

10 Bible Studies in the book of
James

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James

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Introduction

Studying a book of the Bible, verse by verse, with a group of teens is a real challenge. You can, however, take up the challenge with the help of this manual. It contains 10 Bible studies on the Book of James. Even though the studies are “ready for use”, they require preparation time which you must not under-estimate. You should thoroughly study the Epistle for yourself before sharing it with a group of teens. James 1:25 encourages us to look into the Word of God, to continue in it and to conform our actions to it (be a doer of the Word).



Objectives: This manual aims at helping young believers to grow in their faith. Every study seeks to accomplish three objectives focused on knowledge, emotions and actions. Your task as a teacher is not only to pass on doctrinal knowledge. Depending on the work of the Spirit, you will try to challenge the young people and encourage them to put the Word of God into practice. The manual can also be used with adolescents who have not yet trusted the Lord. It will give you opportunities to share the Gospel with them. Their specific needs are taken into account in the complementary objective.



Questions: The questions help to guide the teens in their study of the text. You will use three kinds of questions: observation, comprehension and application questions. This way the young people will start by examining what the passage says, then they will think over what it means and finally they will put it into practice. They will learn little by little what the steps are to interpret a Bible passage. It will help them when they have their own quiet time.



Introductions and conclusions: The manual also offers means to win the teens’ attention at the beginning of the studies and to prepare them to read the Epistle. In your conclusions, try to encourage the young people to put the teaching they have received into practice.



Illustrations: Several verbal illustrations used in the manual are inspired by the devotional booklets called *Our Daily Bread* (RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI, USA). Some of them may not be relevant to your group and you might have to find other illustrations. The teens usually appreciate when the teacher shares his personal experience.



Methods: You will find a variety of methods to encourage the teens to participate: role play, case study, photo language, fictitious letter, crosswords... if you think that the use of these methods might make your study too long, split the studies into two parts.



Worksheets: You can photocopy the worksheets and hand them out to the teens at the beginning of each study. Remember to provide pens and something to lean on. To help with the study of the passage, parts of James’ Epistle are given on the worksheet, in the New King James Version. The young people will, however, need their Bibles to examine the additional texts.

16 years +: Even though the studies have been prepared for 11-15 year-olds, the manual offers a few tips (advice) to adapt the teaching to older teens. The book by Douglas J. Moo, entitled *The Epistle of James* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1985) has been used to write this manual; it can be a very useful tool for supplementary research and to better meet the needs of your group.

1 Trials

James 1:2-12



Objectives: the young believers will

-  understand that trials are inevitable and that they are valuable for their spiritual growth.
-  realise that, when facing trials, they can count on God and that one day they will receive the crown of life.
-  ask God to help them to stand firm in difficult times.

The unsaved can be challenged through verse 12, which says that the crown of eternal life is for those who love God.



Introduction: After the match

Paul was 14 years old when he travelled to the Paris area to take part in a football tournament. He really enjoyed playing in the team. But in the evening, he preferred to stay alone in his room because his friends were drinking a lot of alcohol. Paul quickly became a laughing stock and was put under a lot of pressure, but he stood firm in this trial. Later he realised that this experience had helped him a lot to count on God's help in all circumstances.

Perhaps that reminds you of situations you have experienced. Today we will speak about trials in the Christian life. They are difficult to go through, but can be useful, as they were for Paul. James deals with this subject in the first part of his letter. [Give out a worksheet to each young person.]

Bible reading: James 1:2-6;12

- 2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,
- 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.
- 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.
- 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.
- 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting...
- 12 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. (NKJV)

Reality of trials

1- In verse 2, James speaks of "various trials". Do you know what kind of trials the believers faced at that time?

They faced severe persecution from the Romans and the Jews who wanted to prevent the expansion of Christianity. But the Christians faced numerous other problems which James mentions later on in the course of his letter: illness, financial worries, relationship problems...



2- The text does not say "if you fall" but rather "when you fall" into all kinds of trials. What can we deduce from this?

James shows us in this way that trials are inevitable. The Christian must not think that he will be kept from them. Trials are part of the Christian life. We can note these first two statements on our worksheets: *trials are numerous and inevitable.*

16 years +

If you teach 16-year-olds upwards, you can study parallel texts:

Psalm 34:19 “Many are the afflictions of the righteous...”

2 Corinthians 4:8-9 “We are hard pressed on every side...”

1 Peter 4:12 “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you.”



Method: Pictures to interpret

Examine the pictures on your sheet, then tell me which difficulties they represent. [Allow several young people to give their interpretation. In the first scene, a young man is undergoing pressure from a disreputable group. In the second scene, he is having a difficult relationship with a parent or a teacher, perhaps because of his bad school marks.]

Right attitude in trials

3- According to verse 2, what should we do when facing a trial?

Count it all joy! [Worksheet.] This is an instruction which is difficult to accept. “It seems impossible, it’s crazy!” We need to understand what James is really teaching us.

- He does not say that you must enjoy suffering; difficulties are disagreeable and are not in themselves matters for rejoicing.
- He does not say either that you need to act as if everything is going well, with a beautiful artificial smile, when you are actually suffering inside.

James says that in spite of the distress and sadness, you can find a reason to rejoice. You can be really happy when you discover the usefulness of the test.

Usefulness of trials

4- What does the trial produce, according to verse 3?

In the Christian life, the trial produces *patience* [worksheet], that is endurance, the ability to resist. Your confidence in God is shaken by difficulties to make it more solid. You cling more tightly to Him. [You can remind them of the example of Paul given in the introduction.]



Illustration: Computer printers put to the test

Computer printers manufactured by a company in Colorado undergo shock treatment before leaving the factory. First of all they are frozen, then heated to 54°C, and finally shaken violently for 15 minutes. Why are they put to such a test? Because these printers are then sent to the American army and can be used on the battlefield in extreme conditions.

It is essential that you, too, are prepared. Thanks to the trials, you become stronger spiritually, you have more endurance, you are more apt to resist and you become more dependent on the Lord.

16 years +

You could examine two texts which describe the same process: Romans 5:3-4 and 1 Peter 1:6-7.

5- What is the final result – verse 4?

To be perfect and complete. The result is *maturity* or perfection (Bible translators are unsure which meaning is correct) [worksheet]. Here it is a case of spiritual maturity or perfection. Difficulties cause a deep work to be done in the life of the Christian. They change you little by little. You become more and more like the Lord Jesus. In reality, perfection can only be achieved when you are in Heaven. But God is working on this now, from today onwards.



Method: Personal testimony

[You could give a personal testimony and show how trials favoured your spiritual growth.]

6- What should you do when facing trials, according to verses 5-7?

Ask God for wisdom [worksheet]. Wisdom will allow you to see the difficulties from a new angle and to stay happy and grateful. If you ask with faith, God will give you wisdom. He is good and generous. You will not look at the trial in the same way again.



Illustration: What a kite would say

If a kite could speak, perhaps this is what it would say: “Look how high I can fly, in spite of the string holding me back. Without it, I would disappear into the sky!” In reality, what would happen to the kite if it had just been released? It would flutter for a few seconds, then it would take a nosedive and would end its flight tangled in the branches of a tree. So what would it say, then? “You see, what I thought was pulling me down, was actually keeping me up high.” I am sure you sometimes have the same impression of being pulled down by your trials. But if God cut them off, your relationship with Him would experience the same free fall as the kite. So remember this lesson: our trials are there to help us to fly higher and higher, close to the Lord.

This evening, take the time to think about the different difficulties you are facing. Talk to God about your difficulties and tell Him that you want to grow through them. Go for joy and gratitude!

[Note for the teacher: we will leave out verses 9 to 11, in which James deals with a specific trial. We will, however, include verse 12 in this study, even if most translations use the word “temptation” here. In Greek, the same root is used to speak about trial and temptation. In verse 12, the two meanings overlap. From that point of view, we have an excellent conclusion to what we have seen here.]

Reward after trials

7- If you stand firm in trials, what will you receive, according to verse 12?

A crown [worksheet]. This is another reason for joy in difficulties!

8- What does it represent?

At the time when James wrote his letter, crowns were more common than today:

- A crown of precious metal was worn by the king or other authorities; it was a sign of *glory* [worksheet];
- A crown of flowers was worn at festivals and represented *happiness* [worksheet];
- A crown of laurels was presented to winning athletes after the games and represented *victory* [worksheet].

James speaks about a *crown of life* [worksheet]. In Heaven, Christians will fully enjoy life with God. They will live in God’s glory, experience perfect happiness and celebrate His victory.



9- For whom is it reserved?

For those who love God [worksheet]. Loving God is to put Him in the first place in our lives. Do you love God? Have you given Him the place He deserves? If not, you cannot benefit from what we have just been describing. For you, difficulties are not yet an opportunity to grow in faith. You do not yet have life with God. On the contrary, you are dead in your sins. Don’t put off asking God to forgive your wrongdoing. Ask Him to apply to your life Christ’s work on the cross. Let Him begin His work in you and prepare you to live one day in His glory.



Conclusion

Can you summarise what James has taught us today? Let us try together to complete the three phrases given at the end of the worksheet.

“When I have difficulties, *I should be happy* for they allow me to *grow in the image of Christ*. I can ask God *for wisdom* and expect to receive the *crown of life* which God has promised to *all those who love Him*.”



Supplement: Report

The young people could become reporters. With the help of a tape recorder or a video camera, they could visit some mature Christians to interview them:

- Have you faced some big trials or tests during the course of your life?
- Can you tell us about some of them?
- How did you deal with them?
- How do you advise us to react when we face similar situations?
- Did these difficulties help you to grow?
- In which area and in what way?

Trials

James 1:2-12

- **2** My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,
- **3** knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.
- **4** But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.
- **5** If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.
- **6** But let him ask in faith, with no doubting...
- **12** 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. (NKJV)



Reality of trials

Verse 2a

Trials are

and _____

Right attitude in trials

Verse 2b

We should

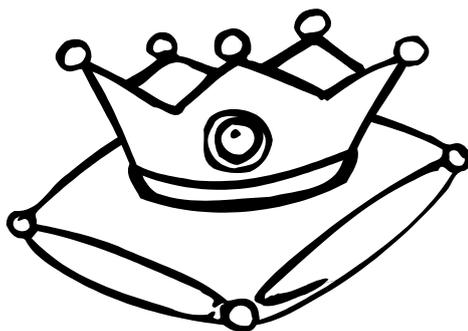
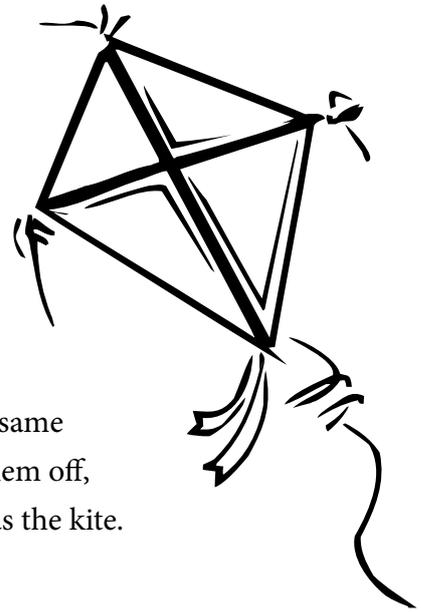


Usefulness of trials

They produce _____ (verse 3) → _____ (verse 4)

What should you do when facing trials, according to verses 5-7?

If a kite could speak, maybe this is what it would say: "Look how high I can fly, in spite of the string holding me back. Without it, I would disappear into the sky!" In reality, what would happen to the kite if it had just been released? It would flutter for a few seconds, then it would take a nosedive and would end its flight tangled in the branches of a tree. So what would it say, then? "You see, what I thought was pulling me down, was actually keeping me up high." I am sure you sometimes have the same impression of being pulled down by your trials. But if God cut them off, your relationship with Him would experience the same free fall as the kite.



Reward after trials

If you stand firm in trials, what will you receive, according to verse 12?

What does it represent? _____

For whom is it reserved – verse 12? _____

Can you summarise what James has taught us today?

When I have difficulties, I should _____

for they allow me to _____

I can ask God _____

and expect to receive the _____

which God has promised to _____



2 Temptation

James 1:13-15



Objectives: the young believers will

- understand what temptation is and how it operates.
- realise that if they give in to temptation, sin will cause considerable damage to their relationship with God.
- count on God's help to resist the temptations which could come up during the week.

The unsaved will be encouraged to put their trust in God, during the study of the consequences of sin in verse 15.



Introduction: Fire alarm

Two young ladies lost their lives because of a fire, which destroyed their apartment. Yet their home was equipped with a smoke detector in very good condition, which should have alerted them to the danger. Why did it not work? The enquiry revealed that the young ladies had organised a party the evening before. Fearing that the candle smoke would set off the alarm, they deactivated it.

This incident reminds us that we need to be vigilant, including in our life with God. In the passage that we will study today, James speaks about temptation. It is like a fire that can start when you don't expect it. You need to be constantly on the alert. [Distribute the worksheets.]

Bible reading: James 1:13-15

- 13** 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.
- 14** But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.
- 15** Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. (NKJV)

A definition of temptation

1- What is temptation?

Someone has defined temptation as being "*an invitation to sin*" [worksheet]. You are tempted when you are being urged to do wrong things. Supposing you find a lost wallet on the way out of school. It contains the owner's address, but also money and telephone cards. You are tempted to keep it for yourself. God has given us a conscience. When temptation comes, this inward voice alerts us to it.

2- Why is temptation in itself not bad?

Because temptation comes before sin – we sin only when we give in to temptation. Jesus was tempted without committing sin. Finding a wallet and examining it is not wrong. On the other hand, as soon as I accept the idea of keeping the contents, I sin in my thoughts. If I then take possession of the wallet, I am committing theft.



Method:

Here are three situations in which young people are tempted. After reading them, think of a fourth one and note it on the worksheet.

A. During the history examination, Daniel has a memory black-out. He simply cannot remember several important dates. His notes are within reach in his schoolbag. If only he was allowed to glance over them!

B. Isabelle has gone to visit her boyfriend Patrick and they watch a DVD together, comfortably seated on the sofa. Patrick's parents have gone out for the evening. The film, which included sex scenes, ends and Isabelle thinks that she would love a cuddle.

C. Colin's friends have the tendency to drink a little too much. After the football match, they get out some beer. Colin knows that he needs to be careful not to let himself be drawn in, for his father is an alcoholic. But his best friend offers him a can. Colin wants to keep his reputation.

The source of temptation

3- Some people blame God for putting them in these situations and for tempting them. What does James say in verse 13?

God cannot be tempted by evil, nor tempt anyone [worksheet]. That would be contrary to His nature: He is a holy God, separated from evil. He is light; there can be no darkness in Him. That is why it is inconceivable that God would be attracted by evil or that He would encourage others to do wrong.

4- But the Bible speaks of a "tempter". Who is he and what does he do, according to 2 Timothy 2:26?

[James does not ignore the ultimate tempter. He talks about him in chapter 4 verse 7. For now, he prefers to insist on man's responsibility.]

The devil lays traps for us [worksheet]. In Timothy's circle there was opposition from people who were held captive by the enemy and were subjected to his will. But Paul mentions in this verse that God has the power to extricate anyone from Satan's hold. We can and must ask for His help.

16 years +

You could examine other passages with an older group:

2 Corinthians 11:3; 2 Corinthians 11:15.

Matthew 4:3 and 1 Thessalonians 3:5 use the word "tempter".

5- James maintains that we are the main ones responsible for this. What is it in us that causes temptation?

The evil desires which we have [worksheet]. Unwholesome cravings lurk deep in my heart and yours (cf. Mark 7:15,20-23). We need to examine ourselves. If I am tempted to steal a wallet, isn't it because of my love of money and possessions? If Daniel is tempted to cheat during an exam, isn't it because success is more important to him than honesty? If Isabelle is tempted to have a physical relationship with her boyfriend, isn't it because she has an urge for wrong sexual experiences? If Colin is tempted to drink alcohol, isn't it because he thinks more of his popularity than his health? Temptation certainly comes from our bad desires. The fortress is quickly besieged because there are traitors on the inside!

6- Which verbs does James use to describe what these bad desires do – still in verse 14?

They draw us away and entice us [worksheet]. In the original language (Greek), the second verb is part of the vocabulary relating to fishing.



Illustration: Delicious earthworm

A tasty worm can easily draw a fish out of hiding. Because of his appetite, the fish will probably not notice the hook or the fisherman's shadow on the surface of the water. The bait is irresistible and the consequences for this poor fish will be immediate and fatal. This is the picture used by James to show the force with which we can be attracted towards evil. If we do not resist this powerful seduction, we risk being caught.

Let's summarise: temptation is the invitation or the incitement to sin. It is not initiated by God. Satan furthers it, but it is our bad desires which draw us toward sin.

The result of temptation

7- If anyone allows sin to run its course, what will be the result, according to verse 15?

Death, which means eternal separation from God [worksheet]. (Parallel texts: Ezekiel 18:4; Romans 6:23). This is a clear warning, first of all for those who are living without God. Remember that God is holy and He cannot tolerate sin. So, every time that a man says *yes* to temptation, he is saying *no* to God. He distances himself more and more from Him and takes one more step towards death. Man does not have the resources within himself to resist temptation and sin. He needs to give himself over to God. God in His love sent His own Son. Although Jesus was tempted in every respect, He never sinned. He paid for all our offences on the cross and rose from the dead. Anyone who places his trust in God and gives his life over to Him, receives pardon. As well as that, God gives him the power and freedom to live for Him. Have you asked Him to do that for you?

8- In spite of fighting against temptation and sin, the Christian sometimes gives in. How does that affect his relationship with God?

If you give in, your disobedience will be an obstacle between you and your heavenly Father. Your Bible reading and your prayer life will be affected by this. Perhaps you have already experienced this sad state. Perhaps you have also noticed that one sin leads to another. Disobedience can become a habit and the consequences are disastrous. *We lose our joy. Guilt and anxiety take over* [worksheet].



Illustration: A hazy sky

In winter we appreciate the sunshine. It provides us with warmth and makes nature look especially beautiful. But it only takes a cloud to hide the sun. If our “sky” (our life) becomes clouded by sin, we lose contact with God.

9- How can our relationship with God be restored? 1 John 1:9

If you have given in to temptation, be honest and *confess your sin to God*. According to His promise, your Father will forgive you and deliver you from guilt. After that you will need to count on Him, knowing that you can't deal with temptation on your own.



Method: Discussion groups

[Divide the young people into groups of three or four. They will study several Bible characters who had to face temptation. Some resisted, some gave in. The young people will have to draw practical lessons from this.]

Bible passage	Character	Practical advice for resisting temptation
Genesis 13:10-13	<i>Lot</i>	<i>Choose your company carefully</i>
Genesis 39:11-12	<i>Joseph</i>	<i>Run away from strong temptation</i>
2 Samuel 11:1-4	<i>David</i>	<i>Pursue healthy activities</i>
Matthew 4:1-11	<i>Jesus</i>	<i>Stay rooted in God's Word</i>

Help in times of temptation

10- In 1 Corinthians 10:13, you will find two statements about God, which will be a great encouragement to you when you face temptation. Note them down.

1. He won't allow us to be *tempted beyond what we can take*.
2. He will make a way to *escape from the temptation*.

When you face temptation, remember that God controls the intensity of it and that He is preparing a way out. Make an effort to count on Him. In that way you will be able to extricate yourself from the net.



Conclusion

Let us sum up what we have learned:

1. **Definition** – temptation is an invitation to sin.
2. **Source** – it is our bad desires which attract and entice us.
3. **Result** – we are drawn towards sin and death.
4. **Encouragement** – God controls the intensity of the temptation and is planning an escape route.

Be alert in the coming days and count on your God!



Supplement: Role play

When temptation comes from friends, it is particularly difficult for adolescents to resist. You can give them the opportunity to practise using role play. You could use the following scenario:

“Four young people find a lost wallet. Three of them have no problem with sharing out the contents. The fourth one is a Christian.” It may be necessary to act out this scene several times before the young believer reacts appropriately.

How to help a friend

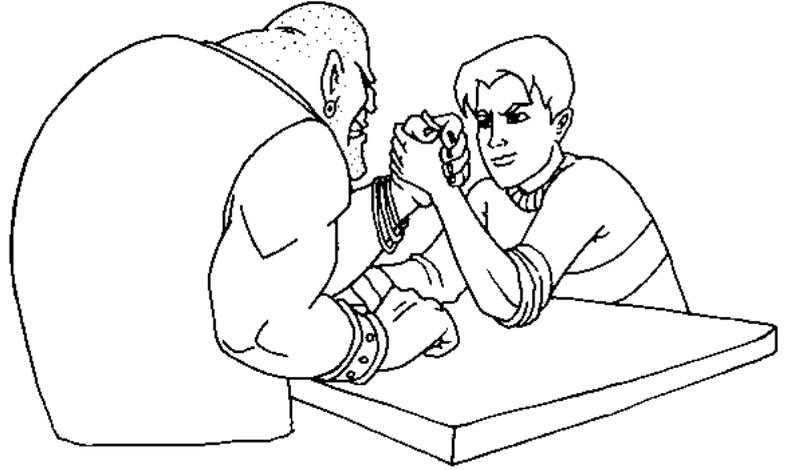
You can look at the problem of temptation from another angle, by asking the group to think about how they can help others not to give in to temptation. The young people could pretend they have a friend who smoked a joint when put under pressure and who now has difficulty resisting the desire to continue. Ask them to make some practical suggestions.

- Be an example by refusing to touch the drug yourself.
- Warn the friend about the damages caused by the drug.
- Invite him to the youth group.

Temptation

James 1:13-15

- **13** 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.
- **14** But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.
- **15** Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. (NKJV)



A definition of temptation

A. During the history examination, Daniel has a memory black-out. He simply cannot remember several important dates. His notes are within reach in his schoolbag. If only he was allowed to glance over them!

B. Isabelle has gone to visit her boyfriend Patrick and they watch a DVD together, comfortably seated on the sofa. Patrick’s parents have gone out for the evening. The film, which included sex scenes, ends and Isabelle thinks that she would love a cuddle.

C. Colin’s friends have the tendency to drink a little too much. After the football match, they get out some beer. Colin knows that he needs to be careful not to let himself be drawn in for his father is an alcoholic. But his best friend offers him a can. Colin wants to keep his reputation.

Can you think of another situation in which temptation rages?

The source of temptation

Some people blame God for putting them in these situations and for tempting them. What does James say in verse 13?

God cannot _____

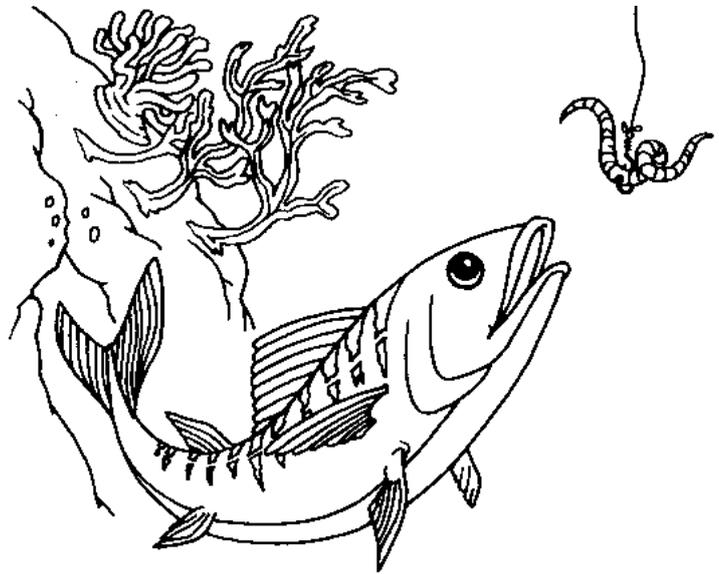
But the Bible speaks of a “tempter”. Who is he and what does he do?

2 Timothy 2:26 : _____

James maintains that we are the main ones responsible for this. What is it in us that causes temptation?

Which verbs does James use to describe what these bad desires do – still in verse 14?

_____ + _____



The result of temptation

If anyone allows sin to run its course, what will be the result, according to verse 15?

In spite of fighting against temptation and sin, the Christian sometimes gives in. How does that affect his relationship with God?

How can our relationship with God be restored? 1 John 1:9

Bible passage	Character	Practical advice for resisting temptation
Genesis 13:10-13		
Genesis 39:11-12		
2 Samuel 11:1-4		
Matthew 4:1-11		

Help in times of temptation

In 1 Corinthians 10:13, you will find two statements about God, which will be a great encouragement to you when you face temptation. Note them down.

He won't allow us to _____

He will make a way to _____



3

God's Word

James 1:22-25



Objectives: the young believers will

- understand that the Word is like a mirror which reveals their spiritual condition.
- realise that listening to or reading the Word is not enough: it needs to be put into practice.
- study some Bible verses every day of the week and will follow God's instructions.

The unsaved will realise their spiritual condition; they will ask the Lord to save them and transform their lives.



Introduction: Hey, it's me!

Let's imagine that you are leafing through a magazine when you get a surprise – you come across a report about yourself. A whole page is devoted to your life. There is even a photo of you with a group of your friends. From that point on, this magazine becomes very important. You devour the magazine because it talks about you!

The Bible also talks about you. Of course you won't find your name or a photo of yourself in it. But when you read the Bible, or hear teaching from it in a church, you will discover many important things about yourself. It is when you have the "hey, it's me!" experience and when you realise the personal character of the Bible, that you begin to devour the pages of this book and allow yourself to be transformed by it. [Distribute the worksheets.]

Bible reading: James 1:22-25

22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror;

24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the word, this one will be blessed in what he does. (NKJV)

The Word – a mirror

[Note for the teacher: it is difficult to start by studying verse 22. It is better to begin by explaining what the "Word" is and why James compares it to a mirror. Then move on to the importance of putting it into practice.]

1- In this passage, the term "word" is used several times. What does it refer to?

Without doubt it means God's Word, but not only in its written form. We can read the Word, but also listen to it when it is taught in Club or at church. James seems to have two things in mind: verse 22 concerns the *spoken Word* while verse 23 may refer to the *written Word*. [Note on the worksheet.]

2- Why does James compare the Word to a mirror?

When we read or hear God's Word, *we discover important things about ourselves* [worksheet]. Just as a mirror sends us back an image of ourselves, the Bible confronts us with the reality of who we are. It reveals to us our condition before God.

When a non-believer reads the Bible and understands that it is speaking about him,

he should have cause for alarm. He discovers that sin has affected each part of his being. It is as if he is disfigured because of sin. But he can ask God to apply Christ's work on the cross to His life and to transform him into a new person (verse 18 speaks about this). Have you asked God to do this for you?

If you are a Christian, you must continue to look into this mirror. You will realise what in your life is pleasing to God, but you will also discover areas in which you need to make progress. God uses the Word to open your eyes and to change you gradually. He sees to it that you grow and that you become more and more conformed to His will.

16 years +

With an older group you can study 1 Peter 1:23-2:3.

- We are born to a new life by the living Word – the Good News.
- We need to desire the pure milk of the Word in order to grow.

3- After hearing the Word, what must you do, according to verse 22?

Transform it into deeds [worksheet]. If the pastor's message or the studies we are doing together have helped you to understand better what God expects from you, do something about it! If the Word has put a finger on a problem in your life, you need to sort it out! It is essential to put the Word into practice. To ignore this would be to deceive yourself, as James says. We should not think that we can live with God without obeying His instructions.

The man who neglects the Word



4- Then James puts the attitudes of two people in contrast, with regard to the Word. What does the first one do, according to verses 23 and 24? (Note the verbs used.)

He observes himself – goes away – forgets [worksheet].

Illustration

Imagine that one morning you struggle out of bed and have a quick breakfast. Then you spend a few seconds in front of the mirror. You are shocked by what you see: hair in disarray, bleary eyes, a trace of hot chocolate above your lips, stains on your shirt... but off you go to school and forget what you saw! Don't you have a similar attitude whenever you read the Bible and it puts a finger on something in your life which is not right? You quickly forget about it. The same thing happens when we have just come home from church and then ignore the teaching we received there about God.

5- If you neglect the Word in this way, what will be the consequences?

Just as the physical appearance of this young person is an absolute disaster, *your spiritual state will be equally miserable* [worksheet]. Neglecting the Word is like closing the door to God, preventing Him from working in our lives. His plan is that you become holy like Him. If you ignore Biblical teaching, this change and growth will not take place. Your relationship to God will deteriorate; so will your behaviour.

The man who puts the Word into practice

6- In verse 25, James describes another man. What is he doing? (Note again the verbs used.)

- *He looks into* (examines in great detail) *what the Word or the Law teaches.*
- *He continues in it* (faithfully holds to it.)
- *He does what God's Word says* [worksheet].

16 years +

With an older group, you could consider 2 Kings 22 and 23. At the time of Josiah, a book of the Law was found in God's temple. When Josiah heard the Word, he reacted in an exemplary way:

- He tore his clothes as a sign of repentance – 22:11.
- He became aware of God’s anger and tried to consult Him – 22:13.
- His heart was touched, he humbled himself and wept – 22:19.
- He committed himself to obeying God’s commandments with his whole being – 23:3.
- He put them into practice without delay – 23:4.



Method: Workgroups

Now let’s try to follow James’ instructions. [Divide the young people into groups of four or five. They will study Psalm 1:1-3 and complete the chart. The first question will encourage them to examine the passage to find what it teaches about them; the second one will help them to think about how to put this teaching into practice. After about ten minutes, call the group together again and ask some people to share their answers.]

Psalm 1:1-3	What does this passage teach about you? Summarise it in your own words.	What must I do in the coming days?
<p>Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper. (NKJV)</p>	<p>To be happy, I need to avoid bad company. I also need to read the Bible and think about it through the day. In that way, my life will bear much fruit.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be attentive to the influence which my friends are having on me. If necessary, seek out other friends. • Take time to read some verses from the Bible each day. • Think about these verses during the day and ask God to help me to put them into practice.

7- Will you give priority to meditating on the Word in the coming days?

Your life is probably already very full: school, homework, television, sport, phoning your friends, eating, sleeping, etc. Sometimes we need to redefine our priorities.



Illustration: Object lesson

[Find a jar, lots of pebbles and a stone.] Let’s suppose that the jar represents your life. You have many activities. [Put all the pebbles into the jar until it is almost full.] It seems difficult to devote time to the study of the Word. [The stone doesn’t quite fit inside the jar.] [Empty the jar, put the stone in first, then the other pebbles. Now everything fits.] If you begin your day by reading the Word, everything else will fit into place. Sometimes, you will have to make choices and drop an activity. Don’t lose sight of your priorities.



[You will make several attempts in order to determine the right quantity of pebbles.]

I suggest that you read Colossians chapters 3 and 4 during the week. Make a list of the truths and instructions that you find there, then go into action by obeying God’s Word.

The benefits

8- If you make an effort to put the Word of God into practice, what will be produced in your life, according to Psalm 1 and James 1:25?

Prosperity (in the spiritual sense), *fruit, blessings, joy* [worksheet]. When you allow the Word of God to change you little by little, God puts wind in your sails and gives you success. He also gives you much joy in serving Him. See also Luke 11:28; 2 Timothy 2:21.



Conclusion

It is time for us to open our eyes and to realise that the Bible is speaking about you and me. Are you going to take the time to examine yourself in the mirror? Are you determined to look into the Word during this week? Do you want to sit in church or in Club with a different attitude? But don't forget that reading or listening to the Word is not enough. Afterwards, you need to put the Word into action. Ask the Lord to help you to do this.



Supplement: Prayer time

Psalm 119 could guide the prayer time. If you copy some verses from this Psalm onto cards, each young person who wants to pray aloud will be able to choose one and use it as an inspiration.

Verse 16: I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your Word.

Verse 24: Your testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors.

Verse 34: Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart. (NKJV)

God's Word

James 1:22-25

- **22** But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.
- **23** For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror;
- **24** for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.
- **25** But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the word, this one will be blessed in what he does. (NKJV)

The Word – a mirror

In this passage, the term “word” is used several times. What does it refer to?

Why does James compare the Word to a mirror?

After hearing the Word, what must you do, according to verse 22?

The man who neglects the Word

Then James puts the attitudes of two people in contrast, with regard to the Word. What does the first one do, according to verses 23 and 24? (Note the verbs used.)



If you neglect the Word in this way, what will be the consequences?



The man who puts the Word into practice

In verse 25, James describes another man. What is he doing? (Note again the verbs used.)

Psalm 1:1-3	What does this passage teach about you? Summarise it in your own words.	What must I do in the coming days?
<p>Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper. (NKJV)</p>		

The benefits

If you make an effort to put the Word of God into practice, what will be produced in your life, according to Psalm 1 and James 1:25?



4 Favouritism

James 2:1-12



Objectives: the young believers will

-  understand what favouritism is.
-  realise that this attitude is totally different from God's and is condemned by Him.
-  make an effort to welcome and to love all their friends in the coming days, even those who are very different.

The unsaved will discover that God does not have favourites and that He offers salvation to all who place their trust in Him.



Introduction: Chocolate

[Begin the study with a blatant example of favouritism: give out bars of chocolate, but only to certain ones in the group. "One for him because he makes me laugh, one for her because I like her haircut, and one for him because he plays the same sport as I do..." The others will be outraged at not being given any. Ask them: "Which word describes my behaviour just now? What did you feel when you did not get any chocolate?" Then you can correct your attitude by giving bars of chocolate to those who were left out first time around.]

In the second chapter of his letter, James talks about favouritism and shows us how this attitude is contrary to what God expects from us. [Give out the worksheets.]

Bible reading: James 2:1-5,8-9,12

- 1 My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.
- 2 For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes,
- 3 and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool,"
- 4 have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?
- 5 Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?
- 8 If you really fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself," you do well;
- 9 but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.
- 12 So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. (NKJV)

Favouritism among believers

1- First of all, what is favouritism? Give me a definition.

Favouritism means to show favour to certain people while treating others unfairly, just like me when I was giving out the chocolate.

["Favouritism" means to make distinctions on the basis of exterior considerations, for example, physical appearance, social standing or race.]

2- At the time of James, certain Christians were showing favouritism. Under what circumstances – verses 2 and 3?

During the meetings within the church itself! [Worksheet.] In certain churches, when a rich person dressed in splendid clothes came in, he received very special attention and was led to his seat. On the other hand, when a poor person came in, dressed in shabby clothes, he was ignored.

[The situation described seems hypothetical, but this kind of behaviour was certainly evident in some churches.]

3- Could this happen in our group?

Imagine that two young people come to visit us. One of them is very trendy, wearing a T-shirt and a well-known brand name of trainers; he appears confident and very attractive. The second one, on the other hand, is small, poorly dressed and ill-at-ease. If such a situation arose, would we welcome both these young people with the same attitude? Perhaps we would take more interest in the one than the other? Let's recognise the need to make an effort to treat each one the same. James' teaching is still up-to-date.



Method: Case study

Let's think about how people must feel who are actually victims of favouritism. [Put the young people into groups of two or three. They are to read the two examples given on the worksheet and then answer the questions.]

Kevin: "This afternoon before the football match, Patrick and David chose the teams. They took turns choosing the players. Who was the last one chosen? Me, as usual! The other team members made me be the goalie! I only touched the ball five times when I retrieved it from the back of the net."

Diane: "I've been on a diet for several weeks now, but I haven't lost any weight. I am still not getting anywhere with the boys. This evening my friends let me down – they went to the cinema without me. I really felt left out!"

Questions:

- How must these young people feel?
- For what reasons are they looked down on?
- In what way is their friends' attitude not right?

4- For what does James blame those who practise favouritism – verse 4?

They show partiality and become judges with evil thoughts [worksheet]. James wants us to think about what there is in us that provokes us to favouritism. We have the tendency to judge people on the surface, according to the criteria of the world, in particular by their appearance. Then we only treat certain ones well.



Method: "Too much... or not enough..."

For what reasons is a young person sometimes rejected by his friends?

[Divide the board into two halves. On one side write "too much...", on the other "not enough...". Ask the young people to give examples of quick judgements which we make about others. Write their answers in note form. Bad words are banned. Examples: "too young, too fat, too shy, too different because of his culture" or "not fashionable enough, not sporty enough..." The young people can note the concepts on their worksheet: appearance, sex, race, social level, abilities...]

5- God, however, wants you to exercise your judgement concerning your friends. What are good criteria?

You must be particularly attentive to their spiritual and moral life in order to determine how much time to spend with them and what influence you will allow them to have on you. Exercising your own judgement in this way is not only justified, but essential.

In the passage we are studying, James denounces something else: quick, superficial judgement, which is wrong and leads to despising people. That is not right!

God does not have favourites

In the first four verses, James denounced favouritism. In verse 5, the expression “Listen, my beloved brethren” marks the beginning of a new section. James now wants to show us the path to take.

6- In order to encourage us to fight against favouritism, James speaks to us in verse 5 about God’s attitude. How does He treat the poor?

He has chosen them to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom [worksheet]. When the poor place their trust in Him, He saves them and gives them His kingdom as an inheritance.

[Note: James does not state that all poor people will be saved just because they are poor, nor on the other hand that all rich people are excluded because of their riches. It would seem that the expression “poor” was used to mean those who were not only oppressed, but also spiritually well disposed.]

7- In what way is God’s attitude radically different to an attitude which shows favouritism?

He does not have favourites, He does not exclude anyone [worksheet]. What a contrast with the scorn which James denounced in the preceding verses! [Other texts which assert that God does not have favourites: Deuteronomy 10:17-18; Colossians 3:25; Ephesians 6:9].

God does not put you aside because you are “too this” or “too that”. He loves you no matter about your appearance, your personality, your family situation, your faults, your sins... He does not reserve His gifts for certain favourite people.

The greatest gift that He has for you is salvation in Jesus Christ. You need this gift because your sins are separating you from God. In His generosity, He sent His Son to die for you. Jesus rose again and is alive to offer you the gift of forgiveness and life. If you have not already accepted this gift, wouldn’t you like to reach out to Him in faith? If you receive Jesus as Saviour and submit to Him as your Lord, you too can be saved and greatly blessed.

16 years +

With an older group, you could think about how this love for everyone manifested itself during the earthly life of Jesus. Ask the young people which Gospel narratives show evidence of His impartiality. He came to the aid of Samaritans (John 4), lepers (Matthew 8), tax collectors (Luke 19), religious leaders (John 3)... We should ask Him to give us His vision so that we can look on the needs of others with the same compassion.

8- Then James talks about what God expects from His children. What is the “royal law” mentioned in verse 8?

The word “law” is often used to refer to the Old Testament (the Decalogue or the Old Testament in its entirety). But in his letter, James uses this word in a broader sense, which also takes in the teachings of the Lord Jesus. In this way, for him, the law is *God’s entire will for the Christian* [worksheet], including the teachings of the Old Testament. It is the royal law because it is given by the King of Heaven and earth.

9- Which instruction of this law do we need to obey?

“You shall love your neighbour as yourself” [worksheet]. God had given this commandment to His people in Leviticus 19:18. The word “neighbour” applied especially to the Israelites’ fellow-citizen. Jesus took this commandment again (Matthew 22:39) and broadened the sense of it by applying it to everyone we have contact with, including strangers (Luke 10:25-37) or enemies (Matthew 5:44). This is God’s will for every believer. We must imitate God by loving others.

10- What could you do in a practical way in the coming days to follow God's example?

Think of those whom you see at school, in music class, at the sports club or at church. Perhaps you know a young person who is rejected because he is different. Would you like to try to show an interest in that person in the coming days? Sometimes you meet people who don't have much money. Will you look at them with God's love? Will you manage to help them as you can afford it? Ask God to help you during the week to share a little of the love you have received.



Illustration: In the train

During a particularly harsh winter, a very poor woman went to travel on a train. When she got into the carriage, the people looked away. She was old and was dressed in rags. She sat down on the nearest seat. Her hands were rough and sore, because of the cold. At the next stop, an elegant young man got on. He noticed this woman's condition. When the train slowed down and stopped, he quickly walked past her and then got out of the carriage. Before leaving, he had discretely put his pair of woollen gloves on this lady's knee. He took the opportunity of helping someone in need.

11- In conclusion, what does James say about favouritism in verse 9?

It is a sin condemned by the law [worksheet]. Loving our neighbour forbids favouritism. Partiality is open disobedience of the love which God asks us to practise. We disobey God and the law condemns us.

16 years +

Here are some more supplementary verses, which you could examine with an older group: Leviticus 19:15; Proverbs 24:23; Malachi 2:9; 1 Timothy 5:21.

One day, all believers will have to appear before God's judgement seat. Our works will be examined in detail and taken into account by God. James tells us this straight, in verses 12 and 13. Will you be among those whom God will one day reprimand or whom He will congratulate and reward?



Conclusion: Sentences to complete

Let's make one last point about our study today, by completing this sentence on the worksheet.

"This study has helped me to realise that... and I plan to try to..."



Complementary idea: Favouritism within the family

You could study two examples of favouritism shown by parents in the Bible.

You could discuss with the young people what caused such an attitude and what were the consequences.

- Genesis 25:28: Isaac loved Esau and Rebecca loved Jacob.
- Genesis 37:3-4: Jacob loved Joseph more than his other children.

Supplement: Video or research about racism

This study is a good introduction to the theme of racism. You could plan to watch a report together or visit websites on the Internet, which deal with this subject, then discuss the material.

Favouritism

James 2:1-12

- 1 My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.
- 2 For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes,
- 3 and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool,"
- 4 have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?
- 5 Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?
- 8 If you really fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself," you do well;
- 9 but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.
- 12 So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. (NKJV)

Favouritism among believers

At the time of James, certain Christians were showing favouritism. Under what circumstances – verses 2 and 3?

Kevin: "This afternoon before the football match, Patrick and David chose the teams. They took turns choosing the players. Who was the last one chosen? Me, as usual! The other team members made me be the goalie! I only touched the ball five times when I retrieved it from the back of the net."

Diane: "I've been on a diet for several weeks now, but I haven't lost any weight. I am still not getting anywhere with the boys. This evening my friends let me down – they went to the cinema without me. I really felt left out!"

Questions:

- 1- How must these young people feel?
- 2- For what reasons are they looked down on?
- 3- In what way is their friends' attitude not right?



For what does James blame those who practise favouritism – verse 4?

For what reasons is a young person sometimes rejected by his friends?

God does not have favourites

How does God treat the poor – verse 5?

In what way is God’s attitude radically different to an attitude which shows favouritism?

Then James talks about what God expects from His children. What is the “royal law” mentioned in verse 8?

Which instruction of this law do we need to obey?



In conclusion, what does James say about favouritism in verse 9?

This study has helped me to realise that _____

and I plan to try to _____

5 Living Faith

James 2:14-26



Objectives: the young believers will

-  understand that faith must not be limited to an intellectual belief, but must flow over into acts.
-  desire to have a living faith which is transformed into acts of obedience to God and love for others.
-  grasp opportunities to put their faith into action, in particular by helping those in need.

The unsaved will understand, while studying verse 14, that only an “active faith” will allow them to receive salvation.



Introduction: Telephone conversation

[Ask two young people from your group to act out a telephone conversation between two Christian friends. Cathy calls Marion to ask for her help and to encourage her to take part in different activities during the week, but she is not interested.]

C. We are going to study the Epistle of James in the youth group on Saturday evening. Are you coming too?

M. No I can't, there's a great programme I want to watch on TV that evening!

C. Can we count on you for the evangelistic outreach on Wednesday?

M. Actually, I was planning to go shopping with some friends!

C. Stephanie has been sick for several days. How about going to visit her tomorrow morning?

M. Look, I'm very sorry, but I would really like to have a lie-in!

C. I must admit I'm disappointed. Do you not think that as Christians we need to be ready to help others and to be involved in church life?

What do you think about Marion's faith? It is not being transformed into acts. She says she believes in God, but she doesn't act accordingly. You can see a discrepancy between what she claims to be and the life she leads. Isn't this a problem that you and I could also have? In the passage that we are going to read today, James speaks of two kinds of faith: one is dead, the other is alive. This study is the opportunity for you and me to examine ourselves and to think about the kind of faith we have. [Distribute the worksheets.]

Bible reading: James 2:14-17,21-22,24

- 14** What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?
- 15** If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,
- 16** 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?
- 17** Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.
- 21** Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?
- 22** Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?

Preliminary note for the teacher:

When reading this passage, we could have the impression that James' teaching is in contradiction to that of the Apostle Paul. Paul states that we are declared just by faith, without works (Galatians 2:16; Romans 3:26), whereas James assures us that we are declared just by works and not only by faith (2:24). In reality, they are treating two different problems. Their teaching is complementary:

- Paul is thinking of the Gentiles who are trying to earn their salvation by practising the ritual works prescribed by the Law. The Apostle denies the effectiveness of these works for us to be declared just by God and to enter into a relationship with Him.
- James himself is thinking of the Christians who in theory believe in Jesus, but who have not put this belief into practice. For James, the works consist in obeying God and loving your neighbour. He states that they are essential and that they are taken into consideration by God with regard to the verdict He will give on our lives.

Dead faith

1- According to verse 14, what problem did James notice about certain people in the churches?

They say they have faith, but they do not show it by their actions [worksheet]. We see that Marion's attitude which we were just speaking about, was already seen back then, even within the churches (see use of "brother" and "sister" in verse 15).

2- James states that such "faith" cannot save. What kind of "faith" does he mean?

An intellectual belief and a verbal profession [worksheet]. James seems to give a more restricted meaning to the term "faith" than other New Testament authors. It is a case of adhering to the doctrines about God, having a "holy orthodoxy". The Apostle Paul, however, uses the word "faith" for putting your trust in God and making a commitment to obey Him.

3- Why does a "theoretical" or "verbal faith" not give us the benefit of salvation?

To state that you believe in certain truths is not enough. You need to turn from sin and put your trust in God to benefit from the finished work of Christ on the cross.



Method: Text to complete

The necessary commitment with regard to salvation does not only involve our head (comprehension), but also our heart (emotion) and our hands (action).

[Put on the board the three symbols shown below, as well as the beginning of the sentences. The group will have to try to complete them. A volunteer will write the suggestions on the board. Then you will be able to make the necessary corrections and encourage the young people to fill in their worksheets.]

- 🧠 I understand... [*who God is and the sinful state in which I find myself*]
- ❤️ I am sincerely sorry... [*for my sins which separate me from Him*] and I am convinced... [*of the effectiveness of Jesus' work on the cross.*]
- 👋 I turn away... [*from my sin*] and put my trust... [*in God*] for Him to... [*save me and be in charge of my life from now on.*]

Have you turned away from your sin? Have you put your trust in God? Have you given Him control of your life? If you have done this, God will give you His salvation and, from now on, you need to put your faith to work.

16 years +

If you teach an older group, you could look at verse 19 at this stage. The case of the demons strongly confirms that an intellectual belief and emotions do not give access to the Kingdom of God: You believe that there is only one God? You do well. Even the demons believe – and tremble!

4- What kind of Christian acts should be practised?

According to the following verses, James has especially in mind *acts of obedience to God and love towards others* [worksheet]. Love is at the heart of divine requirements, as we saw when we studied James 2:8 in the previous lesson. It is the supreme commandment. This is how faith must influence our attitudes and our actions. They must be marked by obedience to God and they are to reflect His love. These marks of the Christian were unfortunately not visible in the lives of certain people at the time of James. They said they believed in God and they attended the church, but they did not put their faith into action.

5- In verses 15 and 16, James makes use of an illustration. To what kind of behaviour does he compare faith without deeds?

To Christians who wish poor people all the best, without doing anything for them [worksheet]. When facing their brothers' and sisters' basic needs of clothing and food, they give good wishes, but do nothing to help them. James shows very clearly that words are not enough. They must be accompanied by kind acts. In the same way, our faith must turn to action. If James were among us, would he make the same findings? Are you content with kind words, or are you putting your faith into action?



Illustration: A dead tree

Faith can be as dead as a dead tree. It has a sad appearance, without leaves, without fruit. No bird would build a nest in the branches of a rotten tree. If faith is a verbal profession without commitment, it is like this and is useful for nothing.

Living faith

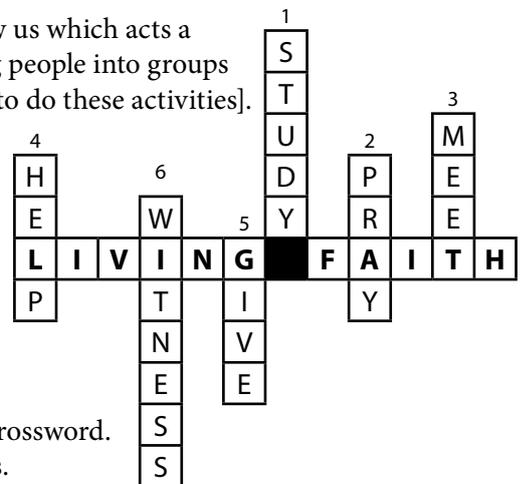
God wants our faith to be living, to be transformed into acts. On the back of the page there is another tree. This one is magnificent and full of life. In summer or autumn, it bears fruit from which others can benefit.



Method: Crossword in groups

Let us examine several verses which show us which acts a Christian should practise. [Put the young people into groups of four or five and give them 15 minutes to do these activities].

- Read the following verses.
- There is a key principal in each passage. Place each principal in the crossword. (Please note: the actual words to be put into the crossword are not in the text.)
- Place them vertically in the crossword.
- Complete the horizontal line of the crossword.
- Then discuss using the two questions.



- 1- Ezra 7:10. STUDY the Bible and put it into practice.
- 2- Ephesians 6:18 PRAY with perseverance.
- 3- Hebrews 10:25 MEET with other Christians.
- 4- James 1:27 HELP those in need.
- 5- 2 Corinthians 9:7. GIVE to meet the needs of God's people.
- 6- Acts 1:8 WITNESS to others about Jesus.

Questions to consider:

- In which of these areas do you have the most difficulties?
- How do you manage to overcome them?

Only God can give us the ability to put our faith into action in this way.

16 years +

With an older group, you could emphasise again the importance of social action. According to Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus promised the kingdom to those who fed and clothed "one of the least of these my brothers". See also 1 John 3:17-18.

6- James takes Abraham as an example to describe living faith to us. To which remarkable event in this man's life does he draw our attention in verse 21?

The sacrifice of Isaac [worksheet]. Let us read Genesis 22:1-2.

7- Why was it extremely difficult for Abraham to obey the command which he received from God that day?

Isaac was the only son of the promise [worksheet]. All that God had proclaimed about Abraham's descendants was centred on this child. It is terrible to sacrifice a human being, especially when it is your own child. Furthermore, *this act was solemnly condemned by God* [worksheet]. So God's command was incomprehensible. Abraham was severely tested. The following verses show us an astonishing and remarkable obedience. Let us read Genesis 22:3-12.

8- The angel of the Lord stopped Abraham from moving and said to him: "Now I know that you fear God". According to the angel's words, what purpose did this test serve?

It showed Abraham's reverent faith towards His God [worksheet]. This act of obedience demonstrated that Abraham's faith was not just theoretical, but active, a faith which led Abraham to observe all God's instructions, no matter how difficult and strange they seemed. According to James 2:21, it is by way of his act that Abraham obtained God's approval. God wants to see our faith at work.

16 years +

You could ask the young people on what other occasion Abraham remarkably put his faith into action. You could look at Hebrews 11:8 together: it is by faith that Abraham obeyed God's call, commanding him to leave home. He left without knowing where he was going. In that way, Abraham exercised his faith repeatedly several times by acts of obedience and love towards God.

9- James 2:22 concludes that faith and works are partners. In one way, faith leads to works. In another way... what does James add at the end of the verse?

Works make faith perfect [worksheet]. In this way, works allow faith to come into full bloom. [The verb used here signifies "to perfect", "to bring to maturity".] Abraham's experience broadened his knowledge of God and developed his trust in Him. In this way, perfect faith is produced by a succession of acts of obedience.

10- According to what does God evaluate our life – verse 24?

According to our faith (the base) and our acts (the outward sign) [worksheet]. James insists that the acts which we do are examined and must testify that we have a living faith. We could say that God looks at the leaves and the fruits, for they reveal the condition of the tree. As He did with Abraham, God takes our faith and our acts into consideration in the judgement which He makes on our lives. [It would seem that James does not use the word "justify" to mean the legal status we are given at the moment of conversion, but more to talk about the appreciation God demonstrates towards our lives.]

By filling in the crossword just now, perhaps you thought of a particular area in which you have still not exercised your faith enough. Do you want to work on this particular aspect of your life in the coming days? Would you like to please your God?



Conclusion: Telephone call

After thinking it over, Marion decides to telephone her friend Cathy:

M. "I am calling you back to tell you that you can count on me tomorrow morning for visiting Stephanie. I also really intend to make church life a priority.

C. Super, but what made you change your mind?

M. Something you said earlier didn't fall on deaf ears. I must put my faith into action!"

Living Faith

James 2:14-26

- **14** What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?
Can faith save him?
- **15** If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,
- **16** 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?
- **17** Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.
- **21** Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?
- **22** Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?
- **24** You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. (NKJV)

According to verse 14, what problem did James notice about certain people in the churches?

James states that such "faith" cannot save. What kind of "faith" does he mean?

The necessary commitment with regard to salvation involves our head, our heart and our hands.



I understand _____



I am sincerely sorry _____

and I am convinced _____



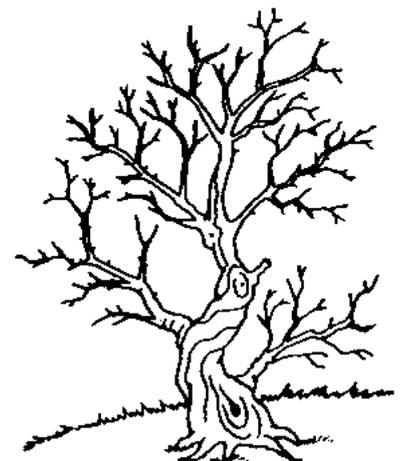
I turn away _____

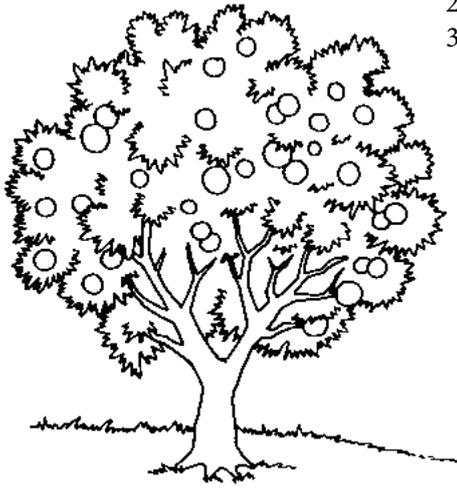
and put my trust _____

for Him to _____

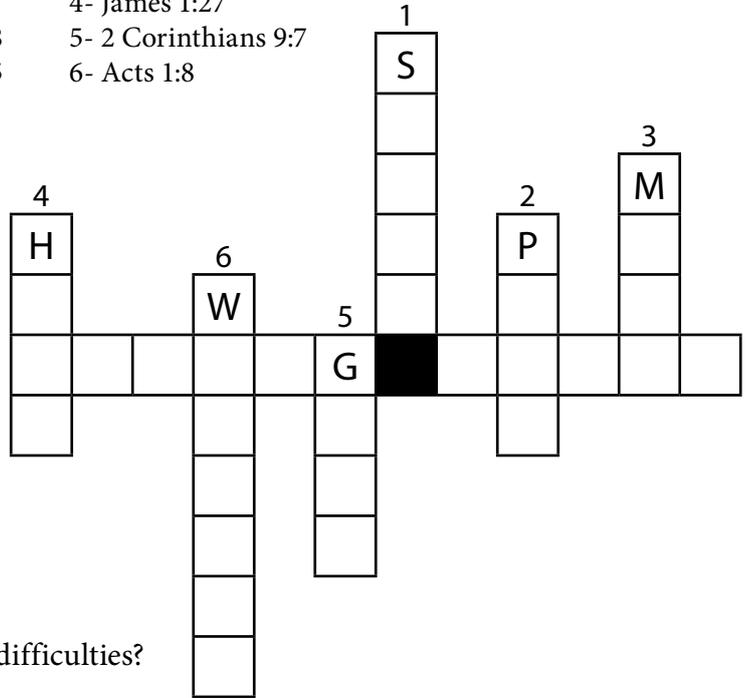
What kind of Christian acts should be practised?

In verses 15 and 16, James makes use of an illustration. To what kind of behaviour does he compare faith without deeds?





- 1- Ezra 7:10
- 2- Ephesians 6:18
- 3- Hebrews 10:25
- 4- James 1:27
- 5- 2 Corinthians 9:7
- 6- Acts 1:8



Questions to consider:

- In which of these areas do you have the most difficulties?
- How do you manage to overcome them?

James takes Abraham as an example to describe living faith to us. To which remarkable event in this man’s life does he draw our attention in verse 21?

Why was it extremely difficult for Abraham to obey the command which he received from God that day?

The angel of the Lord stopped Abraham from moving and said to him: “Now I know that you fear God”. According to the angel’s words, what purpose did this test serve?

James 2:22 concludes that faith and works are partners. In one way, faith leads to works. In another way... what does James add at the end of the verse?

According to what does God evaluate our life – verse 24?



6 The Tongue

James 3:3-12



Objectives: the young believers will

- ✚ understand that the tongue has the power to do much good, but also much harm.
- ♥ realise that they can't succeed in controlling it and they will recognise that they need the Lord's help.
- ✚ carefully watch the use of their tongue and will strive to speak nicely to their parents, friends and teachers.

The unsaved will be challenged by something Jesus said: "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). They will see that they need to receive Christ and be filled with His love.



Introduction: Guessing game

[Make sure to keep the worksheets hidden so as not to reveal the theme of the study.]

- Even though I am small, I am capable of accomplishing great things!
- I succeed in doing good, but sometimes also much harm!
- I am a fleshy, muscular, flat, mobile organ.

Who am I?... The tongue!

In the third chapter of his letter, James deals with another problem: the control of the tongue (although he already referred to this subject in chapter 1 verses 19 and 26). He uses striking illustrations to show us that we must be specially careful with this small part of our body. Only God can prevent the tongue from doing wrong. [Distribute a worksheet to each young person.]

Bible reading: James 3:3-12

- 3 Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body.
- 4 Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires.
- 5 Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles!
- 6 And 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.
- 7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind.
- 8 But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.
- 9 With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God.
- 10 Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.
- 11 Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?
- 12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh. (NKJV)

16 years +

If you are teaching an older group, you could include the first two verses of the chapter. James addresses an exhortation to those who desire to be teachers and have the privilege of teaching Christian doctrine. This function had great prestige in an era when few people knew how to read. James was concerned to see certain Christians becoming involved in this ministry for wrong motives. He warns them that the teachers will be meticulously evaluated by the Lord because they have the heavy responsibility of feeding the Christians' faith. The rest of the chapter gives more general teaching and does not only concern teachers.

The power of the tongue

1- To what does James compare the tongue in verses 3 and 4?

A bit capable of *controlling the horses' bodies* and a rudder capable of *steering great vessels* [worksheet]. Horses are sometimes unruly, but a small ingenious object is enough to bring them under control. Sailing boats proceed at full speed when they are pushed along by violent winds, but a little rudder guides them in the right direction. In this way, small objects succeed in controlling the most violent outbreaks.

2- What do these first two illustrations reveal – verse 5a?

The tongue is small, but can do great things [worksheet].

It can exert considerable influence on people and the course of events. [James personifies the tongue – just like he personified evil desires, sin and death in chapter 1 verses 14 and 15.]



Illustration: A milkman's words

Cheryl, aged 5, lived in America and was a grocer's daughter. Every morning she sat in a corner of the shop and watched out for the milkman arriving. She was keen to hear him saying to her as he passed the door: "How is my little Miss America?" These few words germinated in Cheryl's mind and became the object of her ambition. In 1980 Cheryl Prewitt became a beauty queen. What an impact the words of an ordinary milkman can have!

3- Our words can have a great influence on others. In what circumstances can they do a lot of good?

- When someone is sad, words of *comfort*;
- When someone has made a mistake, words of *exhortation*;
- When someone has been neglected, words of *affection*;
- When some is facing difficulties, words of *encouragement*...

Our words can restore many people and be like a healing balm (Proverbs 10:21; 12:18).

Damage caused by the tongue

4- James continues by comparing the tongue to a fire in verses 5b and 6. In what way is this illustration different to the preceding ones?

It shows that *the power of the tongue can be devastating* [worksheet]. A simple match falling to the ground is enough to set a whole forest ablaze and to reduce it to ashes. Think about the pictures we see in the media during the summer: fires in Southern Europe ravage vast areas. [The word translated as "forest" can also mean "brush". The hills of Palestine were often covered with it. When a fire started, it spread quickly and the consequences were catastrophic.]

16 years +

You could explain to this age group that this comparison of the tongue to a fire is used in other Bible texts. Proverbs 16:27: "An ungodly man digs up evil, and it is on his lips like a burning fire." Proverbs 26:21: "As charcoal is to burning coals, and

wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife.”



Method: Hidden words

Verse 6 states that the tongue is “a world of iniquity”. Several terms showing bad use of the tongue have been placed in the grid. Circle them.

[When the teens find the words, you could ask them to define them.]

R	M	P	L	F	K	T	Z	C	P	R	F	R	T	C
N	U	P	C	B	J	B	C	O	G	I	E	K	B	E
C	W	D	K	T	Z	H	N	C	U	D	B	J	C	A
R	R	O	E	C	L	M	O	A	N	I	N	G	J	H
S	Y	I	V	N	T	D	B	A	O	F	H	O	W	S
Y	P	D	T	A	E	G	L	A	L	I	V	S	A	G
R	R	G	N	I	T	S	A	O	B	M	U	S	N	G
E	R	W	J	O	C	O	S	V	Z	F	A	I	Z	I
K	V	R	O	E	Q	I	U	B	K	T	Y	P	O	Q
C	M	D	L	F	R	J	S	A	O	L	O	I	P	V
O	U	M	Y	D	C	X	L	M	N	F	C	N	E	F
M	B	G	H	K	L	F	K	T	E	C	H	G	G	H

5- What does James imply when he states that the tongue is “set on fire by hell”?

The devil gives the tongue its devastating power [worksheet]. Satan is the one who reigns over hell. He clothes our words with a destructive force. History gives us striking examples, like that of Adolf Hitler. Satan used his eloquence to cause havoc among the nations.



Method: Case study

Let’s see in the following example how a word can contaminate our relationships with others. “Simon is lagging behind with his studies. After having several bad results, he is jealous of a friend, Patrick, who passes every exam with surprising ease. ‘I am sure that Patrick is cheating,’ Simon tells a friend on the school football field. Simon spreads the news: ‘It seems that Patrick is cheating during the exams!’ The rumour spreads around the whole class. Only a few don’t believe the news. So Patrick gets a bad reputation. When someone calls him a ‘dirty cheat’ the next day, Patrick is amazed and tries to defend himself. Then several others join in against him. As for Simon, he keeps his distance; he regrets what he did, but considers it too late to take back what he said.”

- 1-How did the slander start? How did it spread?
- 2-What were the consequences of this for Patrick, Simon and their friends?
- 3-What can you do in practice to fight against this bad use of the tongue?



Quote from Winston Churchill

“The power of man has grown in every sphere except over himself.”

In fact it is surprising to see that man is capable of sending someone to the moon and bringing him back again. But when it comes to our words, we cannot control where they are going to land, nor the extent of their influence.

Equally, James points out in verses 7 and 8 that man succeeds in bringing wild animals under control, but his own tongue is unconquerable. However, what is impossible with man is possible with God (Luke 18:27). He wants to help us, and He can.

The tongue: both bitter and sweet

6- Verses 9 and 10 state that we use our mouth to do two contradictory things. Which ones?

Bless God = praise Him, glorify Him [worksheet].

Curse men = wish something evil on them [worksheet], desire that they will be eternally separated from God. Such words are unacceptable, because men were created in His image.

In this way our tongue is capable of the best and the worst. The most beautiful and the most vile words come out of the same mouth.

7- What illustration does James use in verse 11 to show that our use of the tongue is inconsistent?

Fresh water and bitter water cannot gush forth from the same spring [worksheet]. At

that time, it was essential for the inhabitants of Palestine to have drinkable water from the well. The survival of the village depended on it. Thankfully, the water coming direct from the source is not fresh one moment and salty the next!

8- In verse 12, James appeals to the laws of nature: a fruit is consistent with the tree which bears it. How does this last illustration relate to us?

Our words should show that we belong to Christ [worksheet]. It is not normal for a child of God to use spiteful words.

9- This teaching of James reminds us of that of Jesus in Matthew 12:34: “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” What fills your heart and mine to overflowing?

As long as we are dominated by sin inside, it is inevitable that our tongue will often serve the cause of evil. Our bad words place us under God’s condemnation (Matthew 12:37). Ask Jesus Christ to purify you (1 John 1:7) and to fill your heart with His love. Only a good heart can produce beautiful words.



Object lesson: A glass of water

If we fill a glass with water and then knock it, what is the result? It is inevitable that the glass will overflow and that some of the water will spill. In our relationships, it often happens that we are “knocked” by others. What comes out of our mouths? If our heart is full of hate, our words will be spiteful. But if our heart is full of the Lord’s goodness, our words will be kind.



Conclusion

You can talk to God using this prayer of David: “Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips” (Psalm 141:3). God can continue His work of making you more like Him. He can watch over your tongue and help you to speak in love to your parents, teachers and friends. Ask Him to do that. [Finish with a moment of prayer.]

“Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34).

“Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips” (Psalm 141:3).

The Tongue

James 3:3-12

- 3 Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body.
- 4 Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires.
- 5 Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles!
- 6 And 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.
- 7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind.
- 8 But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.
- 9 With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God.
- 10 Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.
- 11 Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?
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To what does James compare the tongue in verses 3 and 4?

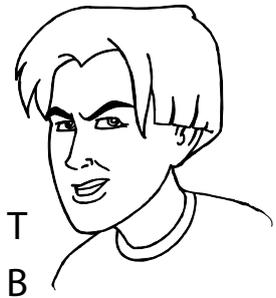
A _____ capable of _____

A _____ capable of _____

What do these first two illustrations reveal – verse 5a?

Our words can have a great influence on others. In what circumstances can they do a lot of good?

James continues by comparing the tongue to a fire in verses 5b and 6. In what way is this illustration different to the preceding ones?



I N T B M C U Y S
 R M P L F P R F R T
 N U P C B G I E K B
 Q C W D K T Z H N C U D B J C O B
 U R R O E C L M O A N I N G J H L
 A S Y I V N T D B A O F H O W S T
 G Y P D T A E G L A L I V S A G U
 L R R G N I T S A O B M U S N G A
 V E R W J O C O S V Z F A I Z I H
 K K V R O E Q I U B K T Y P O Q J
 D C M D L F R J S A O L O I P V C
 O U M Y D C X L M N F C N E
 M B G H K A C H G G
 A E H O T J R H



What does James imply when he states that the tongue is “set on fire by hell”?

Verses 9 and 10 state that we use our mouth to do two contradictory things. Which ones?

_____ which means _____

_____ which means _____

What illustration does James use in verse 11 to show that our use of the tongue is inconsistent?

In verse 12, James appeals to the laws of nature: a fruit is consistent with the tree which bears it. How does this last illustration relate to us?

“Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34).

“Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips” (Psalm 141:3).



7 Conflicts

James 3:17-4:2



Objectives: the young believers will

- think about what can initiate conflicts.
- realise the damages caused by conflicts and will desire to become peacemakers.
- endeavour to have a kind and moderate attitude towards everyone.

The unsaved will realise that they must above all be reconciled to God.



Introduction: Discussion using objects

[Set a variety of objects in the middle of the group, for example:

An elastic band	Matches	A watch	A pawn
A compass	A bandage	A mask	A drawing pin
A candle	Adhesive tape	A handkerchief	A spinning top
An eraser	A whistle	A ruler	

Ask some of the young people to think about the relationship they have with their parents. Some others will have to think about the relationship they have with their friends. A third group will have to think about their relationship with their teachers. Each one will have to choose an object which reminds them of this relationship, then they will explain in turn the reasons for their choice – without giving embarrassing details! For example: “When I ask my parents for permission to go out on Saturday evening, it is as if I were lighting a *match*: the discussion becomes rather heated!” Several young people can use the same object.]

Our relationships can quickly change. A quarrel can take place and leave its mark. In the passage which we will study today, James explains the origin of conflicts and how to avoid them. [Distribute the worksheets.]

Bible reading: James 4:1-2 and 3:17-18

[We propose that you examine the second portion of the text first, in order to give the study more clarity.]

- 4:1** Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?
- 4:2** You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war...
- 3:17** 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.
- 3:18** Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (NKJV)

Causes

1- What kind of conflicts is James talking about here?

Rivalry between believers within local churches [worksheet]. We only have limited information, but the terms used by James are revealing. Some people wanted to have a dominant position in the community, envied the status of others, or tried to impose their viewpoint. The church was the theatre of unhappy power struggles. (Paul reports the same story. Disagreements sometimes took place in the area of doctrine and Christian practices – 2 Corinthians 12:20; Titus 3:9.)

The words “wars” and “fights” from verse 1 do not imply that the Christians were physically fighting. Their disputes were probably mostly verbal. As we saw in our last study, however, verbal violence can do a lot of harm.

2- James wants us to consider the source of these conflicts. What does the rest of verse 1 say?

They stem from our desires for pleasure [worksheet], which are deep-seated in our hearts. The scornful attitude of certain Christians was due to their personal ambition, to their thirst for power. They were only thinking of their personal interest and not of the interests of the church. [James uses the word “pleasure” in Greek, which is neutral, but in the context of the passage, it is a case of unhealthy pleasures. This verse reminds us of James 1:14 on the subject of the origin of temptation.]



Method: Case study

The conflicts which break out today also come from passions and desires which drive us. Which bad desires were the cause of a quarrel in the following situations?

- After losing the match, two football players are fighting in the changing rooms.
- A young person is arguing with his parents’ decision to forbid him going to the disco on Saturday evening.
- After receiving his corrected homework, a student goes out of the classroom and slams the door.
- A young person on a bicycle shouts insults at his neighbour who rides by on his top-class scooter.

[The responses depend on how the situations are interpreted: ambition, pride, jealousy, covetousness.] Rather than allowing our anger to explode, we should take time to think about the motive behind it.

3- Are our desires satisfied?

We cannot obtain what we want [worksheet]. There are so many things we would like to have! It is inevitable that sometimes our expectations will be disappointed. We are often frustrated, incapable of contenting ourselves with what we have or with our social position.

Consequences

4- James continues by speaking about consequences. What do our frustrated desires lead to, according to the rest of verse 2?

Murder, fights, war [worksheet]. Envy grows and provokes hostile acts – just as a balloon filled with too much air will burst in the end.

5- Were the Christians really “murderers”?

The word does not have to be taken in the literal sense. *James is thinking particularly of moral crimes [worksheet].* In fact, our attitudes and our words can injure deeply and “destroy” a person, without having recourse to physical violence. (In Matthew 5:21-26 Jesus emphasises the seriousness of anger. He commands the people concerned to go without delay to be reconciled with their brothers.)

6- Can you think of a Bible story in which jealousy led to a real murder?

The story of *Cain and Abel* [worksheet] in Genesis 4:1-16. Cain could not stand the fact that God looked more favourably on his brother’s offering. He did not try to contain his anger, despite the divine warning. He killed his brother in the fields. This drama was repeated down through the generations.



Illustration: Statistics

There is only one step between verbal violence and physical violence. Numerous young people in schools have crossed that line. According to a French ministerial report, 72,057 violent acts were recorded during the school year 2002-2003. 70 percent of the incidents took place in colleges for 12-15 year-olds. Reported incidents:

- 21,003 physical violence
- 7,844 theft or attempted theft
- 1,952 throwing stones or other projectiles
- 1,757 racketeering or attempted racketeering

Are you confronted with incidents like these in your school? How do you react?
What can we do to curb violence?

Proper conduct

7- If we want to become peacemakers, with whom do we first need to be reconciled?

With God [worksheet]. By committing evil, man has set himself up as an enemy of God (Colossians 1:21). Delivered over to himself, he is a slave of his passions (Titus 3:3) and is incapable of living in peace with others. But, in His love for us, God reconciled us to Himself by the sacrifice of His Son on the cross (Colossians 1:22). Jesus removed the barrier of sin, which stood between us and God. Sinful man only needs to accept by faith the offer of reconciliation which God makes to him. He must grasp the hand which is stretched out to him. Have you been reconciled with God? Have you made your peace with Him?

8- What is “the wisdom that is from above” which James speaks about in chapter 3:17?

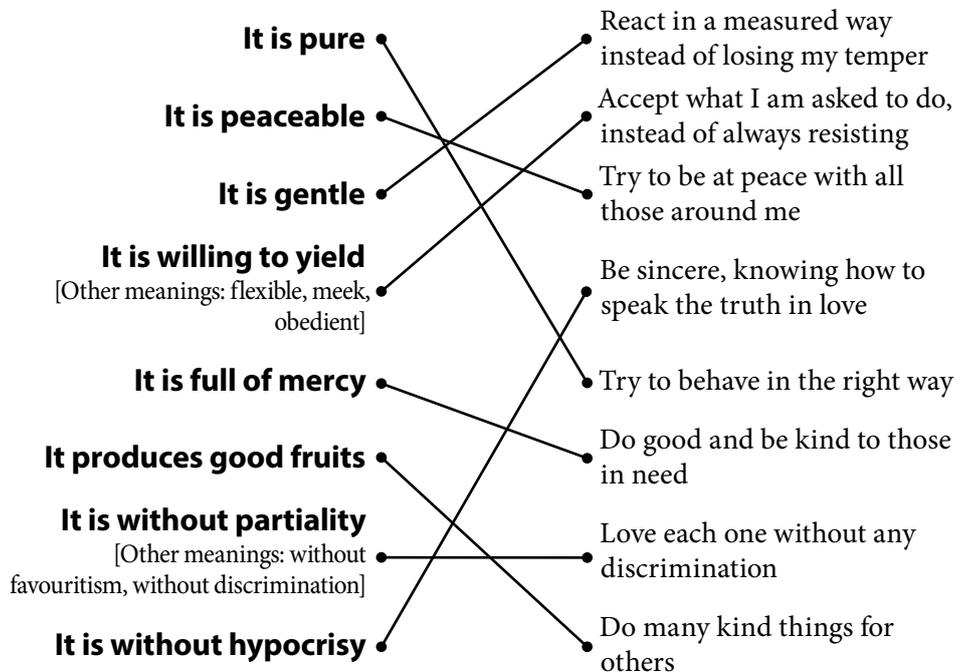
The word “wisdom” is often used to speak about correct knowledge or words. But for James, it refers to a right behaviour. The “wisdom that is from above” is *a way of life inspired by God* [worksheet]. In this verse, James describes the behaviour which a man should have, according to God.



Method:

[Put the young people together in groups of two or three and ask them to put together the qualities of wisdom from the list on the left with the corresponding attitudes on the right.]

Wisdom from above



[After correcting the chart, ask the young people to re-read the list for themselves and underline two areas in the left-hand column, in which they particularly need to make progress.] These qualities come together magnificently in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the Good Shepherd, gentle and meek (2 Corinthians 10:1). He Himself is completely pure. He is “the truth”. He brings peace and asks His disciples to spread it (cf. Matthew 5:9).

9- Does the Christian sometimes have to accept confrontation? In which situations?

Imagine that you see three young people in the street, bullying a child. They throw down his bicycle, empty his bag onto the ground and begin to kick him. Shouldn't you try to intervene?

Imagine that during lunchbreak, your friends start talking about spiritual things and one of them insults God with hateful words. Shouldn't you try to stop him?

Sometimes we need to take a stand for God and for good [worksheet]. These are battles in which you do have to be involved. But watch out that in these exceptional situations you don't forget the principles of the Christian faith. Nothing justifies a fighting spirit!

16 years +

Interesting texts to examine:

Matthew 21:12-13 and 22:15-21: The Lord Jesus chased the merchants from the temple and turned their tables over for they had made God's house into a den of thieves. In other circumstances, He violently opposed the Pharisees when they twisted the truth.

Acts 4:15-20: The Apostles were in conflict with the authorities when they forbade them to proclaim the Gospel.

10- Finally, what image does James use in verse 18 to urge us to work at spreading peace?

Sowing with the harvest in mind [worksheet]. Working for peace is not an easy task. But what you sow will produce what is right and will favour relationships which are pleasing to God. [Verse 18 poses translation problems. The fruit of justice is sown either by peacemakers or for peacemakers.]



Method: Role play

If time allows, you could act out conflict situations:

A father is shocked to find a packet of cigarettes in his teenager's jacket pocket. When the teenager tells him that they belong to a friend, the father becomes angry. The mother intervenes.

After class, David asks Mark to lend him his mobile telephone. He refuses, because David has already borrowed it three times that day. A dispute breaks out. A third teenager, Luke, tries to restore calm.

[The goal is to think about how to resolve a conflict. After the scene has been acted out, take the time to discuss with the young people what happened: What did Luke say to calm his friends? What difficulties did he face? What other means could he have used to initiate reconciliation? Should he give his opinion, take sides? After the discussion, replay the scene with new actors.]



Conclusion

Perhaps you have found out that some of your relationships are not healthy – with your parents, your teachers, your friends or others. Do you want to sow peace from now on?

“Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” 2 Timothy 2:22.

Conflicts

James 3:17-4:2

- **4:1** Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?
- **4:2** You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war...
- **3:17** 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.
- **3:18** Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (NKJV)



Causes

What kind of conflicts is James talking about here?

James wants us to consider the source of these conflicts. What does the rest of verse 1 say?

After losing the match, two football players are fighting in the changing rooms.	A young person is arguing with his parents' decision to forbid him going to the disco on Saturday evening.	After receiving his corrected homework, a student goes out of the classroom and slams the door.	A young person on a bicycle shouts insults at his neighbour who rides by on his top-class scooter.
--	--	---	--

What does the first part of verse 2 make clear about lusts and desires within us?

Consequences

James continues by speaking about consequences. What do our frustrated desires lead to, according to the rest of verse 2?

Were the Christians really "murderers"?

Can you think of a Bible story in which jealousy led to a real murder?

Proper conduct

If we want to become peacemakers, with whom do we first need to be reconciled?

What is “the wisdom that is from above” which James speaks about in chapter 3:17?

It is pure

It is peaceable

It is gentle

It is willing to yield

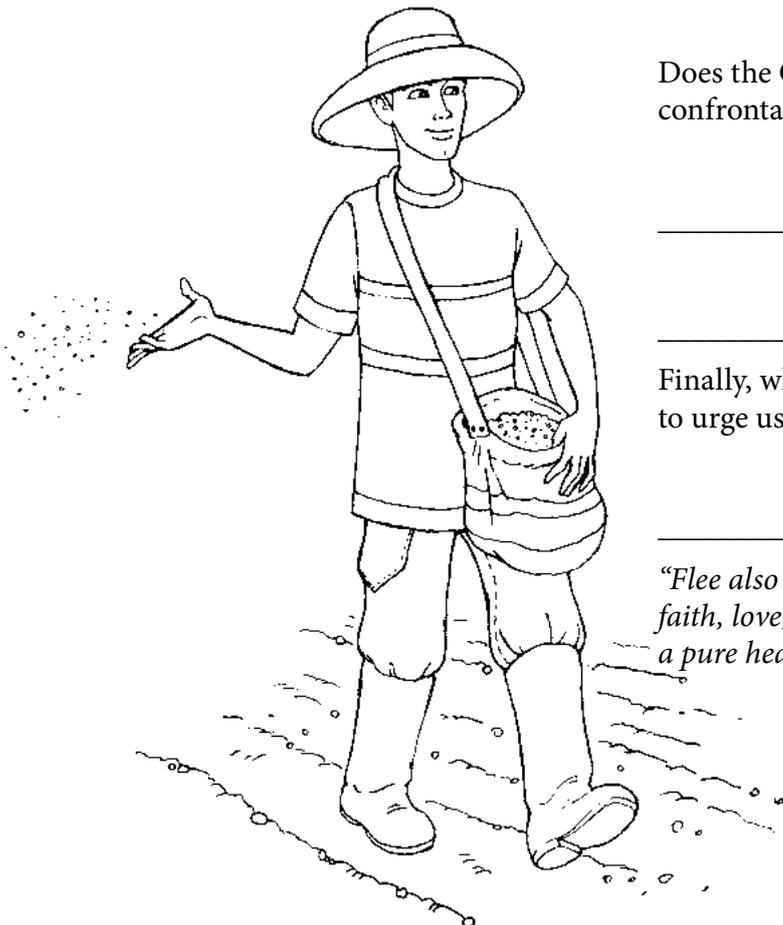
It is full of mercy

It produces good fruits

It is without partiality

It is without hypocrisy

- React in a measured way instead of losing my temper
- Accept what I am asked to do, instead of always resisting
- Try to be at peace with all those around me
- Be sincere, knowing how to speak the truth in love
- Try to behave in the right way
- Do good and be kind to those in need
- Love each one without any discrimination
- Do many kind things for others



Does the Christian sometimes have to accept confrontation? In which situations?

Finally, what image does James use in verse 18 to urge us to work at spreading peace?

“Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22).

8

Future Plans

James 4:13-16



Objectives: the young believers will

- recognise that their future is in the hands of the sovereign God.
- regret having sometimes worked out presumptuous plans.
- submit their plans to God's will in prayer.

The unsaved will think about the brevity of life and will be encouraged to believe in God and to receive eternal life.



Introduction: Photolanguage

[Before the meeting, cut out about 50 photos of different kinds from magazines and put them on a table. You will ask the young people to answer the question "What are your plans?" It can be short, medium or long-term plans. They should use one or two photos of their choice to illustrate their answer. The same photo can be used by several people.]

Will we be able to accomplish these plans? We are not certain of this. In the passage which we will study today, James reminds us that our future depends on God and that we do not know what tomorrow has in store for us. [Distribute the worksheets.]

Bible reading: James 4:13-16

- 13** Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit";
- 14** whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.
- 15** Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."
- 16** But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. (NKJV)

Our plans are sometimes presumptuous

1- Which professional category is James addressing in verse 13?

The rich businessmen who project new profits [worksheet]. At the time of James, commerce was already widespread. Numerous Jews went to the cities of the Mediterranean basin to do business. [The absence of the expression "my brothers" is evidence that James is speaking of businessmen in general and not only those who are believers.]

In reading this verse, we can see a familiar scene from modern life: businessmen who move their offices to a larger town to develop their businesses, gain a larger slice of the market and make a profit.

2- Let's make a detour via verse 16. What is wrong with these people and their plans?

They are arrogant [worksheet]. Sure of themselves, they decide where to go, when to leave and for how long, as if they were perfectly controlling the circumstances themselves. So James does not criticise the fact that they are making plans, but he denounces the arrogance with which these businessmen go about it. They believe they are masters of time. "We will spend a year establishing our business in this new town and lining our pockets nicely. Success guaranteed!" It is this boastful reasoning that James wants to correct. Don't we also have the tendency to be too sure of ourselves?

Our plans are very uncertain

3- James asks a first question in verse 14. What does he want to remind his readers about?

We do not know what tomorrow will hold for us [worksheet].

These businessmen who plan up to a year ahead, do not know in reality what will happen to them tomorrow. Control over time is only an illusion.

4- What kinds of things can crop up in our lives and jeopardise our plans?

An illness, an accident, a terrorist attack, a change in finances, a new romance, the Lord's return... [worksheet]. The Lord's return can happen at any moment; this will be the subject of our next study. We are aware that unexpected circumstances can change the course of our lives. Modern technology does not allow us to escape from uncertainty. We do not know when our earthly life will be over.

5- Why does James compare life to a vapour, in the second half of verse 14?

Because our lives are fragile and brief [worksheet]. Think of a morning fog which covers a lake or envelopes a coastal village. When the sun rises, it quickly disperses the fog, which disappears within a few moments. [Note: the Greek word used here can also be translated "smoke". Our existence is like smoke, which the wind quickly disperses.] We must not lose sight of the fact that our lives are short and uncertain.

16 years +

The Books of Wisdom in the Bible often deal with the fleeting nature of life. Here are several texts which you could study with an older group: Job 7:7 compares life to a breath; Psalm 90:3-6 to grass which flourishes in the morning and withers by evening; Psalm 102:3 to smoke which disappears; Psalm 144:4 to breath and a passing shadow. See also Psalm 39:5-8 and Proverbs 27:1.



Illustration: Living to 100!

M.J. Rodale was the chief editor of an American magazine and a defender of organic food. At the age of 72, he stated confidently that he was going to live until the age of 100. His prediction had only just been reported in *The New York Times* and on television when he died of a heart attack.

6- Should we therefore live in fear of tomorrow?

Realising the fragility of our existence can worry those who live far from God. John 3:36 states: "He who believes in the Son *has everlasting life* [worksheet]; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

It is essential to have placed our trust in Jesus Christ, Who died on the cross for our sins and rose again. Then, even though we may have uncertainties about our earthly life, our destiny is sure. We enjoy eternal life with God. Do you have this assurance?

Certain young people see conversion as a plan for down the road. "I will see later, I have plenty of time!" But tomorrow it may be too late. So don't delay!

Our plans should be submitted to God

7- What should we do when we make plans, according to verse 15?

Say "*if the Lord wills*" [worksheet].

This expression is not a sort of magic formula to repeat to guarantee success!

8- What attitude must these words reflect?

It is a case of modestly recognising that our plans depend on God [worksheet]. Unlike us, God already knows what will happen tomorrow. In His greatness, He controls the course of events. He is the master of time and history. Instead of launching ourselves into our own plans, we should humbly recognise His sovereignty over our lives. The success or failure of our plans depends on Him. Let us give our projects over to Him with confidence.



Illustration: "DV"

Perhaps you have noticed the letters "DV" on publicity or letters written by Christians. This means, "God willing", from the Latin "domino volente". These two letters are often used when referring to future projects. Dates are often followed by "DV". This custom is to remind people that all plans are dependent on the divine will.



Method: Chart to complete

God does not oppose the fact that we have plans for the future, but He asks us to submit them to His will. Let us see how the Apostle Paul developed numerous projects, but allowed God to have the last word on them. [Ask four volunteers to look for these Bible texts and read them. The young people will have to fill in the table on their worksheet.]

The Apostle Paul :	His projects	His submission
Acts 18:21	<i>Go back to visit the Ephesians</i>	<i>If that is God's will</i>
Romans 1:10	<i>Have the opportunity to visit the Romans</i>	<i>If that is God's will</i>
1 Corinthians 16:7	<i>Stay for some time with the Corinthians</i>	<i>If the Lord permits</i>
Philippians 2:19	<i>Send Timothy to the Philippians</i>	<i>Trusting in the Lord Jesus</i>

The important thing is not just to say the words "if the Lord wants it", but to seek to depend on God's will. If our plans succeed, we will give Him the glory for this. If they fail, we will humbly accept that they are not part of His plan.

9- According to verse 16, why do we have the tendency to leave God out of our plans?

Because of our *boasting and arrogance* [worksheet]. It is our pride which encourages us to make presumptuous plans. We claim that we can run our lives on our own. We believe we are self-sufficient and only think "horizontally". Pride leads us to neglect God's sovereignty. We leave Him out of our plans. This is crazy, because He is the One Who reigns over everything!



Method: Fictitious letter

[Put the young people into groups of four or five and give each group some paper, a pencil and the following instructions:]

Suppose you received a letter from a friend:

"Dear... I have to decide which direction to go in my studies! I have always dreamed of being a sports teacher, but I also love computers. My mother sees me as an engineer, but, with my maths average this year, I wouldn't dream of it! I don't know what to do and I am so afraid of making a mistake. How can I make this decision? Can you help me? Will you pray for me?"

Make up an answer together, using the following advice from the Bible: James 4:15 (submit yourself to God's will); Proverbs 3:5-6 (trusting in His leading); Proverbs 15:22 (seeking good advice from others).



Conclusion

We all have plans or dreams. We need to watch out that we don't become arrogant like the businessmen James was addressing. Remember that our existence and our activities are uncertain. We do not know what tomorrow has in store for us. But in prayer we can place our projects into the hands of our sovereign God and ask Him to guide us in His perfect plans.

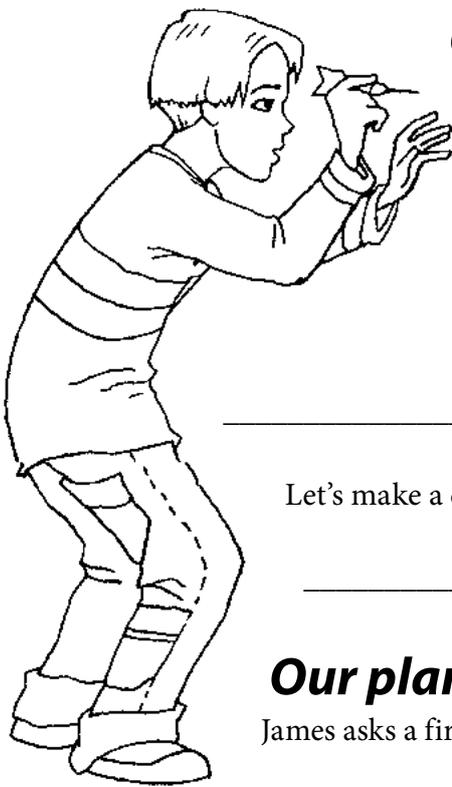
This evening, would you like to take time to give your projects and dreams over to the Lord.

“Show me Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths... But as for me, I trust in You, O Lord... my times are in Your hand.” (Psalm 25:4; 31:14-15).

Future Plans

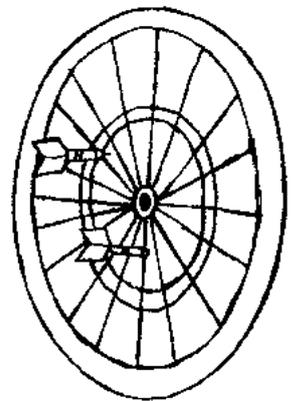
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Our plans are sometimes presumptuous

Which professional category is James addressing in verse 13?



Let's make a detour via verse 16. What is wrong with these people and their plans?

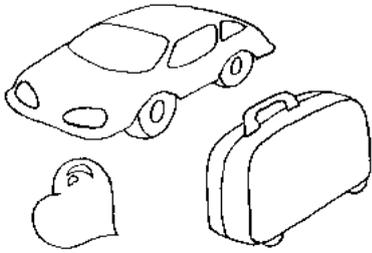
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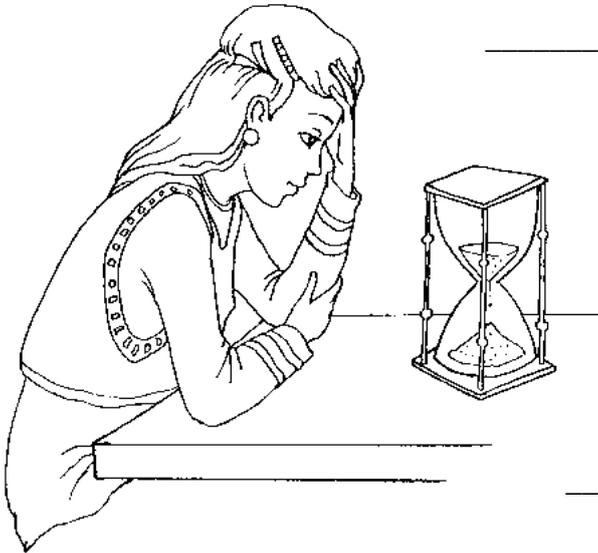
John 3:36: “He who believes in the Son _____; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”



Our plans should be submitted to God

What should we do when we make plans, according to verse 15?

What attitude must these words reflect?



The Apostle Paul :	His projects	His submission
Acts 18:21		
Romans 1:10		
1 Corinthians 16:7		
Philippians 2:19		

The important thing is not just to say the words “if the Lord wants it”, but to seek to depend on God’s will.

According to verse 16, why do we have the tendency to leave God out of our plans?

*“Show me Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths...
But as for me, I trust in You, O Lord...
my times are in Your hand.” (Psalm 25:4; 31:14-15).*



9

Christ's Return

James 5:1-8



Objectives: the young believers will

-  understand that the Lord will return to condemn the unjust and honour the faithful.
-  realise that Christ may return at any time and will want to be ready.
-  prepare for the Lord's return by sharing the Gospel with those around them.

The unsaved will be encouraged to put their trust in Christ so that they will be among those whom He will take with Him and glorify.



Introduction: A storm

Have you ever looked out of your window and noticed that a storm was on its way? The wind has started blowing, lifting the leaves on the sidewalk. Large black clouds have gathered and the sky has darkened. Sometimes you can see swallows flying low. People in the streets run for shelter. Everyone closes his doors and windows before they slam. You cannot mistake these warning signs: a storm is about to break!

In the passage we will study today, James speaks about Christ's return. All the warning signs seem to show that it is close at hand, but we do not know when it will happen. This great day will be a day of terror for some and a day of joy for others. Let's make sure we are ready. [Hand out the worksheets].

Bible reading: James 5:1-4,7-8

- 1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you!
- 2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten.
- 3 Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days.
- 4 Indeed the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth...
- 7 Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain.
- 8 You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. (NKJV)

Condemnation of the unjust

1- In chapter 4 James spoke to the rich merchants.

To whom is he speaking now?

To rich landowners [worksheet]. The passage describes very wealthy men who own land and employ workers. These owners are mean and oppressive. [Just as in the preceding chapter, James is not talking specifically about Christian landowners; he is speaking in general.]

2- Why should these rich men weep and howl – verse 1?

For the miseries that are coming upon them [worksheet]. When the Lord Jesus returns they will be severely condemned.

16 years +

In verse 1, the way the sentence is worded reminds us of a text in the Old Testament. The prophets called the unjust to mourn, for God's wrath was about to fall on them – Isaiah 13:6.

3- In verses 2 and 3 James uses metaphorical language to speak about wealth. Can you interpret it? Complete the following sentences.

- Their riches are corrupted, moth-eaten, corroded means... *they have no value from the perspective of eternity.*
- Their riches will be a witness against them and will eat their flesh like fire means... *they will be condemned because of the evil way in which they use their wealth.*

4- James gives two main reasons for condemning the rich landowners. What is the first according to verse 3?

They selfishly heap up their riches [worksheet]. These men heap up their treasure without thinking of others. They ignore the needs of those around them. How foolish when judgement is so close at hand!

5- What is the second reason for condemning them and which makes their situation much worse – verse 4?

They do not give their workers a salary [worksheet]. They not only ignore others' needs; they even endanger the lives of those who depend on them economically and they take advantage of them. James' accusation is based on the instructions God had given Israel for their social life (Deuteronomy 24:14-15, Leviticus 19:13, Jeremiah 22:13). When a worker was hired to plough land or to reap, he had to receive fair wages, that very day, before sunset. The poorest among them needed the money to buy food for their family. Withholding or lowering a salary could endanger the worker's life or his family's.

6- What does James imply at the end of verse 4 when he says that the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord?

God knows the wrong the landowners are doing and will bring justice [worksheet]. The actions of the rich are not hidden from the Lord. God is omniscient, holy and almighty. He will not let evil go unpunished.

16 years +

Cries reaching up to God are described elsewhere in the Scriptures: Genesis 4:10 (the blood of Abel), Genesis 18:20-21 (the accusations against Sodom and Gomorrah), Exodus 2:23 (the children of Israel's groaning in Egypt).

7- Are there rich men, nowadays, who earn their money by abusing others?

[Let the young people give a few examples from the daily news.] There can be bosses or politicians who embezzle large sums of money. Nowadays fraud can be subtle and discreet. It will however not escape God's justice. [You could bring newspaper cuttings in which this subject is dealt with.]



Method: Case study

[You could divide up the young people into groups. They would then read the summary of Gates' life and answer the thought-provoking questions.]

William H. Gates is the chairman of Microsoft Corporation. He was born in Seattle in 1955. At the age of 13, he discovered the joys of programming. At Harvard University, he developed a version of the programming language "basic," and in 1975 launched the Microsoft company. It soon became the uncontested world leader in software and computer services. This is how Gates became the richest man in the world. His wealth has been estimated at about 50 billion dollars. He and his wife are the owners of a foundation that invests billions of dollars in education and

humanitarian projects such as campaigns against AIDS. It seeks, amongst other things, to provide poorer countries with access to computers and the Internet.

What do you think of this rich man of modern times? Would you like to have his wealth? What would be the advantages and what would be the dangers? According to Psalm 37:7, what should we do and what should we not do when faced with the man “who prospers in his way”?

Reward for the faithful



8- Then James speaks to the believers. What is the main exhortation he gives in the last two verses?

They must be patient [worksheet]. The Christians in those days were often abused and ill-treated. That is why James encourages them to hold on, not to give up and to remain faithful to the hope that is theirs: they know the Lord will return!

Method: Complete the chart

In verse 7, James compares the Christian waiting for Christ’s return to a farmer. Fill in the chart on your worksheet to show this comparison. [Note: the word used by James indicates someone who works on the land; it can be a farmer, a vine grower or a gardener.]

The farmer	The Christian
... must work and sow.	... <i>must serve God and share the Gospel.</i>
... scans the sky and waits for the rain.	... <i>sets his hope in the Lord's return.</i>
... will enjoy a precious harvest.	... <i>will be honoured and rewarded by God.</i>

In Palestine the rain watered the soil during the first half of Autumn and at the beginning of Spring. These showers were rare, vital and longed for (Jeremiah 5:24). In the same way we look forward to the Lord’s return.

9- How can the believer prepare the coming of the Lord?

Among other things, by sharing the good news of the Gospel [worksheet]. God cares for each human being and does not want any to perish (2 Peter 3:9). If you are among those who are waiting for the Saviour’s return, remember that it must not be a passive expectation. The Master of the harvest wants you to be at work. Are there members of your family who do not know the Lord? Can you think of a friend with whom you could share what the Lord has done for you? Watch out for the opportunities God gives you to share your faith. Do everything you can so that when Christ comes back they will rejoice also! Sow the Word of life and wait for the “Autumn and Spring rain”!

10- What is the “reward” the believer will receive when the Lord returns?

It has so many facets that we cannot examine them all today. Here are just a few:

2 Timothy 4:8: *he will have eternal righteousness.*

2 Thessalonians 1:7: *he will enjoy rest.*

2 Timothy 2:12: *he will reign with Christ.*

Daniel 12:3: *he will shine like the stars forever.*

This is the happiness you will receive if you are ready when Christ comes again.

11- In the last verse, James talks about the coming of the Lord as being “at hand”. But we have been waiting for almost 2,000 years! How can we explain James’s statement?

The Lord’s coming is at hand, in that it can happen any time [worksheet]. Remember the example of the storm we talked about at the beginning of the study. We said that the storm was close because there were many signs of its coming and the

atmosphere was heavy. But several hours can pass before it breaks and heavy showers fall on us. The first sound of thunder may make us jump. In the same way, we do not know the day or the hour of the Lord's coming. The most important is for us to be ready and sheltered. [Other interesting texts to examine: 2 Peter 3:4-10; Mark 13:32-33; Luke 12:40.]

12- Are you ready for Christ's return?

Think hard about this question. Maybe you are like those whom we spoke about at the beginning of our study who are carried away by the love of money, who are fascinated by appearances and who do not realise where their choices will lead them.

Romans 3:23-24: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Would you like to receive God's gift? Do you want to be ready for the Great Day and be allowed to enter into God's presence? Turn from sin and live for Christ from now on. Then you will be sure that Jesus will come back for you!



Conclusion: Earthquake

California has often been shaken by earthquakes. That is why a father told his children to put their shoes and a torch under their beds before they went to sleep. When the earth would shake, the windows could be shattered and the electricity go off. Thanks to the shoes the children could walk over the broken glass, and by the torchlight they could find their way in the dark. Each child had to be ready! You must also be ready for Christ's return!

Christ's Return

James 5:1-8

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- 2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten.
- 3 Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days.
- 4 Indeed the wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth...
- 7 Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain.
- 8 You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. (NKJV)

Condemnation

In chapter 4 James spoke to the rich merchants. To whom is he speaking now?

Why should these rich men weep and howl – verse 1?

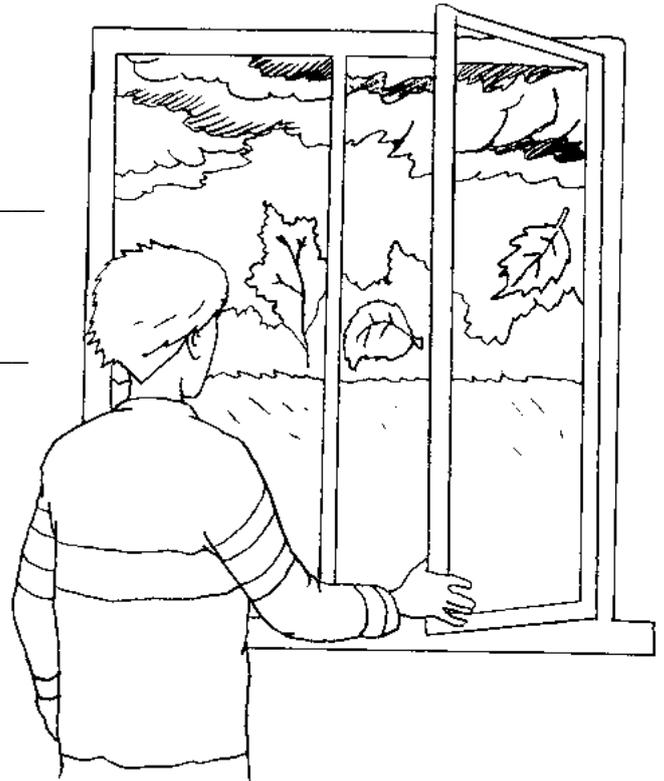
Their riches are corrupted, moth-eaten, corroded

means _____

Their riches will be a witness against them and will eat their flesh like fire means

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What is the second reason for condemning them and which makes their situation much worse – verse 4?



What does James imply at the end of verse 4 when he says that the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord?

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Reward

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The farmer	The Christian
... must work and sow.	
... scans the sky and waits for the rain.	
... will enjoy a precious harvest.	

How can the believer prepare the coming of the Lord?

What is the “reward” the believer will receive when the Lord returns?

2 Timothy 4:8 _____

2 Thessalonians 1:7 _____

2 Timothy 2:12 _____

Daniel 12:3 _____

In the last verse, James talks about the coming of the Lord as being “at hand”. But we have been waiting for almost 2,000 years! How can we explain James’s statement?

Are you ready for Christ’s return?



10 Prayer

James 5:13-18



Objectives: the young believers will

-  understand that prayer enables/allows them to have a close relationship with God.
-  realise that prayer is effective when it is done with faith.
-  try to pray more in the coming days – particularly for the sick.

The unsaved will realise that they must trust in the Lord Jesus and become children of God if they want to enjoy the privilege of prayer.



Introduction

[Hand out the worksheets and ask the young people to answer these two questions:]

What is your first reaction when you face a difficulty? Tick one or two boxes.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I try to solve the problem myself. | <input type="checkbox"/> I ask my parents' advice. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I ask God to help me. | <input type="checkbox"/> I phone a friend and talk to him about it. |

And what is your first reaction when something good happens to you? Again tick one or two boxes.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I enjoy the good news alone. | <input type="checkbox"/> I quickly tell my parents. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I rejoice with my friends. | <input type="checkbox"/> I tell God how thankful I am. |

In difficulties we sometimes tend to wait before we ask for God's help. In the same way, when there is reason to rejoice, we sometimes forget to thank Him for His blessings. The text we will study today encourages God's children to give prayer the priority!

Bible reading: James 5:13-18

- 13** Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.
- 14** Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.
- 15** And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.
- 16** Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.
- 17** Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.
- 18** And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit. (NKJV)

Pray in every situation

1- Before we study this passage, could you give me a definition of prayer?

It is talking with God [worksheet]. Prayer helps us to remain in a close relationship with Him day after day. The great privilege of the believer is to speak freely to God. The Father's ear is turned towards each one of His children.

Do you belong to God's family? According to John 1:12, the Lord grants the privilege of becoming children of God to those who have received Him and believed in His name. If this is the case for you, the obstacle of sin which separated you from God has been removed and you can enjoy a personal relationship with God your Father.

2- In which situations does James encourage us to pray – verses 13 and 14?

When suffering, cheerful, or sick [worksheet]. We should turn to the Lord in every circumstance. Let us not hesitate to share with Him our worries and our needs. No problem is too small for God to be interested in, or too great for God to solve. But let us also come to Him when we are happy. Our prayer can then consist of praise and of thanksgiving – as James suggests in the text. (Another passage in which singing and prayer are closely linked together is 1 Corinthians 14:15).

16 years +

James' exhortation to pray in every circumstance is repeated elsewhere in the Scriptures: Psalm 50:14-15,23; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Ephesians 6:18-20.

3- Do you talk with God when you are in difficulty, but also when you are happy?

Some Christians only pray when they face a crisis. They are right to call on the Lord, but they must remember that prayer is not only an "SOS" in case of emergency. It is being in close relationship with our Father. We can live our days with Him, share our joys and our sorrows with Him. It is also through prayer that we seek to depend on Him and that we let ourselves be guided by Him.

Pray for the sick

[After having encouraged us to pray individually in every circumstance, James now emphasises the value of praying together, particularly for the sick. He mentions controversial subjects in verses 15 and 16. We will not go into detail.]

4- What should a sick person do, according to verse 14?

Ask the church elders to pray for him [worksheet]. The elders looked after the members of the local church. When a sick person asked for their help, it was natural that they should get together and pray for that person. (In the original text, verse 14 says that they prayed over the sick. While praying they probably laid their hands on the sick person.)



Method: Tick the correct box

According to the second part of verse 14, the elders poured some oil on the sick person before praying for him. Let us try to understand the meaning of this. Read for yourself the following list of explanations and tick the one that seems the best to you.

- The use of oil is not mentioned or explained anywhere else in the Bible. [This box should not be ticked. Mark 6:13 mentions anointing the sick with oil so that they would be healed. Also anointing with oil is frequent in the Old Testament.]
- Oil was used as medicine. [Texts such as Isaiah 1:6 and Luke 10:34 remind us that oil was often used to heal wounds. However it could be applied by the sick person himself or by a friend. So this use of oil is very different from that of the elders who symbolically poured oil on the sick.]
- The elders anointed the sick person to set him apart, to entrust him to God's care. [According to Exodus 40:15, 1 Samuel 10:1, and many other passages of the Old Testament, the anointing with oil was meant to consecrate a person to God for a specific purpose. We can thus suppose that in the New Testament church, the elders did the same to set the sick person apart for God and ask Him to give particular attention to him. It is still practised in a number of churches today. It is a good addition to praying for healing.]
- Oil has a "magical effect" that can produce healing. [Of course, this is not the case. We must be careful not to isolate the use of oil from the context in which

James mentions it: the reaction of the local church to illness. The church sends its representatives who care for the sick person, anoint him with oil and pray for him. The emphasis is on prayer. God alone can heal.]

5- What can God do for the sick person in answer to prayer – verse 15?

Save and raise him [worksheet]. God knows perfectly every molecule of our body. He can step in and heal the sickness. [Usually the word “save” is used for spiritual deliverance, but James is most probably using it here simply to speak of physical healing.]

However, God wants us to take part in His work. Even though He doesn’t need us, He wants us to co-operate with Him. He has chosen us to be His co-workers. Our part is to pray individually and together with the local church. If our requests conform to His will, He will intervene and heal the sick. Do you realise that your prayers can have a great impact?

6- James tells us that our prayer should be a prayer of faith. What does it mean?

We should believe that *God is all-powerful*, but also *trust in His wisdom* [worksheet]. In the first chapter James encouraged us to pray in a resolute way, not doubting but convinced that God can step in. However we must also recognise God’s infinite wisdom. Sometimes our requests are not in accordance with His will (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). He alone knows what is best.



Illustration: A puzzle

Do you like puzzles? Sometimes you get stuck. You keep looking for a certain piece among so many others. You have to try each piece one by one to find the one that fits. Finally you find the piece that has the correct shape. It fits into the beautiful picture and allows you to continue your puzzle.

In the same way, our prayer life can be discouraging sometimes. We realise that our prayers are not answered. But God wants us to persevere and count on His help. The “prayer of faith” as James calls it, perfectly fits into God’s will and is answered.

7- James then mentions an obstacle to healing. What is this obstacle and how can we overcome it?

Sin – we must confess it [worksheet]. The Bible teaches us that illness can be due to a transgression [see particularly 1 Corinthians 11:27-30]. However this is not always the case [John 9:3]. It seems that, at the end of verse 15, James is speaking about this particular situation. If a sick person has committed a sin, he can turn to the Lord in prayer and receive His forgiveness. This shows us that when we are ill we should examine our spiritual life and if we realise we have sinned, ask the Lord to forgive our transgressions.

Verse 16 continues by emphasising the need to confess our sins to one another. If we have sinned against a brother, we should admit that we are guilty and ask him to forgive us. (Note: confessing “to one another” was not only a private matter. In the early church Christians would confess their sins publicly during the service, particularly when the whole community was affected.)



Method: Case study

(You could split the young people into groups. They will read the summary of Joni’s life and answer the two questions.)

Joni Erickson was a young Christian girl. She liked sport and had good results in school. She often asked the Lord to help her to know Him and serve Him better. One day she dived into the Chesapeake Bay (USA). Her neck hit a rock and she became paralysed. It was, humanly speaking, impossible to heal her. Christians got together to anoint her with oil and plead with God to make her walk again, but she remained paralysed. During this trial, her relationship with God grew deeper and she had many opportunities to serve Him. She was invited to give her testimony in conferences and wrote books that are now known worldwide.

- 1- Which one of Joni's prayers did the Lord answer and how?
- 2- What attitude should we have when we go through trials like illness?

Pray like the prophet Elijah

8- To show how prayer is effective James takes the example of the prophet Elijah in verses 17 and 18. What do you know about him?

The Books of Kings tell us how Elijah was God's messenger to denounce Israel's sin and to accomplish marvellous miracles. His life on earth finished in an extraordinary way: he was taken up to Heaven in a chariot of fire. As well as this, he was a great man of prayer.

9- James tells us that Elijah prayed for drought, then he prayed for rain to return. Why should he ask God for such things?

1 Kings 17:1; 18:1.

He knew that this was the means God would use to discipline Israel [worksheet]. King Ahab "did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him" (1 Kings 16:30). This is why God decided to punish him by keeping back the rain for three and a half years. Elijah knew God's will. His prayer was taken from God's Word and was meant for God's glory. [Other texts along the same line: Matthew 26:39; 1 John 5:14]. When we pray we should conform our prayers to what we know of God and what He wants for us. God's Word is the mould in which we should form our prayers.

10- How did Elijah pray and what was the result? See also 1 Kings 18:41-46.

He prayed insistently and the answer was spectacular [worksheet]. According to 1 Kings 18, Elijah put his face between his knees so that nothing could keep his mind from focusing on God. He sent his servant up the mountain eight times to look toward the sea and observe the first signs of God's answer to his prayer. The servant finally noticed a small cloud in the distance. The end of the story is quite impressive: after over three years of drought, heavy rain fell on the land. We must learn to pray with perseverance and faith. Then our life and that of those around us will be greatly blessed.

11- What detail does James give us in verse 17 to show us that the power of prayer can be ours also?

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours [worksheet]. You can also experience the power of prayer. It isn't just for a few heroes of faith. The important thing is that you should want to do God's will and give Him the glory. You will then discover how powerful and effective prayer can be.



Conclusion

This study has been the opportunity for you and me to examine our prayer life. Do you live in a close relationship with the Lord? Do you pray for the sick? Have you realised the great effectiveness of prayer? Let us take a few minutes of silence to tell God that we want to know Him more intimately and live closer to His heart. [Quiet time.]



Supplement: Approaching spaceships

Imagine you work for the International Space Centre. Your radars have spotted an armada of spaceships heading straight for the earth. These extra-sophisticated vessels come from a civilisation far more developed than ours. You are worried and decide to send them a message. But how will they react?

- 1- How is this imaginary situation similar to prayer?
- 2- How is it totally different?

When we pray, we are also speaking to a person infinitely greater and wiser than we are. However we know that God hears us, understands us and wants the best for us. We can share our joys and our sorrows with Him.

Prayer

James 5:13-18

What is your first reaction when you face a difficulty? Tick one or two boxes.

- I try to solve the problem myself.
- I ask God to help me.
- I ask my parents' advice.
- I phone a friend and talk to him about it.

And what is your first reaction when something good happens to you? Tick one or two boxes.

- I enjoy the good news alone.
- I rejoice with my friends.
- I quickly tell my parents.
- I tell God how thankful I am.

- **13** Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.
- **14** Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.
- **15** And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.
- **16** Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.
- **17** Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.
- **18** And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit. (NKJV)

Pray in every situation

Before we study this passage, could you give me a definition of prayer?

In which situations does James encourage us to pray – verses 13 and 14?

Pray for the sick

What should a sick person do, according to verse 14?

Why did the elders pour oil on the sick person before praying for him – second part of verse 14?

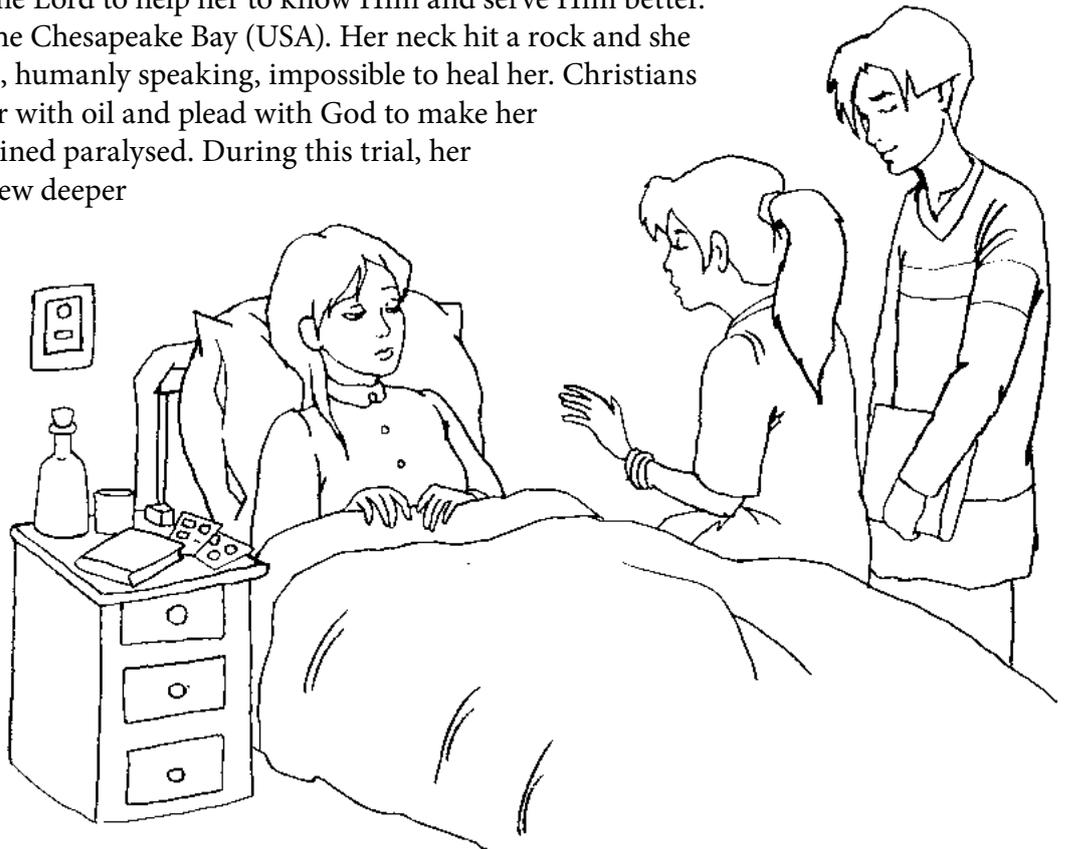
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How did Elijah pray and what was the result? See also 1 Kings 18:41-46.

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