and be sure to let someone who just received Christ as Savior describe how they feel about their decision.

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Faith and Wisdom

A Present-Day Illustration

Monique stood looking at the closed bedroom door of her 15-year-old daughter, JaLisa. She could not hear any noise coming from the room. It was 11 A.M. on a Saturday.

“I have been praying,” Monique had said to her sister a few weeks ago.

“Have you asked God for wisdom on how to deal with JaLisa?” Monique’s sister had asked. It had stopped Monique in her very busy tracks.

For the past few weeks, Monique had done just that. The mother thought that she had sensed a softening in her daughter. This morning, Monique decided to take JaLisa to the mall.

“Shopping? Really?” said a bored looking JaLisa.

“I’ll hang out in the food court. You do you, and then we can meet up for lunch and head down to the movie theater. We can both watch the same movie or watch separate ones. Let’s just get out of the house!”

Sitting in the food court, Monique got a few texts from JaLisa showing various merchandise. Monique responded in emoji’s, either smiling or thumbs up or frowning and thumbs down.

Driving home, the two talked briefly about the movie they saw together.

“Mom, I’m sorry,” said JaLisa. “Mia and I had a falling out, and it seemed like no one had any time for me, not even you. Now I know differently.”

1. Why do challenges normally accompany character growth?

2. Why is fear a common part of these challenges? Explain your answer.

3. What spiritual insights have you gained when your faith in Christ has been tested?

LESSON FOCUS: Ask and believe that God will give you wisdom in trying circumstances.

1 Life Need

Comprehend God’s purpose in the testing of our faith

Take a moment to read the anecdote in the student book, then form small groups to discuss **Questions 1, 2, and 3.**

For Question 1, first ask students what is “character growth” such as being more patient, more empathetic, and wiser. Then have them relate how they need to be challenged in order for these traits to deepen within their character such as being kind to those who aggravate them or stepping into difficult situations to help people who are in distress.

With Question 2, examples that students might mention is the fear of embarrassment when expressing an unpopular yet virtuous principle or the fear of rejection when extending friendship to a stranger. Note that the outcomes may be what is feared, but that character growth comes from overcoming the fears whatever is the outcome.

Finally, for Question 3, remind students that, as Paul states in 1 Corinthians 10:13, God will not let us be “tempted” (which can also be translated “tested”) beyond what we can bear. What this implies is that Christ is always with us during our trials and that His Spirit empowers us to endure. Moreover, the Lord is patient with us when we falter and is transforming our character to be Christlike. Therefore, there is a purpose, a very important purpose, to our testing.

Bible Learning 2

Study James's words of encouragement

Before you teach this step, put up the poster "The Wisdom of James" from your Resource Kit and make copies of the handout that goes with it. You will use it this week and the rest of this quarter. On the handout, read the first two paragraphs, then note the photo of an illustration of a Roman ship.

THE TESTING OF OUR FAITH

Read James 1:1-4, and highlight these key points as you discuss the Scripture:

- James began his letter to his Jewish brothers and sisters by acknowledging that he was

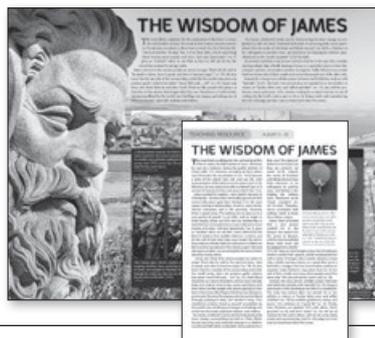
BIBLE EXTRA

James the Brother of Jesus

Most commentators consider James, the brother of Jesus, to be the author of the book that bears his name. His leadership position in the Jerusalem church at the time (Acts 15:12-21) combined with the early death of the apostle James (Acts 12:1-2) point to him as the most likely writer.

Before Jesus' resurrection, James did not accept the messianic claims of his brother, but became fervently devoted to the Savior after He appeared to him (1 Cor. 15:7). According to tradition, James spent so much time praying that his knees developed a tough texture similar to that of a camel's knees.

James wrote "to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations" (1:1), a phrase that designates his readers as belonging to the Jewish community. It's possible the recipients of his book were once members of the church in Jerusalem and knew James but were then scattered during the persecution that arose after the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1-2).



You can find more commentary on the Scripture passage on pg. 9 of this teacher's guide.



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The Testing of Our Faith

James 1:1-4, KJV

1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting

James 1:1-4, NIV

¹James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.

²Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

The letter of James was intended for Jewish believers (those from "the twelve tribes," vs. 1) scattered throughout the nations of the Mediterranean world. This James is most likely the brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55) who became the head of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13-19).

James wasted no time getting to the point in this address to his fellow Christians. Fourteen times the apostle called his readers his "brothers and sisters" (vs. 2). By using this term, this powerful leader of the church in Jerusalem put himself on the same plane with his Christian readers. Though he chided them many times, he did so in a spirit of brotherly love.

James first addressed the matter of trials. In contrast to our natural tendency during such times, James encourages us to "consider it pure joy" when we face a wide variety of difficulties that come to test our faith (vs. 2, NIV). This does not mean we pretend to enjoy our afflictions or behave as though they do not matter to us. We rejoice because of their purpose and what they can accomplish in our lives.

Trials not only test our faith, they also reveal its validity. As the apostle Peter says about the difficult times that come our way, "These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though

a servant of both God and Jesus Christ.

• Immediately, James focused on the adversities that his readers were suffering, telling them to be full of joy because the Lord was using their suffering to transform them into the children God wanted them to be.

• He noted that the testing of their faith in Jesus would produce perseverance in them and that such perseverance completes God's work in them, making them mature and complete and lacking in nothing.

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refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Pet. 1:7). Our response to the afflictions in our lives displays the reality of our relationship with the Savior and leads to our praise of Him.

Affliction does not produce our trust in the Lord, but rather shows it to be real and enables it to grow. The positive outcome of faithfully enduring these storms is that of "perseverance" (vs. 3). This is the muscle of our faith; it's the spiritual strength we develop as the result of the testing of our faith. It's the endurance and tenacity that grows in us during the testing.

The word for "perseverance" is also translated "steadfastness" in some translations. This captures the sense of how our endurance in times of stress leads to greater maturity in our walk with the Lord and prepares us for future trials.

4. What does it mean to consider our trials as "pure joy"?

5. What does the testing of our faith accomplish?

Our Need for Wisdom

James 1:5-8, KJV

5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

6 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

7 For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

8 A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

James 1:5-8, NIV

⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. ⁶But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. ⁸Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

In the midst of our trials, we need God's wisdom to see through the darkness. His insight enables us to make sound

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 4

When James calls upon us to "consider it pure joy" when we encounter trials, he's not asking us to pretend to enjoy them or deny the pain they bring to us. The joy comes from looking at the results of the testing of our faith, to what they produce in our life. They also reveal the genuineness of our faith that Peter says is "of greater worth than gold" (1 Pet. 1:7).

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 5

The testing of our faith first reveals the genuineness of our faith; it does not produce this faith but reveals its character. Our trials also produce an inner strength in us referred to in the text as "perseverance." This quality enables us to not only endure the current struggle, but gives us strength for the next one. The end result of such testing is greater maturity in our walk with the Lord.

OUR NEED FOR WISDOM

While reading James 1:5-8, note these important points in your class discussion:

• James next told his readers to seek wisdom from God if they believed themselves to be

BIBLE EXTRA

Perseverance and Job

Many believers consider it pure joy if they avoid trials of any kind. They may regard adversity as God's punishment for some secret sin. That is the point Job's friends tried so doggedly to prove (see Job 4:7; 8:4-6; 11:1-6). However, the reader is allowed behind the scenes and can see that Job went through his trials to refine his faith and demonstrate God's faithfulness—not to punish bad conduct. Because of Job's response to his trials, his name has become a synonym for patience and perseverance—even James recognized him for these characteristics (see Jas. 5:11).

wanting of such wisdom.

- Indeed, their Lord God would surely grant them such a blessing if they prayed for it.

- If they do ask, however, they must ask believing that the Lord will grant their request, for doubt is like a wind-tossed sea.

- Such doubters are double-minded and unstable, and they should not expect God to give them anything.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 6

If there is any time we feel the need for godly wisdom, it's during times of affliction. We often face difficult decisions, wondering what path to take. Scripture helps answer many of our questions, but we need the Spirit's help in understanding God's Word and how it fits with our particular situation. In doing so, the Spirit often brings verses to mind that we have previously memorized or meditated upon.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 7

Our request for wisdom is one God responds to with a generous amount of wisdom. He will not berate us for our lack of insight, but will respond to our need. However, James warns us about wavering between faith and

doubt in making such a request. The Lord will not respond favorably to any double-mindedness on our part that wavers between trust and disbelief.

THE PERSPECTIVE OF WISDOM

Finally, read James 1:9-11, and think about these ideas in the text:

- James then told his brothers and sisters in the Lord that, though they are lowly in the world, they should exalt in Christ's exaltation.

- Meanwhile, the Lord will humble the wealthy, who will pass away like the flowers among the grass.

- For the sun rises and scorches

decisions and provides the needed perspective so we can respond with joy to our afflictions rather than despair.

But how do we obtain such wisdom? James tells us to ask the Lord for His guidance. When we do, we have God's promise that He will "generously" provide us with such wisdom without demeaning us for our lack of it (vs. 5). He graciously provides the understanding we require for our dilemma.

In doing so, the Lord most often uses Scripture to give us the insight we need. God's Word provides the way for the Holy Spirit both to teach and guide us when we do not know which way to go. Nothing prevents this flow of wisdom to our hearts unless we waiver in our faith when asking the Lord for it.

In verse 6, James warns that we "must believe and not doubt" when we ask for wisdom. He portrays the one who hesitates in trusting God as "double-minded" (vs. 8), one who cannot decide between trusting and doubting Him.

Like the waves of the sea, this person shifts between confidence in his plea for wisdom and doubting the Lord's promise to provide it. One moment this person exudes faith, but in the next, distrust in God's provision of understanding.

James says this skeptic "should not expect to receive anything from the Lord" (vs. 7). If our focus rests solely on the sea raging about us as in the case of those who doubt, we should not expect that God will guide us through His Holy Spirit.

6. Why do we need wisdom in the midst of our trials? How does God provide it?

7. What does James say about God's willingness to give us such insight in our circumstances?

The Perspective of Wisdom

James 1:9 -11, KJV

9 Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:

10 But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall

James 1:9-11, NIV

⁹Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. ¹⁰But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a

BIBLE EXTRA

Double-mindedness

The word for "double-mindedness" (vs. 8) in the Greek literally means "double souled." It's as if this person possesses two personalities in constant conflict with each other. One side focuses solely on the things of this world while the other clings to faith in the Lord when the way forward is clouded.

This inward struggle leads to a lack of confidence or trust in God, causing this person to vacillate between faith and doubt in his or her prayers. The consequence of such a lack of belief is unanswered prayers for guidance in the midst of trials.

the plants, and the flowers will wither and lose their beauty, and in the same way the rich will perish even as they are engaged in their business.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 8

For both the rich and poor

believer, it's eternity that matters, not their current circumstances. For the lowly Christian, their position can be a cause for pride because of who they are in Christ and the wonders of heaven that awaits them. On the other hand, James calls upon the wealthy to recognize

the fleeting nature of their riches. Both their wealth and the pursuit of it will soon disappear. However, like the poor, they can focus on a glorious eternity they will share with all believers.

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KJV

pass away.

11 For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.

It might seem as though James changed subjects in verse 9; however, a closer look reveals he's still referring to our need for wisdom in the midst of trials.

He first addresses "believers in humble circumstances" (vs. 9) who are not only poor financially, but also weak and of little value in the eyes of those around them. But the Lord sees them much differently, a way in which they can even "take pride."

They are God's dear children and as such possess eternal life. Someday the Lord will raise them up with imperishable bodies with which they will forever enjoy the wonders of heaven.

James offers the opposite advice for rich Christians, those who do not need to work for a living. He tells them to "take pride in their humiliation" (vs. 10). This warning stems from the danger they face in regarding their earthly affluence as permanent. In reality, their wealth, including their pursuit of it, is no more lasting than a "wild flower" whose bud quickly disappears in the scorching heat.

James tells both poor and the rich believers to look at their lives through the perspective of eternity. The lowly Christian rejoices in the realization that their circumstances are temporary; they will someday enjoy the many and varied blessings of eternity. The rich, on the other hand, must also learn to recognize the fleeting nature of their status and to value eternal treasures above their fleeting prosperity.

Both the rich and the poor will stand before the Lord someday when faithfulness to the Lord will matter so much more than their current circumstances.

8. *How is the perspective of wisdom the same for both the lowly and the rich believer?*

NIV

wild flower. ¹¹For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.

BIBLE EXTRA

Are the Rich Believers?

Because the text does not specifically designate the rich person (vs. 10) as a believer, some assume he or she is not. James takes a rather negative view of the rich in other places (2:1-8; 5:1-6), which leaves the matter in doubt in these contexts.

However, in James 1:9-11 it's more likely the rich person is a believer. Since James designated the "lowly" as a Christian, it's natural to assume the rich is also one. The parallel sentence structure supports this conclusion as well. Both poor and rich Christians benefit from the perspective of spiritual wisdom that fits with their situations, letting them know that their current circumstances are not permanent.

WINDOW ON THE WORD

The Twelve Tribes of Israel

Although "the twelve tribes" (Jas. 1:1) of Israel can be a generic phrase that refers to all Jewish people, it does have a specific reference. The twelve tribes refers to the twelve sons of Jacob, whom God named "Israel." However, while Israel (Jacob) had twelve sons, the inheritance of the land of Israel included only ten of Jacob's sons—Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin.

Levi was also one of Jacob's sons but was not included in the partitioning of the land of Israel. Instead, it was the priestly tribe—from which the most notable descendant was Moses, and the Levites resided in divinely designated areas among the tribes. The other two tribes were the sons of Joseph—Ephraim and Manasseh, whose mother was an Egyptian.

Bible Application 3

Examine how God imparts His wisdom

This step encourages class members to talk about the spiritual insights God has given them during times of adversity in their lives. Allow students to select the activity they would like to do. If possible, photocopy this page, cut out the boxes, and give instructions to each group. Give hymnals or songbooks to the group choosing a song. Make copies of the handout from the Resource Kit for the group using it.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

• Discussion Group

Read “The Darkest Valley” and answer **Questions 9, 10, and 11** in the student book. Studying Scripture, regular prayer and devotions, and fellowshiping with other Christians help us avoid being shallow Christians. Over the years, we invariably will experience challenges to our faith, and each time we remain faithful, we become wiser and more mature in that faith. Sadly, some people lose faith at each testing and do not become mature. Eventually, they either draw away from other Christians or become a useless fixture in the church.

• Songs of God’s Wisdom

Use hymnals, Christian songbooks, or smartphones to select a song or hymn that expresses the awesomeness of God’s wisdom such as “The Perfect Wisdom of Our God” and “Thine, Lord, Is Wisdom, Thine Alone.” Discuss briefly what each song says about God and wisdom.

• Handout: ‘Finish the Scripture’

Your answers may be deeply personal, so you may work individually, and only have volunteers share their answers with the rest of the group after they have completed the exercises on the sheet.



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The Darkest Valley

“The ultimate test of faith is not how loudly you praise God in happy times,” Christian pastor and author Rick Warren remarked, “but how deeply you trust Him in dark times.” In other words, it’s not difficult to be faithful to Christ when life is going well. When life is beset with adversities, however, that’s when our faith in Jesus either shines or fades in the darkness.

Fans of a sports team illustrate this reality. A loyal fan follows and supports whether their team is winning or losing, but a casual fan follows and cheers only when their team is winning. These kinds of fans are called “bandwagon” fans, and sadly, there are too many of these people who are dedicated to Christ only when their lives are “winning.”

For the faithful followers of Christ there is both purpose and blessing for the trials that challenge their faith in Jesus: God is transforming their character and their minds by making them more and more like Jesus. In this way, God blesses them with His wisdom in the process.

Moreover, the age of a Christian does not determine the spiritual maturity of that Christian. A slab of iron can lay in the field for decades, but unless it is forged in fire and pounded into shape, it has little value. Likewise, unless a believer in Christ faithfully perseveres through the crucible of life and is formed into the image of Christ, he or she will gain little wisdom from God.

Therefore, as James said to his audience, let us rejoice during our trials for, as King David said, the Lord is there with us even in the hardest moments of our lives: “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (Ps. 23:4).

9. How do you avoid being a “bandwagon” Christian?

10. True or false: the longer a person is a Christian, the more likely that believer is becoming spiritually mature. Explain your answer.

11. When have you felt the Lord’s presence in a dark valley?

4 Life Response

Place your trust in God in any difficult situation
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The letter of James would have been a tremendous encouragement to Christians in the early church. They faced trials and tribulations most every day as they tried to honor the Lord in a world that constantly tried to pull them away from Him.

For this step, have students read

“All Glory to the Only Wise God” in *Comprehensive Bible Study*. They may want to pray singly or in the small groups that they were in at the beginning of the class so they can share their hardships or the hardship of someone close to them with others and ask for their prayers as well. Finally, encourage them to express their gratitude to God for teaching them to be more like Christ, particularly when their faith in Him is being tested.

You may want to end with a closing prayer, thanking God for the wisdom He gives us as we experience hardships and adversities so we can become mature Christians, full of His wisdom and joy. Or, you may want to end by singing along with or just watching the video of the song “The Perfect Wisdom of Our God.” You can find the video and the lyrics online.

When the students are dismissed, distribute copies of this week’s *Power for Living*. Send *Lesson Leaflet* to people who could not be with you today.

Before next week, read James 1:19-27. Have students think about how they would finish the sentence, “I always obey. . . .”

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All Glory to the Only Wise God

The Christians to whom James wrote were likely being persecuted for their new faith both by other Jews and the Roman government. While we might not be risking our lives as those Christians did, we still need to rely on the Lord to guide us, and at times carry us, through trying circumstances. Then, we praise Him for what He has done, saying along with the apostle Paul, “to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen” (Rom. 16:27).

► *Take this opportunity to acknowledge your need for God during an adversity you or someone close to you are having. Ask Him to increase your faith at this time and give you wisdom in decision making. Thank Him for His power to help you through it and praise Him for being with you in all circumstances.*

KEY VERSE

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

—James 1:5, KJV

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

— James 1:5, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

Week of August 3 through August 9

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Leviticus 19:13-18—Have Impartial Relationships with One Another.
- Tues.** 2 Thessalonians 1:3-5, 11-12—Praised for Steadfast Faith in Persecution.
- Wed.** Luke 6:20-26—The Poor Blessed; the Rich Criticized.
- Thurs.** 1 Peter 3:13-18—Suffering for Doing the Right Thing.
- Fri.** 1 Corinthians 1:26-31—God Chooses the Foolish, Weak, and Lowly.
- Sat.** James 2:1-7—Treat the Rich and Poor Impartially.
- Sun.** James 1:19-27—The Wise Hear and Do Good.