

Lesson Overview

1 Life Need:

Discuss how God's wisdom anchors our service to Him.

2 Bible Learning:

Study James's teaching on obeying Scripture.

Suggested Material:

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

3 Bible Application:

Consider the necessity to serve others for Christ.

Suggested Material:

- *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit:*
Reproducible sheet—The Word
in Actions

4 Life Response:

Be merciful to those in need.



Hearing and Doing the Word

God's Word—The Scriptures paint a picture of the wise as those who put the Bible into shoe leather. They hear what the Scriptures say, then allow the Holy Spirit to live it out in their lives. Those who walk in wisdom see God's Word as a daily guide with practical, divine directions for their personal lives.

The Conversation—Wise people listen more than they talk because they value what other people say. They listen to other people, assuring them their thoughts and ideas are worthwhile. Even if they disagree, wise people patiently allow others to make their point instead of jumping to an angry conclusion or refusing to listen.

The Obedience—Wise people humbly open their minds and hearts to the Lord's teaching. They hear, receive, and commit to follow God's Word. They look in a mirror and remember what they see. They don't walk away and forget 10 minutes later what they look like. Those who claim to study God's Word which offers direction about living an abundant life, but shrug off or can't remember what it says, continue to wander and miss what God is telling them. The heavenly Father is working on transforming His children into the image of Christ. Church services and Bible studies should not involve merely collecting facts and figures, but be a place for a spiritual makeover (Rom. 12:1-2).

The Evidence—Growing Christians who are obedient to God's Word have the ability to control their tongues. They say things to others that build up, not tear down. They also care for and visit those who are downtrodden—for example, widows and orphans. In biblical days, widows and orphans stood out as desperately in need. Today, many are still in need along with others who society has forgotten or ignored. James challenged the believer to observe the world's methods and systems, in comparison to what God's Word says. It is always in one's best interest to go the biblical way.

AS YOUR STUDENTS ARRIVE

Before class begins, write on a board or sheet of newsprint these words: “I always obey....” Ask students to finish that sentence, but to be careful what they say. If they say, “God,” do they always obey

Him? Can they truthfully say, “traffic laws” or “the Ten Commandments” or “my spouse”? Introduce the lesson by letting the class know that this week’s lesson focuses on the importance of being obedient to Scripture by demonstrating their faith in Christ

through works of compassion and instruction.

Link to Last Week: Allow students to share any praises they have for God’s help through adversity this past week.

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Hearing and Doing the Word

A Present-Day Illustration

You go to Damon’s church?” asked the receptionist. Nathaniel was waiting on his friend and church member, Damon. The two had arranged to get lunch together.

Nathaniel arrived about 30 minutes early, and he was enjoying visiting with the receptionist, Tiana. However, the mention of Damon’s name brought a polite but reserved, mildly hostile response.

In their conversation, Nathaniel discovered how long Tiana had worked for the company, her challenges of commuting, and her children’s names and ages. He also learned that Tiana was taking night classes to finish her bachelor’s and had been doing some reading on her lunch break.

“So, has Damon invited you to our church?” asked Nathaniel. “I don’t know if you have a church home.”

“He’s invited me,” Tiana answered, “but I don’t think I’ll come. Do you know about all his speeding tickets and the bar fight he was in last week? And you should see how he treats people in this office. He talks about following Jesus, but I don’t listen to what people say. I watch what they do.”

“Okay,” Nathaniel said nervously.

When he saw Damon come into the lobby, he rose to greet his friend.

Tiana turned her back to the two men and started busying herself on her computer.

- 1. Why is it wise to understand and obey the laws that govern us?**
- 2. How often do you ask for God’s wisdom to guide you in what you do for Him?**
- 3. How does prayer keep us wise to what God wants us to do?**

LESSON FOCUS: Wisdom requires acting on the Word.

1 Life Need

Discuss how God’s wisdom anchors our service to Him

How we serve Christ reflects how dynamic our faith in Him is. Read the anecdote in the student book, then ask your students to form small groups to discuss

Questions 1, 2, and 3.

Question 1 reminds us that people are watching our everyday witness. If we are not obedient citizens, what does that say about our obedience to God? Also, obedience to the laws around us (traffic laws, civil codes, etc.) keeps us out of trouble and keeps us focused on doing what is right for everyone. When we ignore the laws, we often put many people in jeopardy. We regularly hear such admonitions as “Don’t drink and drive” or “Wear a helmet” or “Don’t text and drive,” but we often ignore that wisdom—much as we often ignore God’s wisdom.

For Question 2, answers will vary, but generally we may say we don’t ask God enough for guidance. Consulting Him is important because He knows what our skills are and how best to use them. He also wants to show us people and places for service.

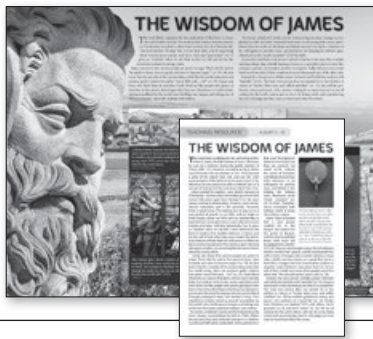
For Question 3, note the many ways prayer helps us tap into God’s wisdom. Examples include helping us submit to His Spirit, illuminating the meaning of relevant Scripture passages, revealing the needs of others, and guiding us on how to meet those needs. Of course, our prayers must be sincere and humble in order for the Lord to guide us with His wisdom.

Bible Learning 2

Study James's teaching on obeying Scripture

According to James, the Word of God must not only affect a Christian's thoughts but also affect a Christian's behavior. We must not only place our trust in what Jesus has done for us according to the Gospel, but we must also be merciful toward others according to the teachings of our Savior and Lord. Indeed, how we treat others actually reflects what we believe.

On the poster sheet, read the third paragraph and point out the photo on the poster of an Egyptian mirror.



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



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A Hearer of the Word

James 1:19-21, KJV

19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

James 1:19-21, NIV

¹⁹My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. ²¹Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

The recipients of the letter of James did not possess individual copies of the Bible as we do today; most of the New Testament was not yet written, and very few believers had access to scrolls of the Old Testament. Instead, they received God's Word orally as their leaders read it to them or instructed them in it. It's within this public worship setting that we understand the commands of verse 19. Here James instructs his audience to carefully receive God's Word while being "slow to speak and slow to become angry." He commands them to carefully consider the words and let them soak into their minds and hearts before offering a hasty or unthinking opinion.

In the middle of a conversation, it is natural to begin forming our response to the other person even while he or she is still talking. Consequently, we tune out what this person is really saying. Being quick to listen and slow to speak takes concentrated effort, but in the long run pays great dividends in relationships. Every once in a while we talk with someone who is very good at active listening. We usually walk away from such conversations feeling like we've been understood.

Anger is a volatile emotion. Later in the letter, James addresses the presence of quarreling and fighting among these believers (4:1). Perhaps these spirited arguments spilled over into their meetings where they used the words of Scripture to judge

BIBLE EXTRA

Works and Salvation

Because of James's emphasis on works, a casual reader might get the impression that works contribute to our salvation in some way. This could not be further from the truth. Our behavior, including our response to God's Word, shows the genuineness of our faith, which comes solely by grace apart from any works on our part (Eph. 2:8-9).

Our new birth results from the work of the Holy Spirit inside us as He verifies the truth of the Gospel message, washes away our sins, and regenerates us (Titus 3:4-7). This is what James talks about in 1:18, "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created." We receive our new birth through God's Word and from that point become "doers of the word" (1:22, KJV).

Works represent our response as redeemed saints to what the Lord teaches us in His Word. This is James's emphasis in this week's text.

This does not mean that as believers we never sin or wander away from the Lord. When that does happen, however, the truths of Scripture at some point draw us back to a closer walk with our Savior.

A HEARER OF THE WORD

Read James 1:19-21, and highlight these key points as you discuss the Scripture:

- Soon after his initial encouragement to the readers of his letter, James urged them to behave

according to Christian principles.

- He told his brothers and sisters in Christ to listen attentively to others while tempering what they had to say and restraining any anger they might feel.

- He also noted that godly righteousness will not result

from being angry.

- Therefore, followers of Christ must do away with immorality and the evil that pervades the world.

- Instead, they must submit to the Word of God, which He has placed in them and which redeems them.

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or attack others. James cautioned that such self-centered wrath did “not produce the righteousness that God desires” (vs. 20). While their anger blocked the message of God’s truth, so did their “moral filth” and evil behavior (vs. 21). Wickedness had closed their ears so they could not hear the words of Scripture. They had become experts at filtering out what they did not want to hear versus accepting its message for them.

A humble reception of God’s Word displays the reality of our faith that came to life through the word “planted” in us at the time of our new birth. While this does not mean we never resist its truth or go astray, it shows that the message powerful enough to save us in the past is able to break through the sinful barriers we put up and bring needed change to our lives.

4. How does anger create an atmosphere that dishonors the Lord?

5. What are the attitudes that lead to a humble reception of God’s Word?

A Doer of the Word

James 1:22-25, KJV

22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

James 1:22-25, NIV

²²Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

²³Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 4

It’s clear from both the Old and New Testaments that the Lord desires unity and harmony among His people. When anger erupts during a gathering of believers, it leads to hurt feelings, intensifies indignation with others, and makes it impossible for a heartfelt hearing of God’s Word. In the setting of early believers listening to the reading of God’s Word, the disharmony would block any lasting reception of it. They would remember the fights, not the message of Scripture.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 5

James lists several attitudes that help ensure a humble reception of the Word. Besides the elimination of anger, he asks that believers listen carefully to what

BIBLE EXTRA

Hindrances

In verse 21, James mentions two hindrances to a humble receiving or acceptance of God’s Word. According to William Barclay, the Greek word for “moral filth” has a medical connotation of wax in the ear. Sin in one’s life prevents us from hearing God’s Word similar to how wax in our ears keeps us from hearing others. Such “filth” shuts out the message of Scripture.

The word “evil” refers to wickedness, which James describes as widespread in his day. This term also denotes a desire to hurt others. Perhaps this is why James warned them about angry reactions to the reading of God’s Word that in some instances stemmed from this evil intent.

they hear and not be hasty to add their own opinions to it. The quality of humility denotes a teachable spirit and willingness to quietly ponder the Word and its meaning.

A DOER OF THE WORD

Now read James 1:22-25, and discuss these summary statements:

- James exhorted his readers to obey Scripture not just by listening to God's Word but also by acting on His Word.
- Those who only hear the Word are deceiving themselves, like those who look at themselves in the mirror and then leave and forget what they truly are.
- Those, however, who continually gaze intently at God's law, which is perfect and liberating, will remember it when they do what it teaches.
- Consequently, the Lord will bless them for what they do in His name.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 6

Just like the mirror, God's Word reveals issues in our lives that need fixing. Perhaps it sheds light on a sin or convicts us of a relationship that requires our attention. James tells us to not be like the person looking into the mirror who walks away without addressing the issue it revealed. Rather, he tells us to take action based on what Scripture tells us.

A GENUINE FAITH

While reading James 1:26-27, note these important points in your class discussion:

- James's indictment on those who pride themselves on being religious but who have no control over what they say to others is frank and severe.
- Indeed, he states that they deceive themselves when, in fact, their religion is utterly without merit.
- On the other hand, God blesses those whose religion is genuine and blameless.

- Those followers of Christ take care of the needs of orphans and widows who are suffering adversities, while they avoid being entangled in the sins of the world.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 7

In these verses, James tells us that a hypocritical attitude reveals itself through its treatment of others. If those who appear to be religious cannot control their tongue

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A living faith does not end at humbly listening to God's Word—it puts it into practice. While hearing God's truth in their corporate gatherings was great, James desired that they incorporate it into their everyday lives.

In essence, he tells them to resist patting themselves on the back for quietly receiving the Word. Hearing without doing indicates self-deception since listening to it brings the responsibility of allowing it to change one's behavior.

James compares the act of hearing without action to a man who looks into a mirror and does nothing in response. This man carefully studies his reflection, sees something that requires his attention, but goes his way without fixing the problem. Despite careful scrutiny, he fails to take any action to resolve the issue. This is precisely the opposite of the response the Lord desires from us. The Lord never commends mere head knowledge of the truth without any action on our part in response to it. Rather, our faith brings us to God's Word, where our active response to it displays the genuineness of our walk with the Lord.

James's reference to the "perfect law that gives freedom" in verse 25 includes the whole of Christian teaching. While the word "law" no doubt reminded his Jewish readers of the Old Testament, "freedom" pointed them to the revelation of the Gospel that came through Jesus. This message frees believers from the bondage of sin and makes them a part of the family of God.

6. What does the mirror illustration tell us about our need to be doers of the Word and not simply listen to it?

A Genuine Faith

James 1:26-27, KJV

26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

James 1:26-27, NIV

²⁶Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. ²⁷Religion that God our Father accepts as pure

but curse and lash out at others, they reveal a lack of genuineness regarding their faith. Although they may even give to the poor, they lack compassion for those who are truly needy.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 8

Another indicator of a genuine faith is that of keeping oneself unstained by the world. By “world,” James refers to the pervasive system of evil around us that opposes

God and His Word. Those who keep themselves “polluted” by it live by the standards of God’s Word rather than the values or the morals of the world around them.

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KJV

27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

NIV

and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Starting in verse 26, James offers three tests for “those who consider themselves religious.” Those who say, “I obey the Word” but fail the tests are hypocritical. The first test is the tongue test. Those who mistreat others through slander or cursing fail the exam. He characterizes their religion as “worthless.”

In chapter 3, James scolds these believers for allowing both “praising and cursing” to come out of their mouths (vss. 9-11). His frequent reference to their lack of controlling their tongue highlights this matter as an ongoing problem in their midst.

Christians who routinely berate and curse others deceive themselves regarding the sincerity of their faith. Like the thrusts of a sword, their words cause damage in the Body of Christ (Prov. 12:18) and reveal the emptiness of their walk with Jesus.

In verse 27, James gives the second test: the test of practical love. “Orphans and widows” represented the neediest classes of people in the first century. They were also the ones who could least repay the giver with money. Showing compassion to them through visits and financial help is one way that would show the value of one’s walk with the Lord.

The third test involves practical holiness, which is remaining separate from the world. James is not saying we must avoid its people, but that we remain apart from the world system that celebrates evil and opposes God’s standard of righteousness revealed in Scripture. A “pure” faith is one that resists the allure of the world to conform to its values versus those found in God’s Word and ministers to others out of a pure heart and mind focused on Christ.

7. How does a hypocritical faith reveal itself?

8. What does it mean to keep oneself from becoming “polluted by the world”?

BIBLE EXTRA

Orphans and Widows

In Scripture, widows, orphans, and aliens are usually depicted as the most helpless among the people. Often they had none but God as their patron and protector (see Exod. 22:22-23; Deut. 10:18; Isa. 1:17).

In Bible times, there was no social safety net to catch the dispossessed and homeless when their source of support was suddenly gone. Widows, orphans, and foreigners were often reduced to begging if there was no friend, relative, or patron to care for them (see Gen. 38:11; Ruth 1:8).

The psalmist, however, reminded widows and orphans that God cared for them (see Ps. 146:9). And the Law made provision for widows to glean grapes, grain, and olives out of the bounty of others (see Deut. 14:28-29; 24:19-21). In the end, according to Malachi 3:5, God’s judgment will include those “who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice.”

BIBLE EXTRA

Mirrors of the First Century

The mirrors of James’s day were not made of glass; these came centuries later. The mirrors of James’s day were a highly polished metal such as bronze, silver, or even gold. Although far inferior to the mirrors of today, they could allow one to see a problem such as a smudge or something with the hair that needed attention. The man in James’s illustration, and James does use the word here for the male gender, was able to spot an issue that needed his attention, but walked away without fixing it.

Bible Application 3

Consider the necessity to serve others for Christ

This step helps students understand why the Lord commands His followers to express their faith in Him by compassionately serving those in need. If possible, photocopy this page, cut out the boxes, and give instructions to each group. Make copies of the handout from the Resource Kit for the group using it.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

• Discussion Group

Read “Do Good to Others” and answer **Questions 9, 10, and 11** in the student book. We should not sin, but we should also be doing good deeds. One never can be at the exclusion of the other, and, indeed, one may help the other. Public opportunities to do good may happen less frequently than private opportunities, yet both are vitally important for our spiritual health and growth, as well as that of God’s kingdom. Churches tend to meet the needs within their walls first; perhaps you can discuss what more can be done outside your church.

• A Mural of a Serving Christian

Using a large sheet of paper and felt pens work as a team to draw a picture of a Christian wisely acting out his or her faith. Place the Christian in the center while drawing lines outward from the Christian. At the end of the lines, portray the Christian carrying out God’s Word such as visiting and providing for the needs of a widow, volunteering at a soup kitchen, and reading Scripture to a senior at a nursing home. When finished, display the drawing on the class wall, and explain to the class how the drawing expresses the Lesson Focus.

• Handout: ‘The Word in Actions’

Read the stories on this handout, then discuss the answers to the questions with the group. What attitudes do we have when we know the Lord is asking us to help someone?



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Do Good to Others

When people think about religion, many think that it comprises rules of what not to do. And to some extent that is true: We shouldn’t murder, or commit adultery, or steal, or idolize false gods. But that is only one side of the Christian religion; the other side is what we should do.

Confucius addressed one side by saying that we should not do to others what we would not have them do to ourselves. Centuries later, Jesus taught the other side by telling His followers to do to others what they would want done to them. While the former teaching is passive resistance to unethical behavior, the latter teaching is proactive in doing good.

What are the things that we should do as Christians? While our good deeds should reflect what following Christ is all about, our actions should not always be visible for many to see. Certainly, we should build homes for the poor, volunteer for short-term missions abroad, or be involved in any number of group projects. Christian service, however, should also include what is done behind the scenes such as opening our homes to missionaries on leave, writing a generous check for those who are working hard at a low-paying job, or other private deeds that aid those in need.

Moreover, what we do in service for the Lord should not be restricted to what we do within our congregation. Again, the Bible insists that we take care of one another as sisters and brothers in Christ. Nevertheless, like Jesus, we should always reach out to those outside of our church. And reaching means both telling others about Christ *and* touching their lives with compassionate deeds.

9. *What is more important to you: not sinning, or doing good deeds for others? Briefly explain your answer.*

10. *Why are both the public and private things you do in service for Christ important to your walk with the Lord?*

11. *In what ways can your church balance what good is done outside the church with the good done within the church?*

4 Life Response

Be merciful to those in need
.....

Opportunities to help others are endless; some are quite evident

to us, while others are beyond our visibility. That's why we need God's wisdom both to know which needs the Lord wants us to meet and to know how to discover what needs are not readily knowable to us. Nevertheless, because both require careful thought, we should not allow

our selfish nature to overrule any action we should take.

Ask students to read "To Serve Others" in *Comprehensive Bible Study* and give them an index card. They may fill out the card alone or in talking with others in their small group from Step 1. You may also want to think of something the entire class could do for other people and make this a group project: everyone send cards to church members who are unable to attend any more because of health problems, or volunteer to clean up trash around a local school, or gather food to take to a local food bank.

End the lesson with a closing prayer: "Thank You, Lord, for the many ways You have guided us in helping people both within and outside our church and for the wisdom You give us to see others' needs. We pray for the people You will lead us to, and we pray that we can better serve You for the sake of Your kingdom and the glory of Your Son. We truly praise You that the hallmark of Your holiness is Your compassion for everyone in the world. In Jesus' sacred name we pray, amen."

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 2:14-26. Ask your students to think about the signs that show something is dead—for instance, how do you know if a battery is dead?

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To Serve Others

James told his readers that our actions reflect how obedient we are to God's Word—specifically, how devotedly we follow Jesus' teachings to minister to people both within and outside the church. Moreover, the wisdom that God nurtures within us cannot thrive without putting our faith into action through service to others.

► Write "A Doer of the Word" at the top of an index card, then write one or two ways you might serve others this coming week. Put the card somewhere you will see it, and add to your list as the Holy Spirit leads you to more opportunities.

KEY VERSE

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.
—James 1:22, KJV

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.
—James 1:22, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of August 10 through August 16

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

- Mon.** Genesis 22:9-19—Abraham Blessed for Fearing God.
- Tues.** Joshua 2:1-7—Spies Saved by Rahab's Quick Actions.
- Wed.** Matthew 18:23-35—Forgive Others as God Forgave You.
- Thurs.** Titus 3:1-2, 8-11—Devoted to Good Works, Avoiding Distractions.
- Fri.** Deuteronomy 6:4-9—Works Guided by Loyalty to God.
- Sat.** James 2:8-13—Receive God's Mercy by Showing Mercy.
- Sun.** James 2:14-26—Faith and Works Must Go Together.