



Lesson Overview

1 Life Need:

Discuss what it means to believe in something.

2 Bible Learning:

Examine the scriptural teaching concerning an active faith.

Suggested Material:

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

3 Bible Application:

Understand that a fruitful faith is a living faith.

Suggested Material:

- *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit:*
Reproducible sheet—Describing a Living Faith

4 Life Response:

Show your living faith through your actions.

Faith without Works Is Dead

A Visible Commitment—Those who have a saving Christian faith are being transformed by the Holy Spirit. They are thinking and acting like Jesus. James considered it impossible to declare saving faith in Christ, but then publicly behave in a totally opposite way. The new Jewish believers had to change their assumptions within their culture once they became Christians. Their emphasis was no longer obeying rules to please God. James said, if you are a follower of Christ, your behavior will reflect your commitment.

An Example—James offered an example of authentic, saving faith versus superficial faith. If an impoverished person entered a Christian gathering hungry and wearing raggedy clothing, but the congregation ignored the person's need, that's an example of dead faith. It shows this church has no Christlike qualities if they wave the person off saying, "Hope you get your needs meet somewhere, God bless you," and refuse to give actual help.

The Demons Know—James continued to speak about superficial faith by pointing to the demonic host. They recognize who Jesus is, and they can say they believe in God, yet this acknowledgment does not save them. Saving faith is shown through godly, loving actions.

Two Faith Examples—James used two Old Testament characters to give an example of living faith. Abraham listened to God's instructions and took measures to sacrifice Isaac. He knew this was the son identified in God's covenant, but he believed the heavenly Father would somehow work this all out. The Lord did after seeing great faith on the part of Abraham. The prostitute Rahab in Jericho believed the report about the power of Israel's God. She put her faith into action by hiding the Israelite spies and helping them escape.

Faith Lived Out—A churchgoer who claims to follow Christ but simply mouths prayers and Bible verses without a sincere commitment has not demonstrated saving faith. He or she cannot say with the apostle Paul, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20, KJV).

AS YOUR STUDENTS ARRIVE

As students enter the classroom, ask them to mention a sign that indicates that something is dead. Examples might include the lack of breathing from a living being, no electricity coming from a battery, the

absence of chlorophyll in a plant, and no gas in a motor boat that is dead in the water. Introduce the lesson by letting the class know that this week's lesson focuses on what makes a living faith.

Link to Last Week: Have a time to share how some of your students were "doers of the Word" this past week.

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Faith without Works Is Dead

A Present-Day Illustration

Henrietta?" Henrietta turned and saw Shandrice, a sister of one of her friends.

"What are you doing here? I didn't know you were in the medical field," said Shandrice. Henrietta was attending the American Red Cross's first aid and certification class.

"I'm preparing for my home healthcare agency business when I retire," said Henrietta.

"Home healthcare? You can never have too many good ones," said a woman standing nearby.

"We took care of my grandmother at home until she died three years ago," said Henrietta. "I saw how much of a need there is in providing good services to caregivers. So, I prayed about it, and felt I had a green light."

"I admire you," said the woman who was standing nearby. "So many people say they want to do something, but stop short of actually acting."

"I have my business plan," offered Henrietta. "I have secured office space in a nice location, and made contacts for my administrative staff, registered nurses, and certified assistants."

"Would you like the name of another good certified nursing assistant?" smiled Shandrice.

"I would love to consider you," said Henrietta.

"Great. I'm looking for a good employer," said Shandrice. "I wish I could have faith like yours. It's so hard for me to believe sometimes."

"God will do great things for you," replied Henrietta. "Have faith in Him—and step out!"

1. *How do you prove you truly believe in something?*
2. *What does believing in Jesus mean to you?*
3. *How would other people know that you believe in Jesus?*

LESSON FOCUS: The actions of the wise flow out of a living faith.

1 Life Need

Discuss what it means to believe in something

Certainly, God's grace is entirely the outcome of what Jesus did for us in His crucifixion and resurrection. In no way do we merit God's mercy. Nevertheless, our faith in Christ demands that we show His compassion to others. Read the anecdote in the student book, then form small groups to discuss **Questions 1, 2, and 3.**

Question 1 provides class members the opportunity to talk about how you show you believe in something such as an idea or principle. One example is believing that an airplane can fly you somewhere you want to go, but getting on the plane proves the depth of your belief. Therefore, truly believing in something is more than a mental exercise, for it motivates us to act on what we believe.

For Question 2, students will see that saying, "I believe in Jesus" should mean more than just "I believe Jesus lived." Anyone can make that statement. Believing in Him should lead us to do things He told us to do when we say we believe in Him.

Question 3 should lead to examples that show belief such as visiting people in prison, providing food and clothing for those who were victims of a natural disaster, and repairing a problem in the home of an elderly widow. Believing might also include studying God's Word, praying for others, and worshiping with other Christians. It's manifesting Christ's love to those who need it.

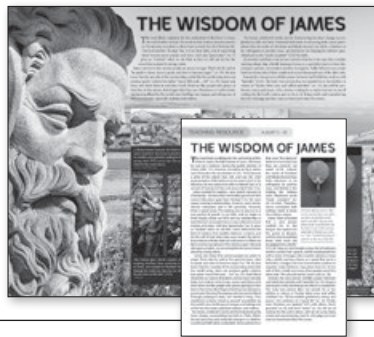
Bible Learning 2

Examine the scriptural teaching concerning an active faith

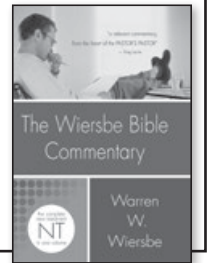
On the poster sheet, read the fourth paragraph and note the photo of the Roman carving.

A TRUE FAITH RESPONDS

Read James 2:14-17, and highlight these key points as you discuss the Scripture:



You can find more commentary on the Scripture passage on pp. 863-866 in *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament*.



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BIBLE EXTRA

Faith or Works?

Do James and the apostle Paul contradict each other on the matter of salvation by grace through faith? In Ephesians 2:8-9, Paul stressed that God saves us on the basis of grace “through faith” and stresses that it is “not by works, so that no one can boast.” In Romans 5:1, Paul states, “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” James, however, seems to add works to the basis of salvation: “Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (Jas. 2:17).

A careful look, however, at the context of each helps us understand the differing emphases. In his epistles, Paul wrote to establish the basis of a living and genuine faith apart from works. He also wrote to combat legalism in the churches he started, as some sought to make Jewish circumcision a requirement for eternal life. Paul looked at the initial reception of eternal life.

James, on the other hand, wrote to professing believers who claimed to possess faith, but whose behavior contradicted their assertion. They had issues controlling their language (1:26; 3:1-12); they quarreled and fought with each other and were friends with the world’s system of values (4:1-4). The rich among them mistreated their workers (5:1-5). James stressed the necessity of works because they show the validity of a genuine, saving faith.

A True Faith Responds

James 2:14-17, KJV

14 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

James 2:14-17, NIV

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Evidently, James had observed some people within the early churches who professed to be followers of Christ but whose faith rarely translated into action. James was quite blunt about these people; he stated that their faith was dead. Actually, through biblical examples, James tried to persuade his readers, some who might have held fallacious ideas about their faith, to alter their understanding and behavior about faith so that they would have a truly living faith in the Lord.

In verses 14-17, James describes a person who claims to be a follower of Jesus, yet fails to respond to the severest of needs. James does not deny the fact that God saves us by grace through faith alone, but questions the validity of a faith that does not respond to one in dire need of help. The immediate needs of the believer in verse 15 are severe. Without clothing for warmth and nourishment, this brother or sister in Christ is not likely to even survive.

The scenario continues with one of James’s readers offering a fine-sounding platitude without offering any assistance. Although fully aware of the urgent need, this professing believer wishes that someone else would fill the void and offer food

- James’s attention on what it means to have a living faith became further focused in his letter when he related a specific example of a faith that is without action.

- First, however, James asked a rhetorical question: How is it possible to have a truly authentic faith in

Christ without doing good deeds?

- James followed with an example to illustrate his point by noting how only charitable words will not feed or clothe someone who is destitute.

- Such a heartless faith is actually dead to God.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 4

James’s example of destitution demonstrates the urgency of the situation, one requiring an immediate response. Those seeing this need must at once step in to relieve the suffering and possibly save the life. The extreme nature of the situation further demonstrates the deadness of faith revealed in the religious-sounding platitude that simply wishes the person well but offers no real assistance.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 5

The response in verse 16 to the desperate situation reveals the deadness of this person’s faith, one that does not go beyond a profession of belief. As James asks, “what good is it?” The offering of well wishes without getting involved in meeting the needs in front of him or her points to a deadness of faith, one that neither helps the one in dire need nor is of any value to the one making the claim of faith.

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and clothing to the needy believer, but takes no action to relieve the suffering.

The question at the end of verse 16 emphasizes the deadness of the faith of one who does not step in to relieve the dire need of a fellow saint. His or her words amount to nothing more than a worthless smokescreen covering up a dead faith.

A true living faith responds to such a need because Christ has already redeemed that person and thus changed the person’s heart. The behavior of the professing Christian proved that his or her faith was never real.

4. Why do you think James uses such an extreme example of destitution in verse 15?

5. What does the response of the person in verse 16 demonstrate about his or her faith?

A True Faith Works

James 2:18-20, KJV

18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

James 2:18-20, NIV

¹⁸But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.”

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. ¹⁹You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

²⁰You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

In response to James’s questioning the reality of a faith that does not respond to the severest of needs, an objector appears in verse 18. This person asserts that beliefs and works are equally valid expressions of one’s faith; in other words, one can have correct beliefs without works. James does not dismiss the significance of possessing correct theology, but denies that one can have saving faith with no visible life change. The dissenter

BIBLE EXTRA

What Is Saving Faith?

Those who are born again possess saving faith. Saving faith may be defined as a voluntary change in a sinner’s mind that results in a turning to God with a corresponding turning away from sin. It includes a change of one’s view, feeling, and purpose in life. An exercise of faith involves the whole person—the mind, emotions, and will—and eventually one’s behavior.

With the mind one believes in God’s existence and in the teaching of Scripture (John 2:22-23). Emotions are connected to personal faith in Christ as the only one who can redeem from sin (Matt. 13:21; John 5:35; 8:30-31). And with the will one surrenders to Christ and trusts Him as Lord and Savior (Acts 16:31-33; Rev. 3:20). The natural consequence of saving faith is a lifestyle that actively promotes and demonstrates righteousness.

A TRUE FAITH WORKS

Now read James 2:18-20, and discuss these statements:

- Next, James contrasted a faith without works with a faith with works and how a Christian's good deeds actually indicate the authenticity of his or her faith.

- To those who assume that it is enough to just have faith, James stressed that even devils believe there is one God and tremble before Him.

- James called those people foolish for requiring proof that good deeds must accompany their faith.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 6

The objector in verse 18 claims that orthodox beliefs are equal to works in demonstrating the validity of a living faith. This person negates the importance of works by claiming he or she can have saving faith without them. In other words, as long as one adheres to the correct doctrines, that is enough to prove the validity of his or her faith.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 7

James points to the demons as evidence that correct beliefs are not enough to save. The demons believe in God's existence and are fully aware of His nature and power. However, such faith does not save them, even if they tremble at the thought of God's existence. In the end, a faith that never results in any change of behavior is "useless" and does not save the one claiming to have it.

A TRUE FAITH PASSES THE TEST

While reading James 2:21-26, note these important points in your class discussion:

- James used Abraham, the first patriarch of the Jewish people, to make his point.

- James said that their heavenly Father deemed Abraham righteous for offering his son,

Isaac, on the altar.

- In that historic moment, Abraham's faith and action were working together, and, in fact, his action made his faith complete.

- Because Abraham trusted God, he became God's dear friend.

- James then referred to another person from Scripture: Rahab the prostitute, who protected the Hebrew spies in Jericho. Her actions resulted from her faith in the God of Israel.

- James summed up his argument by stating that just as a body without a spirit is dead, so

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cannot prove the reality of faith by words without such a change in behavior. James, however, can point to his works as evidence that he is truly a "new creation" in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). His life validates the reality of his claim.

To illustrate his point, James points to the demons that possess an orthodox belief in the oneness of God. Not only that, but they shudder in fear whenever confronted with that reality. They demonstrate that good theology alone and a correct appraisal of God do not imply saving faith.

James dismisses the objector "foolish" since he fails to see "that faith without deeds is useless" or of any saving value (vs. 20). A genuine new birth leads to a change of behavior.

6. What is the contention of the objector to James's claim regarding the necessity of works?

7. How does James respond to the claim that correct beliefs are equal to a change in behavior in proving the reality of a living faith?

A True Faith Passes the Test

James 2:21-26, KJV

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

James 2:21-26, NIV

²¹Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²²You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. ²³And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. ²⁴You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

²⁵In the same way, was not

also a faith without works is dead.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 8

Apart from faith, we would not have a walk with the Lord. Through grace, God brings us to the point of saving faith where we become His

children. Once in God's family, we grow in our faith as we gain further spiritual maturity. That in turn leads to good works. Abraham displays this reality when his mature faith led to his obedience in sacrificing Isaac.

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KJV

25 Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?

26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

The Jewish recipients of this letter knew all about the faith of Abraham and his offering of Isaac (see Gen. 22). He obeyed God to the point of raising his knife before an angel of the Lord stopped him from killing his son. What is James telling us with this example? Is he saying that this was the moment of salvation for Abraham?

No, he is not. Verse 22 confirms this, as James points out "his faith and actions were working together." Abraham's obedience confirmed the reality of faith God recognized thirty years earlier (see Genesis 15:6). The offering of Isaac was not the beginning of his faith, but the passing of a severe test of it.

Taken out of context, some might use verse 24 to prove we are justified on the basis of our works. That, however, would contradict what James just said in verse 22 regarding faith and actions "working together" in the case of Abraham.

Rahab demonstrated her belief in God by hiding the Jewish spies that had entered Jericho (Josh. 2:8-13). She also showed her faith by asking for deliverance when Israel defeated Jericho. Both Abraham and Rahab displayed the reality of their faith through the actions each took.

James concluded by drawing an analogy between the body and spirit and faith and works. Any human body that no longer has a spirit, or what the Old Testament calls the "soul" (Hebrew, *nephesh*, lifebreath), is dead in the clinical sense. Faith without works is like a lifeless corpse. It is not until God breathes into our faith the "spirit" of "works," that it becomes truly alive.

8. How do faith and behavior work together in a vital walk with the Lord, as verse 22 suggests?

NIV

even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? ²⁶As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

BIBLE EXTRA

The Gospel

Although Paul and James emphasize differing aspects of Abraham's faith, they do not contradict each other in regard to the Gospel message. Paul emphasizes the moment "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Rom. 4:3; Gen. 15:6). The apostle stresses that works had nothing to do with the patriarch's initial profession of belief. He inherited God's righteousness solely by grace through faith.

James, on the other hand, looks at the outgrowth of Abraham's initial saving faith that led to his later obedience. His offering of Isaac revealed the reality of his saving faith, but was not the cause of his salvation.

In Ephesians 2:8-10, Paul gives us the essence of the saving message of the Gospel. No one can ever say that works merit any saving favor with the Lord. Once we are firmly in Christ, Paul states that "we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (vs. 10).

WINDOW ON THE WORD

Rahab, the Prostitute

James is not the only New Testament writer to mention Rahab; Matthew also refers to her as an ancestor of Jesus (see Matt. 1:5). In fact, she is one of five women indicated in Jesus' genealogy, ranging from women of questionable morals, such as Tamar and Bathsheba (referred to as one "who had been Uriah's wife"), to women of pristine character, such as Ruth and Mary.

Moreover, at least two of them were not of Hebrew ancestry; that is, Rahab was from the pagan city of Jericho while Ruth was a Moabite, a people whom Moses had cursed for their hostility toward Israel (see Deut. 23:3). Nevertheless, because of their faith in the God of Israel, the Lord blessed them, for Rahab became the mother of Boaz, the husband of Ruth, who became the great grandmother of King David, whose throne would reign eternally through Jesus.

Bible Application 3

Understand that a fruitful faith is a living faith

This step reminds students that God is not pleased with people who profess a belief in Christ but who do not respond to His call to help others. 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. Make copies of the handout from the Resource Kit for the group using it.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

• Discussion Group

Read “Withered or Fruitful” and answer **Questions 9, 10, 11, and 12** in the student book. Some people might think that it is enough to attend church services, occasionally pray, and fellowship with other Christians, but God demands so much more from us. The Lord desires that our belief in Him be active—an inactive faith withers and dies, resulting in a broken relationship with God. When God touches the lives of those people who need help through our service to Him, they are awakened to God’s goodness and mercy.

• Skit: The Quality of Faith

Write a script that relates the focus of this week’s Scripture lesson. Choose one member of your group to direct the skit, and cast the roles of a Christian who is content with just reading the Bible and attending church services, a Christian sister or brother who attends to the needs of others, and people who need help in some way. Read or perform the script before the class. Then, discuss why the Lord is pleased with the faith of the latter but not the former in this skit.

• Handout: ‘Describing a Living Faith’

Read the poems you write to the group when you are finished writing them and explain what you were trying to express. Also, ask your listeners what they took away from the poems and how the verses deepened their understanding of what God demands of their faith in Christ. You may also want to compile your poems (and add some more) to put in a booklet to give to family and friends.



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Withered or Fruitful?

One morning, on His way to Jerusalem from Bethany, Jesus observed a fig tree by the side of a road. The Lord was hungry, but He found no fruit on the tree, and so He cursed it. The tree then withered, which amazed His disciples (see Matt. 21:18-22; Mark 11:12-14, 20-25). An important question is why Jesus told the tree that it would never bear fruit again.

When read in context, this story links to Jesus’ cleansing the temple of the money changers and the dove sellers (Matt. 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17). What angered Jesus was not just the money changers’ predatory exchange rates for coins or that dove sellers were making an outlandish profit selling doves for sacrifices. What angered Him more was what was not going on in the temple. The most spiritual “fruit” in all of Israel should have been found in His Father’s house, the temple, where people came to repent of their sins, pray, and renew their relationship with God. What Jesus found instead was a noisy bazaar—lots of activity, but none of it worshipful or “fruitful.” The temple had become a business, not a place of worship. It was like a fig tree with lots of leaves, but no fruit. So, the Lord showed His followers that they must bear fruit for the kingdom of God lest they spiritually wither like the fig tree.

We too are called to be fruitful servants of the Lord. Bearing fruit is not only an indication of who we are but also of what we do. And just as Jesus was a perfect example of a fruit-bearing servant of God, so also we must humbly serve others by wisely caring for their needs. Truly, a genuine faith in Jesus is shown in our good works.

9. *Why does God want us to do more than believe in Him, go to church, and pray when we need something?*

10. *What is the Lord hungry to see in us?*

11. *When we do not match our beliefs with actions, what happens to our relationship with Him?*

12. *What miracles can occur when we exercise our faith in helping others who are in need?*

4 Life Response

Show your living faith through your actions
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Faith is like a fountain. If fresh, clean water flows from the fountain, it can provide life. We are like that fountain when we wisely act for the benefit of others, and the nourishment we provide is the compassion of our Lord in action. That is the message that James conveyed to

his readers, who had placed their trust in Christ. His desire was for all of us who read his letter to have a living faith that pleases our heavenly Father.

Ask your students to read “A Pledge to Do Good” in *Comprehensive Bible Study* and do the activity there. Some Scriptures they could select besides one from James 2 would be Matthew 25:35-36, Luke 6:38, Romans 12:13, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, or Hebrews 13:16.

End the lesson with a closing prayer. Ask God to give your students the wisdom to know how to be more obedient to His Word. Thank Him for providing them with the perfect example of Christ to emulate in knowing how to identify the needs of others and how to minister to those needs. Finally, call upon the Lord to bring His comfort and mercy to all of your students touched with their faith in His Son, Christ Jesus.

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 3:1-12. Ask your students to think about words they would most like to hear and those they would least like to hear.

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A Pledge to Do Good

The wisdom of James’s contrast between a living faith and a dead faith should be an encouragement to all those who answer Jesus’ call to minister to the needs of others and a warning to those who claim to be Christians but do not respond to His call. What would happen if all those who say they believe in Christ actually performed good works for the Lord? How would the world be changed for the better?

► *Select a Bible verse or verses about living out your faith, write the Scripture here, and pledge to fulfill what that Scripture is telling you to do, starting this week.*

KEY VERSE

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead. —James 2:26, KJV

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. —James 2:26, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

Week of August 17 through August 23

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

Mon. Proverbs 5:7-14—Unwise Not to Listen to Teachers.

Tues. Isaiah 50:4-11—The Testimony of a Wise Teacher.

Wed. Colossians 3:1-11—Slander and Abusive Language Not Allowed.

Thurs. Psalm 119:169-176—Use Your Tongue to Speak God’s Praise.

Fri. Acts 2:1-12—Believers Are Anointed with Fire and Tongues.

Sat. 1 Corinthians 12:27-31—Tongues and Teachers Are God’s Gifts.

Sun. James 3:1-12—Speech Is for Healing and Refreshment.