

Being Doers of the Word: 13 Lessons in James

Leaders Guide



13 online adult Sunday school lessons

Produced in partnership with the Baptist General Association of Virginia

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About Acacia Resources

The biblical witness singles out acacia wood for its uniqueness. The only wood mentioned in the building of the ark of the covenant, the tabernacle and the altar is acacia. Acacia wood is listed with other precious objects—gold, silver, fragrant incense, onyx stones—given to honor God.

Today's acacia tree is known for its value, diversity and durability. Some acacia trees have fragrant flowers used in making perfume. The seeds are edible. The bark is rich in tannin, a substance used in tanning, dyes, inks and pharmaceuticals. Furniture, oars, tools and gunstocks are made of the hard lumber from the acacia tree.

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The name *acacia* symbolically ties BCE's publishing initiative to our biblical heritage. The acacia tree represents the wise value attached to educational resources, the diversity of needs within churches and the durability demanded for growing healthy Christians, whether they are singles, couples with children or senior adults.

Acacia Resources will guide Christians and draw them godward, as the ark of acacia wood guided the people of Israel in their journey and represented the presence of God in their midst.

For more information about Acacia Resources, call 615-383-3192 or visit our Web site at www.ethicsdaily.com.

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A Being Doers of the Word: 13 Lessons from James Students Guide is also available from Acacia Resources (www.ethicsdaily.com).

Preface

The 1989 Steven Spielberg film “Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade” follows the tracks of Indiana Jones as he searches for the Holy Grail.

Unfortunately, Nazis are on the same quest and have kidnapped Indiana’s father in order to obtain his diary, believing it contains maps and other records that will aid them in their search. Indiana’s journey turns into not only a pursuit for the Holy Grail but also a mission to free his father and reclaim the diary.

Near the story’s end, Indiana encounters the knight who guards the Holy Grail. To get to the grail, one must choose between a number of cups from which to drink—cups made from a variety of lovely and valuable elements such as gold, platinum and silver and other, plainer cups from substances like terra cotta and wood.

“You must choose,” the knight warns, “but choose wisely, for as the true grail will bring you life, the false grail will take it from you.”

Another seeker—a bad guy—approaches and chooses to drink from a glittering gold cup. “This certainly is the cup of the King of Kings,” he says. Soon, however, after numerous frightening transformations, he dissolves into dust.

“He chose poorly,” the knight explains.

Indiana Jones then chooses to drink from a wooden cup. “That’s the cup of a carpenter,” he says.

“You have chosen wisely,” the knight tells him.

Writers of movies and books regularly weave into their stories themes related to the benefits of making wise choices and the consequences of making poor ones because these so accurately reflect a common human dilemma. The wisest and best choices are sometimes wrapped in plain or even unappealing packages. And the poorest and worst choices often come deceptively disguised as the most attractive.

The lesson, of course, is this: the wisdom on which we base our choices and thus build our lives is critical. The source of our wisdom makes all the difference. People of faith believe that scripture is a most valuable tool in unlocking true wisdom, and the success of Acacia Resources' Bible study *Living Wisely, Living Well: Lessons from the Proverbs* tells us that people want practical helps in applying the wisdom of scripture to their lives.

Like the book of Proverbs, the epistle of James warns against following the wisdom of the world, pointing instead to the wisdom from God that enables us to see life from God's perspective. Armed with this wisdom and living within this perspective, James wrote, we are equipped to apply the faith we affirm in our heads and profess from our mouths to every area of our lives.

In a pithy style similar to Proverbs, James's letter moves rapidly from one issue or area of life to another, often with no apparent connection, to tell us how to live in a way that authenticates the Christian faith we profess.

A call to authenticity that comes from a single-minded pursuit of God's wisdom underlies much of James's writing. We get into trouble, he said, when we allow ourselves to be deceived into following wisdom from other sources. Though we profess to have faith in God, when we allow sources

other than God to guide and direct our lives and decisions, we become double-minded and hypocritical.

More than what we say, what we do and how we act reflect the true nature of our faith. Faith is practical and concrete, not an abstract theological idea, James believed. Lives of genuine faith according to James are marked by moral purity, peace, gentleness, reasonable speech and actions, impartiality and mercy.

James went so far as to say that we can know the authenticity of a person's faith by their positive actions or "works." And the absence of those works means faith is dead.

The implications for missions are clear: it's not enough to tell others what we believe, and more often than not, the telling isn't what makes the biggest impression. Actions do speak louder than words.

The Baptist General Association of Virginia, our partner in the production of this Bible study, recognizes this reality and offers Virginia Baptists of all ages numerous opportunities to put hands and feet to the faith they profess. Adopting the term "glocal missions," they have accepted the challenge of scripture to become "doers of the word" and work to mobilize, train and equip individuals to carry the ministry and message of Christ both throughout Virginia and around the world.

James would likely have heartily embraced the term "glocal missions," because it is all-encompassing. Missions and ministry—being "doers of the word"—is both "here" and "there." Authentic Christian faith compels us to look both nearby and even farther than we can see to find and meet needs. It broadens and expands our capacity to care, our vision and our reach.

Often that means forming healthy partnerships with other Christian organizations and believers who can go to places we personally cannot and who can represent for all of us the God we serve. The late 2004 tsunami disaster offers but one recent example.

In the days following this unprecedented crisis, Virginia Baptists made some significant decisions that will allow their ministry efforts to have long-lasting effects. In addition to sending money immediately to help in relief efforts, the Virginia Baptist Mission Board and the Woman's Missionary Union of Virginia cancelled their annual spring 2005 Missions Celebration event so that those funds could be redirected toward an ongoing relief project in India.

Virginia Baptists had earlier established a partnership with the Indian Baptist Convention, so the tsunami's effects in that country were of special concern to them. Their bold action allowed the Precious Children's Home, an orphanage in Areeparambu in the state of Kerala, India, to take in 10 children who lost their parents during the tsunami.

The orphanage will also, as a result of these funds, be able to move ahead with plans to enlarge their facilities and take in an additional 100 children. Virginia Baptists who had planned to attend the Missions Celebration were encouraged instead to give the money they would have spent on transportation, food and lodging to the tsunami relief effort.

At a time when words could never have adequately expressed the depth of sorrow we felt nor the compassion we wanted to convey, actions such as these could and did.

Years after James penned his letter, St. Francis of Assisi succinctly summed up his message when he was quoted as saying, "Preach the gospel at all times; when necessary, use words."

Perhaps because St. Francis was not a Protestant, some Baptists and other evangelicals have bypassed his message and have instead reversed and consequently diluted it, also often ignoring the admonition of James to become "doers of the word." With the Baptist emphasis on "personal witnessing," our words have often far outweighed our works and in many cases have been frequently misunderstood and sometimes more harmful than helpful.

In fact, says EthicsDaily.com columnist and pastor James Evans, "A new evangelical mindset has emerged that intends to force people to live a version of the Christian life whether they want to or not. . . . So much for gentle persuasion. Many Christians are celebrating this get tough approach to spreading the faith, but they should not be too excited. This is not how faith spreads—this is how faith dies. History is littered with the debris of faith communities that have tried to force their way on others. In fact, it was just such an evangelistic group that nailed Jesus to the cross" ("Evangelism and the Hope of a Better World," www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=5200).

If we want others to join us in "doing the word," we will persuade them not so much by what we say as by how we live. They'll see it in:

our mature decision-making;

our ability to withstand temptation;

our positive attitudes and loving actions;

our impartial and nonjudgmental love;

our sincere efforts to apply God's wisdom;

our thoughtful speech;

- our pursuits of peace and justice;
- our confident assurance and identity;
- our God-based world view and priorities;
- our advocacy on behalf of the powerless and voiceless;
- our ability to exercise patience and take the long view;
- our determined focus;
- our confident praying.

Now more than ever, our world needs people who profess the faith to back it up with love-based actions that expect nothing in return.

Allow the message of James to show you how to be a more effective and authentic “doer of the word.”

Written by Jan Turrentine, managing editor for Acacia Resources, Baptist Center for Ethics, Nashville, Tenn.

Developing a Mature Faith Leaders Guide

James 1:2-8

²My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, ³because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; ⁴and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing. ⁵If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. ⁶But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; ^{7,8}for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

Theme: Christian faith both forces us and equips us to make difficult choices.

Before You Teach

- ▶ Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.
- ▶ Prior to this Bible study, enlist a long-distance runner in your group to explain how he or she reached the level of physical conditioning necessary to run for long periods of time. Ask the person to be prepared to talk about their initial training plan and how they built up their muscles and increased their lung capacity. If there is not such a person in your group, find someone outside the group, interview him or her to obtain this information and plan to report it to the group.

► In advance, prepare half-sheets of paper on which you have written: *Faith grows when* _____.
Make a sheet for each person in your group.

► EthicsDaily.com regularly features columns and news related to Christian responses during difficult times. Use the Web site's search engine to find a number of specific examples related to the late 2004 tsunami disaster. These and many other columns and news stories contain illustrations you may find helpful as you prepare for and lead this Bible study. The following two are representative:

"Finding God in a World of Tragedy," (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=5165);

"Where is God Now?" (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=5249).

As You Teach

Introduce the Lesson

► Recall for adults the movie "Music of the Heart" and ask those who have seen it to summarize its plot. Supplement their comments with the following, noting particularly the scenes related to standing tall.

The film tells the true story of Roberta Guaspari (played by Meryl Streep). When Guaspari's Navy officer husband leaves her for her best friend, she returns home to New York and must find a job and make a new life for herself and her two young sons. Though she has teaching credentials, she has never used them nor has she had any other professional experience.

Guaspari ends up becoming the violin teacher in an East Harlem elementary school, relying on a skill she had ac-

quired and developed as a child. She succeeds in teaching her students not only the technical skills required to play the violin but also the life skills of discipline, preparation, cooperation and the quest for excellence.

One early scene shows Guaspari reminding her students that they must stand tall and strong. Later, during difficult circumstances at the school, she contemplates quitting. In a particularly touching and parallel scene, she talks with one of her young students who is considering quitting violin lessons. The young girl thinks she cannot stand tall because she wears a brace on her leg. Guaspari reminds her that standing tall is more than standing on one's legs. Gently touching the little girl's chest, she reminds her that she can stand tall "here," in her heart.

► Lead adults to discuss the various responses people have to trials and adversity by calling attention to the examples in the Introduction in the Students Guide. Ask them to give examples of responses to difficult times from their own lives or the lives of family members and friends.

Then ask:

- *What causes some people to respond positively in difficult or tragic circumstances while others, facing the same or similar circumstances, become angry, bitter and hopeless?*
- *How do you personally respond when someone asks you why bad things happen to good people?*
- *Do you think God creates trials so that we will grow?*
- *Do trials develop character or reveal it?*

► Suggest that most people would agree that trials can develop character and offer opportunities for our faith to grow. Just as important, however, is the fact that difficult times can also reveal character that is already present and faith that is as confident as it is when things are going well. Point out that James advised his readers to cultivate a mature and constant faith that would sustain them when they faced trials and suffering.

Explore the Bible

► Remind adults of Rabbi Harold Kushner's best-selling book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* and its exploration of the question of the suffering of those who do their best to live the right way. Point out that the question is a timeless one; people of all generations and faith traditions—and people of no faith tradition—have asked the question when the difficult and inexplicable happen.

In a column he wrote following a visit to Sri Lanka only two days after the 2004 tsunami disaster, Tim Costello said, "In fact, if there were some direct relationship between morality and natural disasters, as was once thought, it would make God out to be an unconscionable bully to the coastal poor and a chief benefactor of cities such as Zurich, Palm Springs and Paris. And it would also make a mockery of Jesus' teachings about the special place for the poor in the heart of God."

► Next, read aloud James 1:2 and note that instead of addressing the question of why bad things happen to good people, James immediately began to give advice to Christians about *when*—not *if*—they faced "trials of any kind." Suggest that for James, trials and troubles were part and parcel of life. He was not concerned with *why* they occurred but instead with *how* Christians should respond to them.

Ask:

Developing a Mature Faith

- *What was James's advice?*
- *How do you interpret or understand his admonition to consider trials as "joy"?*
- *How is joy different from happiness?*
- *Upon what does happiness depend?*

Stress that while happiness is dependent upon what happens to us, joy is not.

► Ask the runner you previously enlisted to explain his or her initial training program and explain the steps he or she took to reach the point of being able to run long distances.

Then ask a volunteer to read aloud James 1:3-4. Draw the parallel between the progressive training in which a runner engages to build up muscles and increase lung capacity, and the consistent faith responses we make that give us strength and enable us to face trials and difficult circumstances. Ask:

- *What is the purpose of endurance? What does it prove?*
- Read aloud James 1:5 and ask:
- *Why do you think James rather abruptly moved from writing about faith and endurance in verses 3-4 to writing about wisdom in verse 5? What is the connection?*
 - *Why is God's wisdom essential for us in facing trials as James instructed?*

- *How is the worldview James promoted different from the world's wisdom?*

▶ Ask a volunteer to read aloud James 1:6-8. Then ask:

- *Within what context have you most often heard these verses used?*
- *What is the actual context of asking in faith in these verses?*
- *What did James condemn in these verses, and why?*
- *Why was James's use of wave imagery here unusual?*

Apply Biblical Truth

▶ Give each person one of the half-sheets of paper you have prepared, and distribute pens or pencils. Ask each person to consider James 1:2-8, the group's discussion of it and their own new insights about faith and then complete the statement.

Ask several volunteers to read aloud their completed statements. Then call attention to the four related statements at the conclusion of the lesson in the Students Guide. Ask someone to read aloud those statements.

▶ Call attention to the column "Finding God in a World of Tragedy" by Jim Evans (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=5165) and note that Evans wrote the column in the days immediately following the December 26, 2004 tsunami. He wrote:

"Suffering of this magnitude pushes us to confront again and again the ancient question of the problem of evil. If God is good and all powerful, the argument goes, then why is there suffering. Either God is not as good as we thought or not as in charge of the universe as we believed."

He concludes: "I choose to cling to the hope of God's goodness. The tragedies of life are not instances of God's anger or absence. The tragedies of this life are the painful price that we pay for being human. God does not inflict our suffering but does not prevent it either. In much the same way that parents allow their children to fall as they are learning to walk, so the forces of this world are allowed to blow against us. The hope is that we might learn the proper way to be human in this world.

"And what does that way look like? The world's response to the earthquake is a picture of what the human community could be all the time. . . . We must learn to respond to daily tragedies such as poverty with the same enthusiasm we have for periodic tragedies such as earthquakes and floods.

"Christians ought to understand this better than most. The symbol of our faith is an ancient instrument of torture. . . . [It] gives us a way to embrace the goodness of God. With the cross we can believe that God knows what it is like to suffer as a human being, and perhaps suffers with us."

▶ Challenge adults to consider things they can do to develop a more mature or complete faith that will enable them to make difficult choices and face "trials of any kind." Remind them that such a faith is the foundation for those who are doers of the Word.

Enduring Temptation

Leaders Guide

James 1:12-18

¹²Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. ¹³No one, when tempted, should say, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it; ¹⁵then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death. ¹⁶Do not be deceived, my beloved. ¹⁷Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

Theme: Christian faith enables us to withstand temptation and pursue goodness.

Before You Teach

- ▶ Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.
- ▶ EthicsDaily.com regularly features articles, columns and news related to issues that challenge Christians to work for peace and pursue justice for all people. The follow-

ing list is representative; you may find these and other articles helpful as you prepare for and lead this Bible study. Many of them contain illustrations and examples you can incorporate into the discussion of this scripture and its application.

"Wrestling With Controversy," (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=5398);

"Teaching Outside the Ivory Tower," (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=3990);

"A Time for Traveling Light," (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=5319);

"The Way of Discipleship," (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=2948);

"Would Jesus Win an Election?" (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=4658).

As You Teach

Introduce the Lesson

- ▶ Begin with the following illustration:

A young woman from a rural West Virginia farm, barely out of her teens, and a young man from small coal-mining town in southwestern Pennsylvania both find themselves serving as American soldiers in Iraq. Their socio-economic backgrounds are similar, the young man having worked the night shift at a fast-food restaurant during high school to help his financially-strapped family.

The two are stationed at the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad and live in conditions that can only be described as primitive: cellblocks for living quarters, no dining room or mess hall, almost unbearable heat.

Word gets around the prison that military intelligence wants to soften up some of the prisoners for interrogation. Here the similarities between the two soldiers end. One soon found her face on the pages of newspapers around the world, posing with a pile of naked men and pulling an Iraqi prisoner by a dog collar. Her name became known almost instantly. The other, Spec. Joseph M. Darby, was rarely seen in photographs, and his name was known by comparatively few people. His actions, however, led to the exposure of abuse of Iraqi detainees at Abu Ghraib.

Darby, a reservist in the 372nd Military Police Company, slid an anonymous note under the door of a superior describing the physical and sexual abuse of Iraqi detainees at the hands of some in his unit. Hundreds of explicit photographs soon not only authenticated his allegation but also shocked the world. Darby later also came forward with a sworn statement that set off the investigation into the abuse scandal.

Friends and family members of both soldiers were surprised by their actions. One family friend described the young woman as a “caring person” and said, “It’s not like her to be like that.” Her mother said she joined the army to pay for college. She wanted to become a meteorologist.

Upon hearing of what Darby had done, one of his friends from high school said, “That don’t sound like Joe.” He recalled a young man who was often hot-headed and unafraid to show his anger. “Like the rest of us might, I thought maybe he’d just turn and forget about” the abuse, he said. “Maybe I’d do the same. You just never know.”

But a neighbor of Darby’s said that his upbringing caused him to respond the way he did. He was “respectful, brought up the proper way.” A former girlfriend from high school remembered that Darby organized a benefit dance to raise money to help the family of a friend whose father had died of a heart attack.

► Point out that while one of these individuals quickly became labeled a villain and the other was heralded as a hero, there was nothing in the background of either that would have predicted their actions or those labels. In fact, the opposite might appear to have been the case.

Next, describe the examples of the young Polish conscript and the grandmother from the Introduction in the Students Guide. Lead adults to discuss these situations by asking:

- *What choices did each of these individuals face?*
- *What did their decisions and actions reveal about their characters?*
- *When two individuals are faced with the same set of circumstances, what causes one to choose vengeance and the other to choose justice?*
- *How easy is it to fall prey to the temptation to do evil so that good might come from it?*
- *Is it ever right to do evil because we think that good may eventually result?*
- *What is the source of hard choices such as these?*

Explore the Bible

► Read aloud James 1:12, and guide adults to a more complete understanding of the word the NRSV translates as “temptation.” Suggest that we can better understand the meaning of the original word as “trial,” “test” or “struggle.” James used the word in relation both to external sources of struggle (see Jas 2:1-13, 5:1-6) and internal forces (Jas 1:7-8, 14; 4:13-17). The word includes but is not limited to what we normally think of when we think of “temptations.”

Then ask:

- *Why did James say those who endured struggles and trials were “blessed”?*
- *What did James mean by “blessed”?*
- *How are those who endure struggles and trials “doers of the word”?*

► Ask a volunteer to read aloud James 1:13. Then ask adults to compare and contrast humanity and God, according to James’s assessment. Ask:

- *How did James view God?*
- *What human tendency did James advise against?*

► Read aloud James 1:14-16 and lead adults to discuss it by asking such questions as these:

- *According to James, where does evil begin?*
- *What or who is responsible for evil?*

- *What is the result of unchecked human desire?*
- *Is there a solution to this problem, or a way to stop this deadly chain of events?*

► Ask someone to read aloud James 1:17-18. Explain that you will name a one-word quality or attribute of God, and ask adults, in light of these verses, to describe or further characterize it as it relates to God. Suggest that they do so by comparing and contrasting God’s manifestation of this quality or characteristic with that of humanity. Use these qualities: *generosity; faithfulness; love; purpose.*

Then ask: *What did James mean when he said that “we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures” (v 18)?*

Ask a volunteer to read aloud the statements about God’s generosity and our responsibility by Dietrich Bonhoeffer from the Students Guide.

Apply Biblical Truth

► Suggest that while our Christian faith enables us to withstand trials and struggles and work to pursue goodness and justice, we can expect to face opposition and resistance from those who would rather pursue their own agendas, or worse, vengeance. Cite the following example.

Miguel de la Torre, a Cuban American, is professor of theologies of liberation at Hope College in Holland, Michigan, and a former Baptist pastor in Kentucky. He is also a regular columnist for EthicsDaily.com and for his local newspaper, the *Holland Sentinel*.

Holland is, by his description, a conservative religious and political environment. It was settled by the Dutch in the early

1800s and continues to celebrate its rich Dutch heritage. Well under the radar, however, are Hispanics who comprise over 22% of the overall population. That figure would rise to nearly 30% if it included undocumented persons, de la Torre says.

“Yet in spite of these demographics,” he asserts, “our marginalized members are seldom seen walking, shopping, or eating on the same streets frequented by whites, even when Latinos live a few blocks away. It is a town where many from the dominant culture may wish to live in a more just and equitable society, but also find themselves trapped within social structures once created to protect their privilege by masking racism and classism. Consequently, those who are oppressed by these structures, along with those who benefit, are in need of salvation” (“Teaching Outside the Ivory Tower,” www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=3990).

“The Christian ethical perspectives from the margins of Holland are crucial toward establishing a more just society. For this reason, my role as a Christian must include participation with the faith community and the overall society. Most ethicists of color do not write only to express their views in the marketplace of scholarly opinions. They write to give voice to the voiceless—to shout from the mountaintop that which is commonly whispered among disenfranchised people—to put into words what the marginalized are feeling.”

De la Torre is aware that his writing often angers those who see their power and privilege as a birthright. Some probably question his sanity, he says, “for only a madman would fight insurmountable forces bent on maintaining the status quo.” It would be easier, he says, “to simply conform, and remain silent in the face of racism, classism, sexism and

heterosexism.” That temptation, he confesses, sometimes seems attractive.

“As alluring as this might be, I have chosen instead to construct praxis with those of the dominant culture who have a vision for Holland that provides services and opportunities for all, regardless of their race, gender, class, national origin, sexual orientation or religious affiliation. As a Christian who recognizes that every individual is endowed with the *Imago Dei*, the very image of God, I move beyond a faith based on the ‘right’ interpretation of doctrine toward a faith based on the ‘right’ manifestation of Christ’s actions—recognizing that faith without works is dead.”

► Point out that we always have a choice about how we will respond when we face struggles, trials, oppression and injustice. We can look away. We can by our actions or our inactions help maintain the status quo. We can lash out in anger and seek vengeance. We can even resort to violence. Or, we can pursue goodness and peace.

In reflecting on our nation’s response to the September 11 terrorist attacks, pastor and EthicsDaily.com columnist Jim Evans commented that, in spite of the fact that we have retaliated and destroyed and killed, much anger still persists. “Revenge has not yet satisfied our sense of loss,” he said (“In Search of Healing and Hope,” www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=4702).

“In the face of so much loss, and in an increasingly dangerous and unpredictable world,” he proposes, “maybe we need to ask just how effective violence really is in stemming the tide of evil and restoring our hope. There have been some great souls along the way who have questioned the value of violence—Jesus among them.

“Dr. Martin Luther King had some thoughts about violence. He remarked on one occasion: ‘The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. . . . Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.’

“In love, not in hate,” Evans concludes, “we will find healing for our grief and hope for peace.”

Being Doers of the Word Leaders Guide

James 1:19-27

¹⁹You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰for your anger does not produce God’s righteousness. ²¹Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls. ²²But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. ²³For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; ²⁴for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. ²⁵But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing. ²⁶If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. ²⁷Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Theme: Christian faith completely transforms and directs both our attitudes and our actions.

Before You Teach

- Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.

► EthicsDaily.com regularly features columns and other articles related to the connection between attitudes and actions, beliefs and behaviors.

The following list is representative; you may find these and other articles helpful as you prepare for and lead this Bible study:

“Getting Real Religion” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1304);

“A Biblical Worldview” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=3694);

“Ten Reasons Why Justice is Essential to the Gospel” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=5110).

Note that content from the last column is especially valuable for helping adults apply the truths of James’s writing.

► Locate the quotations attributed to St. Francis of Assisi and Henlee Barnette in the Introduction of the Students Guide. Copy each on a large piece of poster board and display them prior to leading this Bible study.

As You Teach

Introduce the Lesson

► Remind adults of the movie “Steel Magnolias,” which fielded a stellar cast including Sally Field, Julia Roberts, Dolly Parton, Shirley MacLaine, Daryl Hannah and Olympia Dukakis. It tells the stories of a close-knit group of women in a small Louisiana town.

The movie happily opens on the wedding day of Shelby Eatenton (played by Roberts), daughter of M’Lynn and

Drum (played by Field and Tom Skerritt). While filled with eccentric characters and funny scenes, the storyline includes its share of tragedy and even offers a lesson for well-meaning but sometimes misguided people of faith.

Because she is a diabetic, Shelby’s doctors have cautioned her against becoming pregnant, advice she chooses to ignore. Her fragile health deteriorates to the point that she needs a new kidney, which M’Lynn donates. Eventually the many complications of diabetes claim Shelby’s life at age 27. The entire community joins her parents, brothers, husband and young son in mourning her death.

One of the film’s most poignant scenes finds M’Lynn at the cemetery following Shelby’s funeral, surrounded by her friends. Annelle (played by Darryl Hannah), tries to comfort her, saying something like, “Shelby is with her King now.”

Words are the last thing M’Lynn needs at this point, and she angrily and explosively responds to Annelle. “I understand that in my head,” she says, “but would someone please explain it to my heart!”

► Suggest that Annelle’s response is typical of many people of faith, particularly in times of crisis. In an effort to quickly answer unanswerable questions and fill uncomfortable silences, they—sometimes we—speak instead of listening. We replace caring, no-strings-attached ministry with words people are not ready to hear. We speak faith instead of living faith. And we sometimes do more harm than good.

► Offer this example:

Following the December 26, 2004, tsunami that devastated Asia, controversy ensued when the aid efforts of certain US-based religious groups were perceived as exploitative

and proselytizing. While the motives of most groups were pure, and volunteers were there only to do relief work, some groups made Christian conversion of the many Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists in the region their primary and ultimate goal.

Vince Isner, director of FaithfulAmerica.org, was part of a delegation that visited Sri Lanka and Indonesia, the two countries hardest hit by the disaster. The group's goal was to meet with survivors and leaders of various faith groups to assess needs and develop a long-term strategy for meeting those needs. Isner's group wanted to facilitate connections and relationships between faith communities in the United States and those most affected by the tsunami disaster so that volunteers could continue to help long after the television cameras were gone and the world's attention was focused elsewhere.

As he traveled to various locations in the devastated region, Isner kept a Web log to chronicle his experiences and feelings. Isner's abiding question was: "What is the most helpful, loving thing we can do at such a time?"

"The temptation," he wrote, "is to assume that everyone needs what we need, thinks as we think, and wants what we want. Perhaps the best thing we can do is consider a different way of relating—one that assumes little, and listens much. . . . Christians need not abandon their evangelistic calling. There is a case to be made for living out one's faith with integrity and respect for others. I have the feeling that if people of faith were to fully embrace and live out the highest precepts of their religion, people would gravitate to it as if to a holy mountain" (www.faithfulamerica.blogspot.com).

In a visit to what used to be a small neighborhood, Isner listened to the stories of survivors who had watched help-

lessly as their neighbors, many of them children, had been swept away. As they neared the freshly-dug graves of a father and his four-year-old son, the group fell silent.

"Americans are often uncomfortable with silence," he wrote. "We make small talk. We clear our throats. We let out a sigh. Yet these wounded and traumatized neighbors knew what only the best of neighbors know about each other. Silence between loved ones can be the holiest of times. . . . Neighbors—good neighbors—love one another. They nourish each other in life, and they comfort each other in death. They give and receive. They laugh and they cry. They grieve and they rebuild. They help each other remember, and when it is needed, they offer each other the holy ground of silence in which to heal."

► Call attention to the quotations you have posted from St. Francis of Assisi and Henlee Barnette and ask adults to respond to them and to questions such as these:

- *Which is more important: what we believe or how we live?*
- *Of the two—right belief or right practice—which do you think Baptists have traditionally emphasized?*
- *How are beliefs and behaviors connected?*

Point out the Apostle's Creed in the Students Guide and note both what it includes and what it excludes. Then ask:

- *If the Apostle's Creed were all you had to develop a definition of Christian faith, how would you define it?*

Note that the epistle of James offers a more complete understanding of the interconnectedness of what we think and how we live the faith we profess.

Explore the Bible

- ▶ Ask someone to read aloud James 1:19-20. Then ask:
 - *What three things did James identify as primary duties of Christian believers?*
 - *How do you explain, in practical terms, what it means to be quick to listen? slow to speak? slow to anger?*
 - *What was James advocating? What was he warning against?*
 - *What did James mean when he said that “your anger does not produce God’s righteousness”?*
- ▶ Next, read aloud James 1:21 and ask:
 - *Of what did James say disciples should rid themselves?*
 - *What did James encourage disciples to receive or “welcome”?*
 - *What did James mean by “the implanted word”?*
- ▶ Distribute pieces of paper and pencils or pens. Assign each adult the role of either *hearer* or *doer*. Ask everyone to read James 1:22-25, and write a definition of their assigned role based on the description James provides. Ask them to write to someone who is unfamiliar with Christian faith.

After several minutes, ask several volunteers to read aloud what they wrote and allow adults opportunities to respond and react. Reinforce what James meant by the phrase “doers of the word,” and explain clearly how those who only hear engage in self-deception.

Explain the mirror analogy James used. Point out that James did not discount the value of listening to preachers and teachers but instead made the point that authentic disciples do more than simply hear. They also listen, remember what they hear and take action.

- ▶ Ask a volunteer to read aloud James 1:26-27 and lead adults to discuss and apply it by asking such questions as:
 - *What did James say are some indications of worthless religion?*
 - *How did James define pure, or worthwhile, religion? What concrete evidences will exist in the lives of those whose religion is worthwhile?*
 - *How do we most effectively care for the poor and powerless today? What does this involve?*
 - *What obligations do Christian believers have in terms of their personal lives and conduct?*

Stress the connection between belief and behavior, and note that works are no substitute for genuine faith. Instead, authentic faith includes both what we believe and how we live. As EthicsDaily.com columnist Barry Howard wrote, “Real religion involves the dynamic between belief and action, or putting faith into action. For James, anything less than an action-oriented faith is impotent religion. . . . Religion is not believing the right things, but acting on right

beliefs” (see “Getting Real Religion,” www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1304).

Apply Biblical Truth

► Ask a volunteer to read aloud or summarize the illustration from the Students Guide about the red- and green-letter editions of the Bible. Then recall the recent fad that prompted thousands of Christians to purchase and wear bracelets and other items emblazoned with *WWJD*. Ask:

- *What was your reaction to this cultural phenomenon?*
- *What do you think was its intended goal?*
- *Do you think it had significant impact on the decisions, behaviors and lifestyles of many individuals? Why or why not?*
- *What motivates you to act as Jesus would?*
- *What excuses do Christians typically make for inaction against social injustices and other wrongs in the world?*
- *What does James’s letter say about the validity of these excuses?*

► Close by elaborating on some or all of the “Ten Reasons Why Justice is Essential to the Gospel” by Ross Langmead (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=5110). Include some of the following thoughts from the column:

- “If we were to take to a Bible with scissors and cut out the thousands of verses about justice and the poor, we’d have a mangled mess of holes. In the Bible, our relationship to God is always tied to our relationships to each other.”
- “God is a God of justice. In the Hebrew Bible, God is always acting in history to set relationships right, defend the poor, the weak and the oppressed. In fact, God is the very manifestation of justice and mercy.”
- “Jesus’ favorite topic was the Commonwealth of God (or the kingdom of God), the new, upside-down order in which human relationships are upturned by God’s radically inclusive values. The social reversals that happen in his parables are amazing. A kingdom-centered mission will always point at the socio-political implications of conversion.”
- “Following Jesus, we’re called to make visible the Good News, and that means both putting it into words and showing by our lives what it means in terms of justice and love.”

Finally, note columnist Langmead’s concluding statement: “There’s so much happening in the world to arouse our passion for justice that we ought to be standing up and shouting. But it will only happen if our vision of the gospel contains justice at the heart.”

Living Impartially Leaders Guide

James 2:1-13

¹My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? ²For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, ³and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," ⁴have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? ⁶But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? ⁷Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you? ⁸You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ⁹But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. ¹¹For the one who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹²So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. ¹³For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

Theme: Christian faith compels us to love without partiality both those the world holds in high esteem and those it deems disposable.

Before You Teach

- ▶ Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions. Note that discussion revolving around this scripture may raise painful memories for some in your group who have been treated unfairly because of race, gender, socioeconomics or other reasons. Be particularly sensitive to these individuals.
- ▶ Note the comments from singer/songwriter Kate Campbell suggested for introducing the lesson, below. If possible, obtain a CD Campbell's album "Visions of Plenty" and plan to play the song "Bus 109" for your group.
- ▶ If possible, obtain a recording of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. Plan to play a portion of this speech to conclude your Bible study.
- ▶ EthicsDaily.com regularly features columns and news related to equality, justice and fairness. Following are two columns you may find helpful as you prepare for and lead this Bible study:

"When the Bible Is Used for Hate," (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=5314);

"Capital Punishment and Race," (http://ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=3719).

As You Teach

Introduce the Lesson

► Plan to arrive at your Bible study location ahead of everyone else. Arrange most of the chairs in a circle, but move several of the chairs away from the circle at some distance, against a far wall, if possible. Determine ahead of time a characteristic or trait other than race or ethnicity that you will use to segregate certain members of the group. For example, you might select everyone who wears glasses, or everyone born outside your state. The trait you select will depend upon the individuals in your group and will require that you know your group members fairly well.

Position yourself at the doorway before anyone arrives. As individuals try to enter the room, insist that those with the predetermined trait sit in the chairs you arranged away from the larger group. Greet the others in your group enthusiastically and warmly. Continue to insist that the two groups remain separated.

After everyone has been seated, ask individuals to respond to the exercise by asking such questions as these:

- *What do the individuals seated outside the circle have in common?*
- *How did you feel about being asked to sit in an area apart from the rest of the group?*
- *How did you feel about being included in the circle while some members of the group were excluded?*

Ask adults in the circle to extend it and make room for those who have been on the outside, and ask those individuals to bring their chairs into the circle. Then ask:

- *Have there ever been situations in your life where you have been excluded or overlooked while partiality was shown to someone else?*

Allow adults several minutes to offer personal examples.

► Lead adults to continue thinking about the dangers of showing partiality by using an illustration from the movie “Far From Heaven,” which explores, among other themes, the racism of the 1950s. In one scene, a five-year-old black boy puts his toe in the water of a whites-only swimming pool, causing everyone to clear out.

This film, wrote EthicsDaily.com movie reviewer Roger Thomas, “dares to ask the question, ‘Were the ‘50s really such a perfect time, or is that just the product of a sanitized imagination? ... The world of 1950s America may be an icon of everything that is good for some people. Some religious and political leaders hold it up as the time of traditional family values to which America should return. Those people live with a fantasy of the past that existed only in films and sitcoms. The truth is that it was much more than a time of well-behaved children, manicured yards and polite conversations, for a great many people lived lives filled with injustices. Some may romanticize that time as ‘paradise,’ but reality knows it was ‘Far From Heaven,’” (http://ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1889).

► Ask:

- *Is racial prejudice and bigotry a thing of the past?*

Encourage adults to consider both historical and contemporary examples of prejudice and partiality. Play the song “Bus 109” from Kate Campbell’s “Visions of Plenty” album. Encourage discussion of prejudice and partiality by relating the following information about Campbell and her songs.

Though she is a Baptist Christian and much of her music reflects her understanding of how Christians related to God and others, Campbell has enjoyed success in the secular market. “My music is not about me being a Christian. It’s not about evangelism. Writing songs is about telling a story” (“Songwriting as Storytelling: An Interview with Kate Campbell,” www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=186).

“One of the best things” her father did for her, she says, was allowing her to be bussed from her Donelson, Tennessee, neighborhood to a predominantly black school in downtown Nashville when that system desegregated its schools. She views the entire experience positively; it provided fodder for her song “Bus 109.”

“Many other families did not want their kids being bussed off to another school, so they put them in private school,” she recalls. Descriptions of life in the South during the civil rights movement regularly find a home in Campbell’s songs.

“Very few southerners write about civil rights,” she says. Her song “Crazy in Alabama” recalls how she and other whites stood in line at the front of the Dairy Dip, while blacks formed a separate line—the “colored line”—on the side of the building. Hot summer days found white children enjoying the cool water of the swimming pool while black children could only watch through the fence. “It never made one bit of sense,” her song says.

“Southerners should be leading the rest of the nation on race relations . . . if only they were willing to discuss these things,” she believes. “People will listen to a song about poverty, race relations, land and heritage. They will see it more in art.”

► Note that race is but one—albeit powerful and persistent—source of prejudice and bigotry. Ask adults to list others; write their responses on a flipchart or board. Include in the list sources such as gender, origin, status, wealth/poverty, political ideology, appearance, education. Then ask:

- *What problems arise when human prejudice causes us to show partiality to one person or group to the neglect and even disdain of others?*
- *Is prejudice, bigotry or partiality a problem within the Christian faith community?*

► Point out that the issue of partiality arose early in the Christian community, and James devoted part of his epistle to addressing it.

Explore the Bible

► Remind adults of the role of the synagogue in the Jewish community and how Jews had for centuries met in synagogues so that the rabbis and elders could interpret the Law to them. They also settled disputes among individuals as necessary, using the Law of Moses as their guide. Christians continued to meet in synagogues for several decades after Jesus’ death and resurrection so that judges could help them settle disputes.

Problems arose, however, when judges showed partiality between two people embroiled in a dispute. Such was the case James addressed in Chapter 2.

► Ask a volunteer to read aloud James 2:1-4 and lead adults to discuss the situation by asking such questions as these:

- *What was the real problem here—the differences between the two individuals being judged, or the attitudes of the judges toward these individuals?*
- *What did James mean by the phrase “judges with evil thoughts” (v 4)?*
- *How are partiality and Christian faith incompatible?*
- *Is it possible not to judge others? Why or why not?*
- *How does partiality dishonor God?*
- *How can we maintain impartiality?*

► Read aloud James 2:5-9 and lead adults to follow how James advanced his argument by asking:

- *What did James mean when he wrote that God has “chosen the poor to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom” (V5)?*
- *What was especially scandalous about the judges’ treatment of the poor in this situation?*
- *What was the royal law?*
- *How were the judges and the rich guilty of being transgressors of God’s law?*

► Read aloud James 2:10-13 and point out that while James held the law in high regard, he realized there was something even more important: mercy. James recognized that none of us is capable of living up to the law all of the time. Each of us is a transgressor at one point or another. The only hope any of us has is in God’s mercy. And as

recipients of God’s salvation who have been shown mercy, we, too, must show mercy to others. God makes no distinctions among us and shows no partiality. We live like Jesus when we show love, impartiality and justice.

Ask adults to offer personal explanations or definitions for mercy. Then ask someone to read aloud the quotation from John Chrysostom in the Students Guide.

Apply Biblical Truth

► Ask:

- *What groups of people today are treated unjustly or with little regard today? In what arenas does this most often occur?*
- *What groups of people today receive special notice or preferential treatment? In what arenas does this most often occur?*
- *What responsibility do people of faith have to address this disparity?*

► Play the recording, or read aloud from the Students Guide, part of Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech. Then ask:

- *What individuals or groups today would find this message especially hopeful? Why?*
- *How would you summarize King’s dream?*
- *Is the world King envisioned possible? Why or why not?*

- *What role should the Christian community play in helping to achieve this dream?*
- Challenge adults to look for ways to address cases of partiality, prejudice and injustice and extend Jesus' message of love and mercy.

Completing the Faith Leaders Guide

James 2:14-26

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? ¹⁷So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. ¹⁸But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. ¹⁹You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. ²⁰Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is barren? ²¹Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²²You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was brought to completion by the works. ²³Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. ²⁴You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. ²⁵Likewise, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another road? ²⁶For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.

Theme: Christian faith reveals and demonstrates itself in loving and practical actions.

Before You Teach

► Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.

► The following column from EthicsDaily.com includes ideas suggested for helping adults apply this Bible study. You may wish to read it in its entirety:

“The Seduction of Christian Spirituality,”
(www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=544).

As You Teach

Introduce the Lesson

► Begin with the following illustration:

When Perry Reese Jr., single, black and Catholic, first moved to the largest Amish settlement in the world—Berlin, Ohio—residents there looked at him suspiciously. Years later, at Reese’s funeral mass, many of these same people, including scores of Mennonites, flocked to the altar to receive the wafer of Holy Communion from a priest who knew he wasn’t allowed to offer it to non-Catholics, but did it anyway.

Reese went to Berlin to become basketball coach and teach at Hiland High School. In the process, he lived a Christian faith so genuine that he earned the respect of everyone.

Although his players were typically spindly and short, he somehow turned around the school’s struggling basketball program. He also made a habit of looking everyone in the eye, smiling, speaking, joking good-naturedly and treating everyone with dignity and respect.

Those in the community who first thought the federal government had sent him in as a spy soon became his friend. They saw a humble, unselfish man who regularly gave away much of his salary to his students and players. Parents eventually relied on him to help instill shared values in their children.

He was tough on the kids, but always loving and available. He took players to each other’s churches and to his own. He exposed them to music, literature, foods and other experiences they otherwise likely would have missed. Most of all, he encouraged them to think beyond the community where they were born and raised, a place that had changed little since it was settled 200 years earlier. He wanted his students to go to college, and many accepted his challenge, along with the laundry baskets full of supplies he gave them.

When community residents became fearful that another school would try to lure him away with a larger salary, women began to stock his pantry with groceries and his table with home-baked treats. Families regularly had him in their homes for meals.

That wasn’t enough for them. Together, Amish and Mennonites decided to begin paying Reese’s rent, one month per donor. So many people volunteered that they had to be placed on a waiting list. In the meantime, they raised \$1.6 million to build a sparkling new gym at the school.

News of his brain tumor devastated them, but they banded together to pray and provide him with round-the-clock care in his home. Before he died, he used his \$30,000 life savings to begin a college scholarship fund. Others contributed to it, raising it to over \$100,000.

One of his former players is studying to become a teacher and a coach, just like Coach Reese. The cultural divide he crosses will be as challenging as the one Reese crossed. The student wants to work with at-risk black kids in an inner-city school.

Several Berlin families have adopted biracial or black children, something they in all likelihood considered only after knowing and loving Perry Reese.

Both Perry Reese Jr. and the faith community of Berlin, Ohio, reflect the truth that Christian faith reveals and demonstrates itself in loving and practical actions.

Explore the Bible

► Introduce James 2:14-26 by noting that it has been widely debated for centuries, particularly among Protestants, because many people believe that James contradicts Paul's teachings in Romans 4 and Galatians 3. Others, however, believe that the differences between Paul and James have to do with vocabulary.

Without getting sidetracked by debating this issue to the point of neglecting thoughtful dialogue about the James text, explain the line of thinking utilized by both Paul and James. Point out the following:

- For Paul, "faith" meant saving faith—a close alignment with Christ in word and deed.
- James used the word "faith" to refer to belief—mental assent.
- When Paul talked about "works," he referred to legal righteousness—compliance with the law in an attempt to gain salvation.

- James viewed "works" as a natural outgrowth of authentic faith. For Paul, these were "fruit of the spirit" (Gal 5:22).

► Ask someone to read aloud James 2:14-17 and lead adults to discuss it by asking such questions as these:

- *What was James arguing against?*
- *Do you think James contradicts Paul? Why or why not?*
- *What was James's conclusion, and how did he illustrate it?*
- *If you were James, how would you present this argument in our culture? What examples would you use?*

► Read aloud James 2:18-19 and explain that James continues the use of "diatribe" he began in the preceding verses. Here he engaged in debate with an unknown second party and wrote to prove his point, interrupting his own arguments with those of his imaginary opponent.

Ask:

- *Who do you think James imagined his debate opponent to be here?*
- *Why did James refer to the concept that "God is one" (v 19) to progress his argument?*
- *Why was this starting point of faith not enough for James?*

► Note that James’s argument reaches its climax and conclusion in verses 20-26. Here James employed a method the Jewish rabbis often used when he appealed in verse 23 to Genesis 15:6. Interestingly, Paul also appealed to this text in Romans 4 yet seems to come to a very different conclusion.

As time permits, divide adults into two groups. Assign one group James 2:20-26 and the other, Romans 4:1-12. Ask those in each group to read their assigned scriptures and the section from the Students Guide related to James 2:20-26. Ask them to determine the writer’s major concern and conclusion.

After several minutes, ask someone from each group to summarize the group’s discussion. Then ask:

- *Are the argument and conclusion of either writer in conflict with the gospel? Why or why not?*
- *What was James’s purpose in including the example of Rahab in verse 25?*

Apply Biblical Truth

► Call attention to the Thomas à Kempis quote in the conclusion of the Students Guide: “In things essential, unity; in doubtful, liberty; in all things, charity.”

Suggest that while many Christians today receive attention because of their theological debates, doctrinal disagreements and insistence upon conformity, scripture is clear that what should characterize us is our love, demonstrated in caring and thoughtful actions.

Challenge adults to apply scripture further by relating the following thoughts.

One reaction some Christians have had to the emphasis on doctrinal conformity is to turn to the ancient practices of the church, including prayer and fasting. “Spiritual formation” is now a major component in the ministry of many churches and fuels unity and renewal. It is “a part of what it means to be a Christian and to unite with a community of believers,” according to Ben Leslie, vice president and dean of the faculty at North American Baptist Seminary in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

The problem comes, he says, when we assume “that there is a ‘spiritual’ or ethereal realm which is quite separate from the physical and day-to-day aspects of one’s existence,” (“The Seduction of Christian Spirituality,” www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=544).

This false assumption, Leslie says, “excuses us from taking responsibility for the very concrete needs of the political, social and physical world. One need not become concerned with issues of poverty, hunger or political oppression if one is preoccupied with the far more important ‘spiritual’ realm.”

The search for meaning, inner peace, restoration of relationships and release from anxiety that spiritual disciplines promise drive many to pursue them. “Spiritual renewal is for many a matter of the heart, pure and simple—a path to peace and personal contentment,” Leslie says.

Scripture does not support this view of spirituality, however. Instead we find “a collection of texts focused more on the earthy aspects of our existence. Diet, sexuality, real estate and money end up being not peripheral, but prominent concerns of the biblical texts.”

Leslie points to James’s summary of Christian spirituality, which reflects that of the prophet Micah: “Religion that is

pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world” (Jas 1:27).

“The inward and the outward, the physical and the ‘spiritual,’ stand in remarkable synthesis with one another. The spiritual life is simultaneously the active life, neither complete without the other. Christian spirituality that is biblical in character will never be satisfied with mere ‘inner peace,’” Leslie contends. “It will always long for its outward journey into the sinful and broken world, where the kingdom can be proclaimed and parables of mercy enacted. . . . The spiritual and the ethical are not polar opposites, but essential dimensions of the one Christian life.”

► Affirm the biblical connection between faith and doing. Faith, says pastor Joel Snyder, “is not something we have or acquire. It is something we do. . . . One of the things that would utterly destroy the work of Christ on earth would be this belief that faith is something that I just keep inside me and that it is something that is meant for the way that I feel and for my comfort in life. That is not faith,” (“Turning Dreams into Deeds,” www.ethicsdaily.com/doclib/upload/Turning_Dreams_into_Deeds.doc).

Snyder quoted the late Peter Marshall, who said, “Belief becomes faith only at the point of action. It is not simply what we think about God but when we take what we think about God and put it into action in our lives.”

Snyder’s sermon title, “Turning Dreams into Deeds,” came from Clarence Jordan’s translation of Hebrews 11:1-2: “Faith is turning dreams into deeds. It is betting your life on the unseen realities.”

“That’s what faith is,” Snyder said, then referring to an example from his congregation, First Baptist Church,

Rome, Georgia. A church member approached Snyder and said, “I think we should turn on the heat for everybody in Floyd County who has had their utilities cut off.”

“That makes no sense,” Snyder admitted thinking. “That’s a big job. I don’t think we can do that. . . . By faith, if we will get up and do the things that God enables us to do, we can turn that dream into a reality.”

► Close by reading aloud Isaiah 58:10-11: “If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.”

Speaking Thoughtfully Leaders Guide

James 3:1-12

¹Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. ²For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. ³If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. ⁴Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. ⁵So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! ⁶And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. ⁷For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, ⁸but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. ¹¹Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? ¹²Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.

Theme: Christian faith employs speech that enhances and extends God’s creative work and purposes.

Before You Teach

► Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.

► Joseph Phelps, pastor of Highland Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, and writer for this lesson in the Students Guide, has also written a book introducing dialogue as a method for openly discussing disagreements in mutually respectful ways. If possible, obtain a copy of *More Light, Less Heat: How Dialogue Can Transform Christian Conflicts into Growth* (Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999) and use this as an additional resource.

► Gather current newspapers, newsmagazines and articles from Web sites to use in introducing the concept of the power of speech.

► EthicsDaily.com regularly features columns and other features related to ethical speech. The following list is representative; some of the illustrations suggested for use in leading this Bible study come from these columns. You may wish to read them in their entirety, and you may also want to search the Web site for other columns and features that provide additional illustrative material.

“What’s in a Word?” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=4446);

“More Than a Name,” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=4520);

“Is Rush a Racist?” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=3184);

“Pulpit Rhetoric Enrages Muslims and Endangers Christians,” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1011);

“Truth and Consequences, Ministerially Speaking,” (http://ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=2956);

“SBC Leaders Offer Sinking Defense of Vines,” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1015);

“Vines’ Speech Tarnishes Golden Rule,” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=974);

“Wrong Words,” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=2972);

“All of Us Seek the Same God,” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=3944).

► The following article provides an illustration suggested for introducing this Bible study. You may wish to read it in its entirety.

“Do Not Go Quiet Into That Good Knight,” (www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/013/33.99.html).

► This column includes personal illustrations from Christian humorist and writer Liz Curtis Higgs. You may want to include some of her ideas as you lead discussion related to this Bible study.

“Say WHAT?” (www.christianitytoday.com/tcw/7w1/7w1062.html).

As You Teach

Introduce the Lesson

► Distribute among adults a number of current newspapers, newsmagazines and articles from Web sites. Ask each person to find one or more illustrations of the power and effect of words and speech.

After several minutes, ask several to summarize the examples they found and characterize the effects of the words or speech in each case, using categories such as: *positive, negative, hurtful, inflammatory, angry, helpful, healing, accusatory, retaliatory, defensive*, etc.

► Suggest that civility and general kindness seem not only to be declining in the speech of many people, but they are also in many cases being replaced with unbridled profanity and angry, hate-filled, disrespectful words. Even some Christians in very visible positions of leadership employ attack-laden rhetoric.

Offer one or more of the following examples, as time permits.

- Legendary Indiana University basketball coach Bobby Knight was finally fired in September 2000 after a history of verbal and physical abuse of players. His language was foul, and his temper was notorious: he often threw chairs onto the court during games; he once stuffed a fan in a garbage can; he even kicked his own son, who was seated on the bench during a game, and he was caught on videotape choking one of his other players.

His abusive behavior and remarks were not limited to the game of basketball. He once advised women who were raped to enjoy it.

- Jerry Vines, pastor of First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida, and former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, told pastors attending the 2002 SBC in St. Louis that “Islam was founded by Muhammad, a demon-possessed pedophile who had 12 wives, and his last one was a 9-year-old girl.”

Perhaps as inflammatory and harmful as Vines’s statements were the responses of those present when he spoke to them. They applauded.

The SBC president and president-elect at that time refused to renounce Vines’s statements, instead agreeing with them and calling them “accurate.”

- In 2003, radio talk-show host Rush Limbaugh was forced to resign from ESPN’s NFL pre-game show after making controversial remarks about Donovan McNabb, quarterback for the Philadelphia Eagles.

Limbaugh said, “I don’t think he’s been that good from the get-go. I think what we’ve had here is a little social concern in the NFL. I think the media has been very desirous that a black quarterback do well. I think there’s a little hope invested in McNabb and he got a lot of credit for the performance of his team that he really didn’t deserve.”

Limbaugh was unrepentant and defended his statements, saying, “All this has become the tempest that it is because I must have been right about something. If I wasn’t right, there wouldn’t be a cacophony

of outrage that has sprung up in the sportswriter community. There’s no racism here. There’s no racist intent whatsoever.”

Few agreed with Limbaugh’s assessment and found his statements not only insensitive but also bigoted, ignorant and offensive.

- ▶ Note Jesus’ words concerning our speech: “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person brings good things out of a good treasure, and the evil person brings evil things out of an evil treasure” (Matt 12:34-35).

Then read aloud the following from a column written by Mennonite pastor Richard A. Kauffman: “I’ve long been a believer in the notion that we need to listen to the language we use and to discern how patterns in language behavior shift over time. The language we speak says more about us than we intend to say; and shifts in the language we use are great barometers of cultural shifts. What many analysts have observed is a ‘coarsening of American culture’ marked by language which is very uncivil, discourse unfit for what once would have been called ‘polite company.’ ...I’m just as concerned about language with an attitude—speech used to slander, put down, intimidate or ridicule other people” (“Do Not Go Quiet Into That Good Knight,” www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/013/33.99.html).

Explore the Bible

- ▶ Read aloud James 3:1 and note James’s warning about the unique role of teachers, a prelude to his lengthier advice about speech. Then ask:

- *Why did James say teachers would be judged more harshly?*

- *What was James’s warning to teachers?*
- *Do you think James’s words here have application for those other than teachers? Why or why not?*

▶ Read aloud James 3:2 and note James’s acknowledgement that no one is perfect in the use of speech. He pointed out that we all make “many mistakes.” For James, less than loving speech, even from Christians, is a reality. Realizing that we are all not only guilty of making mistakes in the past but also capable of and likely to make them in the future should cause us to be particularly aware of what we say and how we say it.

- ▶ Ask a volunteer to read aloud James 3:3-5a. Then ask:
- *What was James’s point in using the bit and rudder metaphors?*

Then make the following statement and ask adults to indicate whether they agree or disagree, and why:

Our speech has the ability to shape our direction and future.

Encourage adults to discuss and debate the possibility this statement asserts and the degrees to which they agree with it.

▶ Read aloud James 3:5b-6 and ask adults to explain James’s point in using the fire metaphor. Then ask:

- *How do you interpret or understand verse 6?*

Reinforce James’s conclusion that uncontrolled speech is like an out-of-control fire, capable of destroying everything

in its path. Remind them that like someone who drops a lighted match in a forest and leaves, only to learn later that the forest has burned, our speech can also have devastating effects of which we are unaware.

▶ Read aloud James 3:7-8 and explain James’s wild animal metaphor, noting the difference between wild animals and the tongue.

▶ Ask a volunteer to read aloud James 3:9-12 and lead adults to discuss it by asking such questions as these:

- *What actually determines the kind of speech we use, according to James?*
- *How does our speech give evidence of our relationship to God?*

Remind adults that while James devoted much of this passage to the harm speech can do, speech also has the ability to do great good. It is up to us and our choices concerning speech as to its effects, positive or negative, helpful or harmful, healing or hurtful.

Reinforce the fact that loving speech is a sign of God’s presence in our lives. Our speech should reflect our commitment to living in a God-oriented way. James reminded us that no one is perfect, and we will all make mistakes when it comes to our speech. But he also said that Christians cannot consistently speak hatefully and hurtfully toward others God has also created and whom God loves.

Apply Biblical Truth

► Ask adults to think about various conversations they have had during the past week and identify the one that was most troubling to them. Explain that you are going to ask a series of questions in an attempt to help them identify some things they can do to redeem that situation. Use questions such as the following, pausing briefly after each:

- *What was most difficult or troubling about this conversation?*
- *Did I or the other party respond in anger?*
- *Did I or the other party make unfounded accusations?*
- *Did something I say result in hurt for the other person?*
- *Did the other person say something that hurt me?*
- *Did the other person misunderstand something I said?*
- *Is it possible that I misunderstood something the other person said?*
- *Did I challenge the integrity of the other person? Was my integrity challenged?*
- *Did I say something that caused the other person to respond defensively? Was I defensive?*
- *Did I say anything that was helpful, positive and/or healing?*
- *Did the other person offer words of help and healing?*

- *What did this conversation do to my relationship with this person?*
- *What can I do to bring resolution and/or solve the problem and also reach a new and deeper level of trust and understanding with this person?*

► Note the following from pastor Richard A. Kauffman: “Throughout our history, Christians have been known for many different things: for our love for the down and out, for our care of the sick and dying, for translating the Bible into very nearly every language in the world. Perhaps the time has come for we Christians to be known for our language, for the kind of way we address each other and others outside the family of faith. It would be a kind of language which doesn’t put down or curse others, but a language which blesses others with the use of benedictory words. Many Christians think benedictions are prayers said to conclude a worship service. Wrong. ‘Benediction’ comes from two Latin words, *bene* and *dicere*, which mean to speak well of, to bless. ... What more do I have to offer people as a Christian ... than benedictions, words of healing and blessing” (“Do Not Go Quiet Into That Good Knight,” www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/013/33.99.html).

► Close by carefully wording a benediction for your Bible study group that affirms them in their faith and in their ability to enhance and extend God’s creative work and purposes through their wise use of words.

Pursuing Wisdom Leaders Guide

James 3:13-18

¹³Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. ¹⁵Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. ¹⁶For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. ¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. ¹⁸And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

Theme: Christian faith is marked by godly wisdom, peaceful living and thoughtful actions.

Before You Teach

- ▶ Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.
- ▶ Ahead of time, prepare assignment cards for the two groups suggested in Explore the Bible, below.

Write the following characteristic words and phrases on individual paper strips: *pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of hypocrisy or jealousy*. Prepare enough strips for each

person in your group to have one. Repeat the words and phrases as necessary.

Also write the following relationship categories on individual paper strips: *parent/child; marriage; friendship; business; neighbor; stranger; adversary*. Prepare enough of these strips for each person in your group to have one, repeating as necessary.

Obtain two small bags or other containers. Place the characteristic words and phrases in one and the relationship categories in the other.

▶ EthicsDaily.com regularly features columns and news related to peace, justice and thoughtful living. The following list is representative; you may find these and other articles helpful as you prepare for and lead this Bible study:

“Ten Reasons Why Justice is Essential to the Gospel,” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=5110);

“Ten Big Words in a Very Small Package,” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=4399).

As You Teach

Introduce the Lesson

▶ Use the following illustration to lead adults to begin thinking about peaceful living and intentionally thoughtful actions.

Matthew (Mattie) Stepanek had become a New York Times best-selling author with his *Heartsongs* poetry collection by the time he was 11, although that was never his goal. He most wanted to be known, he said, as “a poet, a peace-maker and a philosopher who played.”

His writing reflects a wisdom and worldview that belied his years. In one poem, he wrote:

“We need to stop.
Just stop.
Stop for a moment...
Before anybody
Says or does anything
That may hurt anyone else.”

Former President Jimmy Carter called him “the most extraordinary person I have ever known in my life.” That’s pretty high praise from someone who regularly met with kings, queens, presidents and prime ministers.

Mattie was born with a very rare form of muscular dystrophy that stunted his growth; limited his physical mobility; necessitated his dependence upon numerous medications and equipment; and filled his life with pain, needles, hospitalizations and countless medical procedures. He lost three siblings to the same disease, and his mother, Jeni, was diagnosed with it as an adult.

The war in Iraq devastated him, according to his mother, because he believed that world leaders had not tried hard enough for peace. One of his dreams was to talk peace with Osama Bin Laden.

The boy whose personal motto was “Think gently, speak gently, live gently” became close personal friends with Carter, who was impressed not only with Mattie’s wisdom and personal character but also with his knowledge of international affairs. Mattie hoped to write a book with the former President. He even had a title for it: *Just Peace*. On his Web site, he wrote: “I am very blessed to have God and my mom so involved in my life. I am also lucky because I have a lot of great support from my doctors and MDA

friends, and from all the people who write to me and tell me how my words have made a difference in their lives. I am so lucky that I get to see the difference. Everyone makes a difference in somebody’s life. Everyone. It’s just that not everyone gets the chance to realize that difference in this life. So my life is very difficult, and sometimes painful, but very full and blessed,” (www.mattieonline.com).

Mattie died on June 22, 2004, at the age of 13 from complications of his disease. Carter delivered the eulogy at his funeral, and according to Mattie’s wishes, his coffin was covered with a United Nations flag and included a bumper sticker that said, “Be a peacemaker.”

► Suggest that Mattie Stepanek seemed to live life from a perspective much different not only from most children but also from many adults. He seemed to understand, even from a very early age, that relationships are primary, and we sustain them by living with godly wisdom that seeks peace and pursues thoughtful actions.

Explore the Bible

► Lead adults to contrast godly wisdom with earthly wisdom, using James 3:13-16. Divide them into two groups and make the following assignments:

Group 1

Read James 3:13 and the related section in the Students Guide. As a group, discuss answers to the following questions.

- *What does it mean for a Christian to live life from a kingdom perspective?*

- *How does wholehearted commitment to Christ change the way we see ourselves? our relationships? our values and priorities?*
- *What does it mean to live with “gentleness born of wisdom”?*
- *What characterizes a life lived with godly wisdom?*

Group 2

Read James 3:14-16 and the related section in the Students Guide. As a group, discuss answers to the following questions:

- *What did James say would result from envy and selfish ambition?*
- *How do Christians fall prey to these?*
- *What characterizes a life that is lived with earthly wisdom?*
- *What is at the center for one who lives his or her life with wisdom from a source other than God?*

► After several minutes, call the groups together and ask a volunteer to read aloud James 3:13-16. Ask individuals from each group to summarize their group’s conclusions.

► Next, ask a volunteer to read aloud James 3:17-18. Explain that these verses explain and amplify the “good life” to which James referred in verse 13. Here James painted a more complete picture of what it looks like when we live according to God’s wisdom.

Ask each person to take one paper strip from each of the two bags you prepared. Explain that on one strip, they will find a quality or characteristic of peaceful living. On the other, they will find a relationship category. Explain that their assignment is to describe a scenario in which they could

embody the characteristic James identified in their assigned relationship. For example, if someone draws strips labeled “willing to yield” and “marriage,” he or she should think of and describe a specific situation in which a Christian committed to living with God’s wisdom would respond with that characteristic in that relationship.

Refer them to the descriptions of these characteristics by David Hubbard in the Students Guide. Encourage them to think of situations from their own lives and relationships, and be creative in how they will respond.

After several minutes, review the list of characteristics and elaborate on their meaning, using Hubbard’s explanations. Then ask volunteers representing each characteristic category to describe how they might display that characteristic in the relationship they were assigned. Try to solicit responses that offer examples for each of the characteristics listed in verses 17-18.

Then ask:

- *Do you think James’s expectations are realistic? Why or why not?*
- *Which of these do you find easiest?*
- *Which do you find most challenging? Why?*
- *In which of your relationships do you find it most difficult to live out these characteristics? Why?*
- *What difference would it make if all Christians lived out these characteristics? How would our world be different?*

Apply Biblical Truth

► Read aloud again James 3:18 and call attention to its unmistakable refrain of peace. When we live according to God's wisdom, James said, every decision we make and every action we take leads to new hope, new life and new justice. Each marks another step toward peace.

► Close by reading aloud these lines by singer/songwriter Kate Campbell: "It hurts my heart to think of them. Four little girls and what they could have been. But we never know about these things—when the violent bear it away."

Explain that Campbell's song "Bear It Away" recalls the 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, that killed four little girls. Her inspiration comes from a saying of Jesus recorded only in Matthew's gospel. Jesus said that God's kingdom has suffered violence throughout history, and the "violent bear it away" (Matt 11:12 Douay-Rheims Bible).

Challenge adults to pursue godly wisdom, peaceful living and thoughtful actions, using some of the following thoughts from pastor and EthicsDaily.com columnist Jim Evans, who wrote reflecting on Campbell's song:

"It's hard not to wonder how many losses there have been to violence. Not just the individuals who have died or suffered pain, though that's loss enough. But how many opportunities have we lost by turning to violence first instead of as a last resort. How many times has the kingdom been at our door step, a moment of grace within our reach, only to have the violent take it away?" ("The Violent Take It Away, www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=3199).

"And only God knows what violence has taken away from us in terms of our humanity. What poets, or painters, or song writers have been stifled when the violent come and bear their art away replacing sensitivity with anger or hate? How many teachers, community leaders, or healers have drifted into despair when the violent come and take away their dream replacing compassion with fear and cynicism?"

"You would think by now we would learn. Jesus tried to tell us—an eye for an eye only makes the world blind. Cruelty does not breed love, it breeds more cruelty. Anger does not create understanding, it only creates more anger. Pain inflicted with a sense of righteous indignation does not create righteousness, only indignation. And the violent carry our hope away."

► Encourage adults to continue developing the qualities and characteristics James described and display them through deliberate and thoughtful actions that pursue peace.

Living Single-Mindedly Leaders Guide

James 4:1-10

¹Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? ²You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures. ⁴Adulterers! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. ⁵Or do you suppose that it is for nothing that the scripture says, “God yearns jealously for the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”? ⁶But he gives all the more grace; therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” ⁷Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection. ¹⁰Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Theme: Christian faith leads to a single-minded focus that humbly submits to God and looks for God’s will in all things.

Before You Teach

► Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.

As You Teach

Introduce the Lesson

► Recall for adults the 2005 Grammy-winning song by Tim McGraw, “Live Like You Were Dying.” The song tells the story of a man who learns he has only a short time to live. Instead of spending his last days selfishly, he intentionally spends his time on examining himself, pursuing positive experiences and improving his relationships with others.

In part, he says, “I was finally the husband that most of the time I wasn’t/and I became a friend a friend would like to have/and all of a sudden going fishin’/wasn’t such an imposition/and I went three times that year I lost my Dad/Well, I finally read the Good Book/and I took good long hard look/at what I’d do if I could do it all again.”

McGraw is “on to something,” pastor and EthicsDaily.com columnist Michael Helms believes. “If we lived like we were dying, many of the things we view as important would become trivial. If we lived like we were dying, many of the things we never got around to doing, we would do” (“Live Life Like You are Dying,” http://ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=5363).

Living with this perspective changes everything, both the song and Helms say. “We’d be less materialistic and more concerned about our fellow man. We’d be less selfish and more giving. We wouldn’t take life for granted. Rather, we’d

wake up with thankful hearts for the gift of a single day. We would be less busy and more likely to notice the beauty of a rose or be more willing to sit with older people and hold their hands and listen to them share whatever's on their minds."

Further, Helms notes, "we'd try harder to settle our differences with our neighbor. If we lived like we were dying we'd be less concerned about our earthly bank account and more concerned about storing treasures in heaven."

► Suggest that while James's letter does not specifically advise us to "live like we are dying," it does challenge us to examine our motives and priorities. James was not concerned with telling people what they wanted to hear. His words were direct and sometimes harsh, and his expectations were tough to live up to. He was not afraid to let Christians in the early church know that they had gotten way off track and were headed for trouble if they didn't change course.

James's message causes us to examine our lives to see who or what is at center. Do we live our lives in relation to God as though God exists for our happiness, or do our lives reflect the fact that we believe we exist to please God?

Explore the Bible

► Set the stage for examining James 4:1-10 by reading aloud the first three verses. Here James identified the problem in no uncertain terms. Point out that the words he used that we translate "conflicts and disputes" were the same words normally used in reference to warfare. The situation James addressed among these Christians had moved well beyond a squabble or misunderstanding.

Lead adults to articulate James's concern by asking such questions as these:

- *What had led to this situation, according to James?*
- *Do you think things had gotten so bad that the people were actually killing one another, or did James use the phrase "commit murder" for some other reason?*

Point out that the word translated "cravings" in verse 1 is the source of our English word "hedonism," meaning "pleasures." James recognized that these Christians, rather than being led by God and their pursuit of God's plan, were instead being led by their own selfish desires. When they failed to get their way or get what they wanted, they aggressively fought with those who stood in their way.

Ask:

- *What did James mean when he said, "You do not have, because you do not ask" (v 2)?*
- *What was his assessment of their praying?*
- *What was their motive in praying?*

According to James, they were focused not on what God wanted, but what they wanted for themselves. They prayed to further their own agendas. Ask adults to indicate whether they agree or disagree with this statement:

God will give us anything we ask that is right for our lives.

Ask:

- *Under what conditions is this statement true?*

- *Are their circumstances under which God will not give us what we ask in prayer? What are they?*

► Ask a volunteer to read aloud James 4:4-6. Call attention to the strong words James used: adulterers; enmity; enemy. Note that James considered that these Christians were moving into dangerous territory spiritually. Then ask:

- *Why did James use the word “adulterers” in verse 4? What was his point?*

Point out that James originally used the feminine form of the word we translate “adulterers.” His reference here recalled the Old Testament image of Israel as the bride of God (Is 54:5) and, unfortunately, an unfaithful wife (Jer 3:20; Hos 9:1). These Christians had abandoned God and had been unfaithful to God, like a person in a marriage who commits adultery. Their personal desires had become their god, and as a result, they had become God’s enemies.

Ask:

- *Is it possible to do the right things and still live as God’s enemy?*

James would answer this question affirmatively. Although these people still prayed and gathered together in Christian community to worship and learn, they, not God, were at the center of their lives. Appearances were deceiving, James said. They were not God’s friends, as they claimed to be, but were actually God’s enemies. Still, James said, God had not given up on them.

Read aloud again verses 5-6 and note that James offered them the way back to right relationship with God. Ask:

- *What is grace, and how did James say that we can experience it?*

- *What is required of those who want to return God to life’s center and live singularly focused on God and God’s will?*

► Ask someone to read aloud James 4:7-10. As they do, ask another person to write on a board or poster the ten commands included in these verses. Assign one of the commands to each person. Ask them to develop a working definition of what that command means and what it would look like in our lives.

Read aloud the commands in order, beginning with “submit.” Ask:

- *Is the order James used here important or significant? Why?*

State each command in turn and call for its definition. Lead adults to consider what following these commands means for us by asking:

- *Is it enough simply to submit to God? Will everything else fall automatically into place? Why or why not?*
- *Is it enough simply to resist the devil? Why or why not?*
- *What happens when we “draw near to God”?*
- *How do you interpret James’s instructions to “cleanse your hands” and “purify your hearts”? How do we do this?*
- *Why is it necessary to “lament” and “mourn” and “weep”?*

- *How can exaltation come from humility (v 10)?*

Apply Biblical Truth

► Remind adults that much of James's letter seems to draw from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Point out that at the time Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount, he "saw his culture, his family, even his disciples concerned with control and dominance and getting even. . . . Most everyone was focusing on their own desires and hurts, and Jesus said, 'Stop it.' Focusing on dominating and exploiting others will never result in true happiness. Your ego is not the epicenter of the universe" (Love Is Caring, Not Gaming," http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=2125).

Suggest that things had not changed much by the time the early church was forming, and things have not changed much today. We often tend to place self and what we want at life's center, rather than God. We still struggle with submitting to God, allowing God to be the center of our lives, thinking we know better than God how we should live and what we need. Like the early Christians, we can easily lose focus and direction.

► Close with this illustration from author and motivational speaker Bob Perks, who wrote about an experiment he did using a magnet and a compass.

"I took a magnet and held it close to the compass to see if I could affect it. It did. I took control of the compass. North no longer mattered because the magnet was closer and had more influence over it," ("Do You Need a Compass?" www.beliefnet.com/story/132/story_13239_1.html).

"I thought about it for a moment," Perks continued. "My life has been like that. So many times I was headed in the right

direction and suddenly found myself lost, off course or stuck in the rut on the side of the road."

Point out, as Perk suggested, that when we allow ourselves, rather than God, to control the compass of our lives, we quickly lose direction, get lost and subsequently get into trouble.

Continuing his experiment, Perk wrote, he took the magnet away from the compass, and it immediately spun back toward north.

"God, like magnetic north, is constant," he said. "As soon as we remove the thing that has distracted us, taken us off the right path in life, we can easily find our way again if we look to God."

► Encourage adults to submit to God and look for God's will in all things with a single-minded focus. Remind them of God's mercy and grace in taking us back and pointing us again in the right direction when we humbly submit to God.

Knowing Who You Are Leaders Guide

James 4:11-12

¹¹Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters. Whoever speaks evil against another or judges another, speaks evil against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. ¹²There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. So who, then, are you to judge your neighbor?

Theme: Christian faith results in personal identity that eliminates the need to feel superior to others, condemn them and use speech to destroy them.

Before You Teach

- ▶ Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.
- ▶ EthicsDaily.com regularly features columns and news related to identity, relationships and communication.

The following are representative; you may find these and other articles helpful as you prepare for and lead this Bible study:

“Moving Through an Identity Crisis,” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1844);

“Settling Identity Crisis,” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=3248).

- ▶ The following articles include illustrations suggested for introducing and concluding discussion about this scripture. You may wish to read them in their entirety:

“A Clear and Present Identity,” (www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/010/35.114.html);

“I Met Christ,” (www.beliefnet.com/story/142/story_14250_1.html).

As You Teach

Introduce the Lesson

- ▶ Lead adults to begin thinking about the role of Christian faith in forming personal identity by relating the following:

Frederica Mathewes-Green, a Christian columnist and speaker, writes candidly about the intersection of faith and everyday life. In one of her columns, she tells the story of how she became a Christian. Though she was raised in a “minimally Christian home,” she had rejected Christianity as a teenager.

“Back in my college days,” she writes, “I was pretty dismissive of Christianity. To be more accurate, I was contemptuous and hostile” (“I Met Christ,” www.beliefnet.com/story/142/story_14250_1.html). She goes on to explain how she continued to be curious about spiritual things, “browsing the world’s spiritual food court, gathering tasty delights.” During her senior year in college, she chose Hinduism.

“I can’t say it was a mature decision. Frankly, there weren’t a lot of Hindus attending the University of South Carolina in the 1970’s, and I chose it in part because I thought it would look really cool on me.”

A few years later, while traveling around Europe on an extended honeymoon, she and her new husband decided to go inside a church they discovered in Dublin. Once inside, she spotted a statue, the symbolism of which had a profound effect on her and enabled her to hear God speak. “I didn’t become a Christian because somebody with a Bible badgered me till I was worn down. I wasn’t persuaded by the logic of Christian theology or its creeds. I met Christ.

“I could hear an interior voice speaking to me. Not with my ears—it was more like a radio inside suddenly clicked on. The voice was both intimate and authoritative, and it filled me. It said, ‘I am your life. You think that your life is your name, your personality, your history. But that is not your life. I am your life. . . . I am the foundation of everything else in your life.’”

Jesus became more real to her at that moment than anything else she had ever experienced, she says. He became, in fact, “the touchstone of reality.”

In another column, Mathewes-Green notes: “The question of identity is significant for Christians because we are each on a lifelong journey to find out who we really are. We are like miners trapped at the bottom of a caved-in shaft trying to tunnel through debris to the light. Jesus calls us toward himself, but sins and selfishness impede us. Our natural state is one of confusion. Prone to self-deception, we don’t readily know which elements of self to value and which to deplore. Examination of conscience is a lost art” (“A Clear and Present Identity,” www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/010/35.114.html).

► Lead adults to dialogue about discovering personal identity by asking such questions as:

- *How do the following factors affect our formation of personal identity: race, economic level, appearance, talents, intelligence, education, profession?*
- *How do these factors affect our understanding and acceptance of other people?*
- *What is the role of faith in developing personal identity?*
- *What is the role of faith in informing the way we relate and speak to others?*

► Suggest that even within the Christian community, cultural, political, socioeconomic and other differences can create friction that affects understanding and interferes with positive relationships.

Call attention to a recent study in which two Dutch researchers paired more than 120 small groups in partnerships. The groups represented 22 countries around the world and involved a variety of faith groups, including Quakers, Roman Catholics, Seventh-Day Adventists and Presbyterians. The researchers assigned each small group the same Bible passage to study and asked them to exchange several rounds of observations and ideas during the study.

The three-year project, “Through the Eyes of Another,” resulted in the late 2004 release of a book by the same name. Daniel Schipani, one of the book’s editors who also coordinated North American study participants, said that the project was a “huge step” that “uncovered our biases, our blind spots.”

Establishing international relationships was key to the project, according to Bob Ekblad, who coordinated two

groups in Washington state. “It’s easy to be judgmental from a distance,” he said, but building relationships helps diminish criticism.

► Relate the following insights from pastor and EthicsDaily.com columnist Michael Helms: “Christians find an identity outside ourselves. The cross serves as a marker that reaches out horizontally, representing our relationships with humankind, and points vertically, representing our relationship with God” (“Moving Through an Identity Crisis,” www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=1844).

Using as examples the Apostle Paul, Martin Luther and Mother Theresa, Helms reminds us that “their lives revolved around God and others, not themselves. Each established important horizontal relationships with others and an important vertical relationship with God. All were willing to take up their cross and enter into suffering in the name of Jesus. Their identity was tied to Jesus, who gifted them for service.

“When we find an identity in the cross,” Helms concludes, “the selfish desires of life fade away and we are able to see ourselves as we were meant to be: ‘God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do’ (Eph 2:9-10).”

Explore the Bible

► Suggest that James clearly connected our identification with Christ to the way we think about, speak and act toward others. After becoming aware of the critical and harmful ways some Christian believers were speaking about each other, he felt the need to address their motivations and challenge them to change their behavior.

► Read aloud James 4:11 and remind adults that James had already discussed speech at great length. Here he seems to direct his comments at a particularly devastating kind of speech, what we might call slander.

Using the information in the Students Guide, summarize briefly the different ways scripture uses the term “evil.” Then note the connection between James’s epistle and Leviticus 19:13-18 and James’s use of “evil” here.

Lead adults to discuss this verse by asking such questions as:

- *What did James mean by “speak evil”? What does “evil” speech involve?*
- *What is slander?*
- *How is slander different from careless speech?*
- *What motivates slander? What is slander’s goal or intent?*
- *Why is this kind of speech wrong, according to James?*
- *What do you think James meant by “law”?*
- *How do you think James would describe the fullest and most complete expression of the law?*
- *How does speaking evil put one in place of God as judge?*
- *Why is the “superiority” one gains through slanderous speech artificial?*

- *How can slander work so freely and become pervasive, even within the faith community?*

► Read aloud this statement from the Students Guide and ask adults to indicate whether they agree or disagree with it and why: “The process of discovering who we really are also involves determining who we are not.”

Then read aloud James 4:12 and ask:

- *Whose place did James say we take when we judge another person?*
- *Why is this dangerous? What implications does this carry?*
- *How does judging another person prevent us from being “doers of the word”?*
- *As you have discovered your personal identity in Christ, who or what have you determined that you are not? How has this been helpful as you continue to develop your identity in Christ?*
- *What risks do we take when we seek to determine who we are not? What do we risk if we do not make this determination?*

► Ask a volunteer to read aloud the two concluding paragraphs from the Students Guide. Then read aloud the following prayer, reportedly the first of a Muslim man who had converted to Christianity:

“O God, I am Mustafah the tailor and I work at the shop of Muhammad Ali. The whole day long I sit and pull the needle and the thread through the cloth. O God, you are the needle and I am the thread. I am attached to you and I follow you.

When the thread tries to slip away from the needle, it becomes tangled and must be cut so that it can be put back in the right place. O God, help me to follow you wherever you may lead me. For I am really only Mustafah the tailor, and I work in at the shop of Muhammad Ali” (George Appleton, general editor, *The Oxford Book of Prayer*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 88).

Apply Biblical Truth

- Close by reading aloud the following thoughts from columnist Frederica Mathewes-Green: “The one true identity we all share is ‘God have mercy on me, a sinner,’ but it’s hard to dwell in that simple self-understanding when the world busily assigns other traits, favored and unfavored. ... Acquiescing in positive or negative stereotypes will only confuse us. The important thing to remember, to adapt another moment from *Back to the Future*, is ‘Where we’re going we won’t need labels’” (“A Clear and Present Identity,” (www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/010/35.114.html)).
- Challenge adults to examine their attitudes about themselves and remind them that how we feel about ourselves affects how we feel about and relate to others. Our effectiveness as doers of the Word depends in part upon a healthy personal identity that keeps attitudes, speech and actions in check.

Living with Faith's Perspective Leaders Guide

James 4:13-17

¹³Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money." ¹⁴Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. ¹⁵Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that." ¹⁶As it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. ¹⁷Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin.

Theme: Christian faith results in a unique relationship with God and a perception of reality that is markedly different from commonly held world views.

Before You Teach

► Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.

As You Teach

Introduce the Lesson

► Lead adults to begin thinking about the perspective Christian faith should bring to planning and to life in general. Ask them to indicate by raising their hands if they have made plans and/or provisions for the following (include others as appropriate):

- personal education
- purchasing a home and property
- buying a vehicle
- medical and dental care
- a business venture
- an upcoming vacation
- an anticipated job change or job loss
- children's education
- investments
- retirement
- long-term health care
- aging parents or other relatives
- charitable contributions

Then ask:

- *Does Christian faith have an impact upon decisions we make in these areas? If so, how?*
- *Should a Christian's priorities and perspectives in these areas be different from someone else's? Why or why not?*

- *How do you make decisions related to your future and that of your family? Are there any particular guidelines that you use?*

▶ Ask different volunteers to read aloud the following verses from Proverbs: 14:15; 15:22; 16:3; 16:9; 19:21; 20:18. Then lead adults to formulate some practical principles for planning based on these scriptures. Write the principles they suggest on a board or flip chart and post them in a visible place.

Explore the Bible

▶ Help adults better understand the lives of those to whom James wrote by offering some insight into their everyday lives. Provide information such as the following:

While the work of many first-century individuals was tied directly to their homes, the Gospels reveal a society and an economy much broader and well-developed than what we might imagine. Markets were established so that individuals could buy and sell goods outside their households. Most towns and villages had an assortment of merchants and craftsmen, including carpenters, silversmiths, tentmakers, potters, bakers and goldsmiths. Some individuals were property owners who sold things like grain and grapes; others worked as lawyers, teachers and physicians. Still others were unskilled day laborers. A monetary system had been established, and there were even some types of banking in place (see Matt 25:27).

Galilee, where Jesus began his ministry, was a rural agricultural area comprised of working-class people such as farmers, fishermen, carpenters and shepherds. Jerusalem, on the other hand, was a major urban center. Its economy depended to a large degree upon the large number of

tourists and religious pilgrims who regularly visited due to the city's religious significance.

Note that the church James addressed in his letter probably included representation from all segments of society and included some very wealthy and quite poor individuals, with most we would probably consider "middle class." Each of them was accustomed, as we are, to making decisions and plans about finances, life and the future. Christian faith was new to them, and they likely viewed it as something they fit into their pre-Christian way of life, rather than understanding that their Christian faith should inform and affect their entire way of living.

▶ In light of the above understandings, read aloud James 4:13 and ask:

- *How do you think these individuals understood these words from James? What did they likely think he was saying?*

▶ Suggest that if any of the first recipients of James's letter thought he was commending them for their foresight in planning, his next words quickly dispelled that notion. Ask a volunteer to read aloud James 4:14-15 and note the contrast James made between the people's perception and reality. They lived and made plans as though their plans would determine their futures. In reality, their futures, like ours, were unpredictable at best. Ask:

- *How did James illustrate his point? What image did he use?*
- *What posture or attitude did James suggest in planning for the future—even the next day?*

Note James's use of the phrase "If the Lord wishes" in verse 15. Suggest that James might have drawn from a similar phrase common in Greek culture that said, "If the gods will." If this is so, then James's point was this: if those with no faith in Christ recognize their own limitations and submit their plans into the hands of false gods, then certainly the Christian should submit all of his or her plans into the hands of the one true God.

► Ask a volunteer to read aloud James 4:16-17. Then ask:

- *What did James say his readers were guilty of?*
- *How did he classify their mindset?*
- *What did he mean by "evil" (v 16)?*
- *Was James advising against making any kinds of plans? Why or why not?*
- *What was he warning against?*

Suggest that James wrote to help these Christians learn to view their lives from a perspective different from that which they had been viewing it. With Christ at the core of their lives, everything should change. It is sin, James said, to live life and make plans as though God does not exist. Christians live their lives in light of the reality of God in everything they do.

► Remind adults of some individuals from scripture whose plans grew from their unique relationship with God (Moses, Joshua, Nehemiah, David, Paul). Stress that these individuals realized success because the plans they followed were God's, not their own. Their perspective of their

situations was based upon their understanding of God and God's desires rather than their own personal agendas. While their decisions and plans might have appeared foolish to some people, they nonetheless followed them confidently because they lived with faith's perspective.

Apply Biblical Truth

► Call attention to the list of principles for planning the group developed earlier using the verses from Proverbs. Review them individually, and ask adults to suggest changes based on their understanding of James's teachings. Rewrite the principles as necessary to reflect additional understandings.

► Close with the following illustration from EthicsDaily.com columnist Gary Farley, who wrote about his friend Terry Billings, a man whose life dramatically changed as a result of his new Christian faith.

"He is active in every phase of his church. He comes to Sunday school and to discipleship training having studied the lesson. Questions and observations about Scripture just bubble over as they come to his sharp mind. He is such a pleasant person, such a searcher, that folks listen and respond," ("Yard Dogs," www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=5341).

"Like many new Christians, Terry has pondered why those of us who have been believers for many years, while not bad or evil, seem to be far less excited about our faith than he is. "

Terry compared himself to the small terrier that lives inside his house. "While his indoor life is very pleasant, he loves to be able to get out in the yard. There, he runs around sniffing

of everything. He nips at the much larger dogs and invites them to a romp. He chases after the livestock. It seems as though the sights, smells and space of the out-of-doors are thrilling to him.”

For Terry, “church and Christianity are a new environment. There are so many things to learn. There are so many things to do. There is so much that he has missed. The sights, smells, and space of the Christian life are exciting to him.”

Terry’s Christian faith has provided him with a whole new perspective, one that changes everything.

► Encourage adults to renew their commitment to and enthusiasm for living life with faith’s perspective. Challenge them to open themselves to God’s presence, activity and will in the world and in their lives. Remind them that this does not happen automatically. It requires intentional effort, diligence and discipline.

Call attention to the section titled “What Now?” in the Students Guide and review some of its suggestions. Stress that the first step in living life from faith’s perspective is believing and acting as if it is possible.

Knowing What Really Matters Leaders Guide

James 5:1-6

¹Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you. ²Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. ³Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days. ⁴Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. ⁵You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts on a day of slaughter. ⁶You have condemned and murdered the righteous one, who does not resist you.

Theme: Christian faith is marked by a merciful lifestyle that advocates for a meaningful existence for all people.

Before You Teach

- Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.
- Note the statistics related to poverty (see www.bread.org and www.unicefusa.org) in Introduce the Lesson, below. For maximum effect, transfer several of the statistics to sentence strips and post them around your Bible study area. Or, copy each statistic to a separate piece of paper and plan to distribute these among adults. You may find different or additional statistics from other sources.

► Become familiar with the Micah Challenge by reading the following articles from EthicsDaily.com:

“Micah Challenge Recruits Evangelicals in War on Poverty,”
(www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=4625);

“British and Australian Baptists Spearhead Effort to Fight Global Poverty,”
(www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=4855);

“Evangelicals Pledge to Hold Governments Accountable for Poverty,”
(www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=4864);

“Experts Say Global Poverty Can Be Reduced by Half,”
(www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=5247).

Plan to use this information as a way to challenge adults in your Bible study group to join with others in working to end global poverty.

► EthicsDaily.com regularly features columns and news encouraging advocacy for the poor and voiceless. The following list is representative; you may find these and other articles helpful as you prepare for and lead this Bible study:

“Religious Leaders Deplore Rise in Poverty,”
(www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=4653);

“U.S. Poverty on the Rise, Census Bureau Reports,”
(www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=3049);

“Law Professor Pushes Tax Reform in Alabama,”
(www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=2424);

“Morality Isn’t Guaranteed By Politics in Jesus’ Name,”
(ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=5313);

“Beyond the Prohibition,” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=4674);

“How Much is Enough?,” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=5129);

“Generational Generosity,”
(www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=4863);

“How Much Is Enough? Hungering for God in an Affluent Culture,”
(www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=2465);

“Evangelicalism Should Wield a Two-Edged Sword,”
(www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=4645).

As You Teach

Introduce the Lesson

► Lead adults to begin thinking about poverty and its effects by noting some of the following representative statistics:

- Almost half of Angola’s population of 13.5 million people is undernourished. Only 38 percent have access to clean water.
- Of Afghanistan’s 27.2 million people, 70 percent are undernourished. Only 13 percent have access to clean water.
- In the Republic of Congo, 75 percent of the 3.1 million people are undernourished. Fifty-one percent have access to clean water.

- Only 24 percent of Ethiopians have access to clean water, and 42 percent are undernourished.
- Of Haiti's 8.1 million people, 49 percent are undernourished. Even fewer have access to improved water source. Only 28 percent have access to improved sanitation.
- More than half of the world's children are suffering extreme deprivations from poverty, war and HIV/AIDS.
- 640 million children do not have adequate shelter.
- 500 million children have no access to sanitation.
- 400 million children do not have access to safe water.
- 270 million children have no access to health care services.
- 140 million children have never been to school.
- 90 million children are severely food-deprived.
- Nearly half of the 3.6 million people killed in war since 1990 have been children.
- More than 15 million children worldwide have been orphaned due to AIDS.
- HIV/AIDS not only kills parents but also destroys the protective network of other adults in children's lives. Teachers, healthcare workers and other adults on whom children rely are also dying of AIDS.

- Between 2002 and 2003, 1.3 Americans slipped into poverty, and the number without health insurance grew by 1.4 million.
- Nearly 36 million Americans now live in poverty, according to the Census Bureau.

► Read aloud the following quote by Carol Bellamy, executive director of UNICEF: "Poverty doesn't come from nowhere; war doesn't emerge from nothing; AIDS doesn't spread by choice of its own. These are our choices" ("The State of the World's Children 2005: "Childhood Under Threat," www.unicefusa.org).

Note that while UNICEF specifically addresses concerns that affect children, these issues ultimately affect everyone, and Bellamy's comments can apply across the board: "The quality of a child's life depends on decisions made every day in households, communities and in the halls of government. We must make choices wisely, and with children's best interests in mind. If we fail to secure childhood, we will fail to reach our larger, global goals for human rights and economic development. As children go, so go nations. It's that simple."

► Remind adults that God's standard and ultimate goal is justice for all people. God hears the cries of those who are unfairly treated, oppressed and victimized by conditions beyond their control. One way God responds to their cries for help is through us. Advocating for a meaningful existence for all people is one way we become doers of the Word.

James's letter reminds us that those who choose to live at the expense of others and ignore those who are in need will answer for this choice. He reminded both those of his

generation and ours to keep both wealth and poverty in perspective.

Explore the Bible

► Review James 1:9-11, 27; 2:1-7, 15-16; and 4:13-16 by asking volunteers to read aloud these passages. Point out that wealth and poverty are recurring themes in James's letter. Ask adults to formulate from these writings of James a list of summary statements and write these on a board or flip chart. Stress the concept that wealth is not evidence of God's special favor; neither is poverty a sign of God's disfavor.

► Read aloud James 5:1 and note that here James returns to his wealth/poverty theme. Then ask:

- *Who are the "rich people" James addressed in verse 1? Do you think they are within the Christian community or outside of it?*
- *Consider James's other statements about riches and wealth. What dangers did he identify as being associated?*
- *Did James consider that wealth was a condemnation in and of itself?*
- *What do you think was the real problem that led James to these strong words of warning?*

► Ask someone to read aloud Matthew 6:19-21; then ask another volunteer to read aloud James 5:2-3. Point out the connection of James's words to those of Jesus. Then ask:

- *What was Jesus' point? How did James's statements differ from those of Jesus?*

- *To whom did James issue this warning, and what did he warn them about?*

► Note that it is not until verses 4-6 that James explained the reasons for his indictment of the callous rich. These verses more specifically identify those to whom James addressed his warning.

Read aloud James 5:4-6 and note the themes of exploitation, selfishness and oppression. James's warnings were specifically to those who so valued riches and wealth that they treated others unjustly to further line their own coffers. Wealth in itself was not the problem; the means by which individuals obtained wealth was. Acquiring wealth by taking advantage of others who are less fortunate leads to judgment, James said.

Remind adults that, like today, many people in that day lived a hand-to-mouth existence. They were day laborers, and Jewish law required that they be paid fairly at the end of each day. Some who had hired them were guilty of withholding their wages, literally taking food out of their mouths and the mouths of those for whom they were responsible. They were guilty of further oppressing the poor.

Apply Biblical Truth

► Suggest that one of the most tangible ways we can become doers of the Word is to reduce poverty, the conditions that create it and the results of it. Given the resources to which we have access, to fail to do so is sinful.

Call adults' attention to the Micah Challenge (www.micahchallenge.org), a global campaign to mobilize evangelical Christians in support of goals to reduce world poverty by half by 2015.

Steve Bradbury, Micah Challenge co-chair, says, “Regardless of their political ideology or religious persuasion, all governments are accountable to God for their performance in delivering policies that respond effectively to the needs of poor and oppressed communities” (“Micah Challenge Recruits Evangelicals in War on Poverty,” www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=4625).

The campaign takes its name from Micah 6:8: “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (NRSV). It is an effort to call Christians to “deepen their commitment to work with and for poor communities.” It also seeks to provide Christians with opportunities “to influence national and international decision-makers to reduce global poverty.”

In addition to eradicating poverty and hunger, Micah Challenge also seeks to:

- ensure that children have access to school;
- promote gender equality and empower women by improving female education, employment and leadership opportunities;
- reduce child mortality;
- improve maternal health;
- combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases;
- ensure environmental sustainability; and
- develop a global partnership for development.

► Close with these words from British Baptist and Micah Challenge proponent Stephen Rand: “Christians hold the key to doing justice in a complex world. They have resources of hope because of their faith in God. They have resources of insight through the Holy Spirit. They have resources of global reach because of the fellowship of the church—the church is the first exponent of globalization. If

Baptists are Bible people, then they can lead the way in encouraging Christians to behave biblically and bring good news to the poor—materially and spiritually” (“British and Australian Baptists Spearhead Effort to Fight Global Poverty,” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=4855).

Practicing Patience

Leaders Guide

James 5:7-11

⁷Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. ⁹Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! ¹⁰As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹Indeed we call blessed those who showed endurance. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

Theme: Christian faith results in focused, honest living that places all of life's circumstances in perspective.

Before You Teach

► Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.

As You Teach

Introduce the Lesson

► Ask adults to name everyday situations and circumstances that require waiting and patience. List these on a

board or flip chart, and ask the group to estimate the average amount of waiting time in each.

Note the following from physician and futurist Richard A. Swenson (*Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives*), who says that in his or her lifetime, the average American will spend:

- six months waiting for traffic lights to change;
- one year looking through desk drawers for misplaced objects;
- eight months opening junk mail;
- two years telephoning people who are unavailable;
- three years in meetings;
- 45 minutes each day commuting;
- 1,700 hours each year watching television.

► Ask adults to select something from their compiled list or suggest other situations or circumstances during which they find it most difficult to wait and practice patience. Then ask them to acknowledge which of the following two statements best describe them, and why.

I pray for patience to endure circumstances such as these.

I pray that I will avoid circumstances such as these that require patience.

Suggest that the old adage, Patience is a virtue, no longer seems to be true in our culture. Our 24/7, time-is-money,

everything-automated lifestyle has conditioned us to expect immediate results for virtually everything. We tend to view waiting as a liability, a waste of time and an inconvenience and patience as an unobtainable and unnecessary commodity.

Ask:

- *Is patience passé?*
- *Are there things for which we must patiently wait that are worth that wait? What?*
- *How does the presence or absence of patience in everyday situations affect us spiritually?*
- *What benefits are there to practicing patience?*
- *How are patience and perseverance connected?*
- *How does the practice of patience enable us to maintain a big-picture focus on life?*

► Consider how faith helps us place life's circumstances in perspective. Relate some of the following insights from Rabbi Fred Guttman of Temple Emanuel in Greensboro, North Carolina, who wrote these thoughts in the aftermath of the December 26, 2004 tsunami.

"As a member of the clergy community, my colleagues and I have been asked many theological questions concerning the Tsunami disaster. It is no wonder that the biblical texts give us guidance in this area. The Bible states, 'The mysteries belong to God' (Deut 29:28) and 'God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few' (Eccl

5:1)" ("Tsunami: Not Why, but What?" www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=5351).

Some people, Guttman said, "want to see some sort of divine retribution or the hand of God in this tragedy. Jewish tradition will reject such an assertion. There is no way that one can justify the tragic deaths of so many thousands of people, especially young children. There is no way that a theological definition can be given as to why so many children were made into orphans by this disaster. From our perspective, it is absolute idolatry to say God did this, because only God can know, and we are left with the mystery."

"The issue," he wrote, "is not 'why' did these things happen, but 'what' can we do to comfort the bereaved and alleviate the pain of those that survived." One of the things Guttman advocates is "a consciousness of unity of all humankind. We are connected to each other as inhabitants of this beautiful green planet. We need to add to our community consciousness, our American consciousness and our religious consciousness a planetary consciousness."

Further, he said, we must "renew our faith in the importance of the good deeds of kindness that we do. If an earthquake can cause massive waves of destruction, let our acts of goodness cause massive waves of construction. Waves of goodness will always overcome waves of destruction. Our acts of love can have cosmic significance if we will allow ourselves to believe that when we love one another, we indeed repair the world."

► Suggest that Rabbi Guttman provides us with a way to frame even the most tragic of life's circumstances that allows us to keep the larger picture in view. Then ask:

- *Do you share Rabbi Guttman's perspective in this case?*
- *What is the role of patience in circumstances such as these?*
- *How does waiting patiently for God to speak and act, often through God's people, strengthen our faith?*

Explore the Bible

► Help adults establish the context for James 5:7-11 by reminding them of James's conclusions in 5:1-6, where he dealt with God's judgment of the wicked and God's reward for the righteous. Those to whom James originally wrote had observed the rich getting richer, often at the expense of others. They probably grew weary from time to time of trying to live righteously when others seemed to get ahead by living to please themselves rather than God.

James reminded them that just as God would judge those who lived only for themselves, God would also reward those who lived to please God. Their rewards, however, might not come immediately. In the meantime, the rich and powerful would likely continue to abuse and oppress them. That is where patience and endurance have effect in the lives of Christians, James said.

Encourage adults also to view patience from God's perspective, reminding them of the ways in which God is patient with us as individuals and with all of humanity.

► Ask a volunteer to read aloud James 5:7-9. Note the agricultural analogy with which many of James's readers would have connected. Remind the group of the sometimes

tenuous nature of farming. In this part of the world, a good harvest depended upon adequate rainfalls during two seasons ("the early and the late rains," v 7). Then and now, many months pass before the farmer knows the results of his efforts.

Ask:

- *What advice did James offer these Christians?*
- *What dangers or temptations within the Christian community might they have fallen victim to during this time of waiting?*
- *What did James mean by "strengthen your hearts," (v 8)? In what practical ways can that happen?*
- *What were the people likely grumbling about (v 9)?*

Stress James's call not only to patience but also to working toward harmonious relationships as they waited for Christ's return.

► Read aloud James 5:10-11 and note the continuing theme of patience. These early Christians would have been very familiar with stories of the prophets to whom James referred. They would know that for many, speaking "in the name of the Lord" (v 10) had been dangerous and costly, yet their faith compelled them to do so.

Suggest that James's reference to the prophets served as a reminder to these Christians that they followed in the footsteps of some admirable and noble individuals who endured persecution and suffering for the sake of following the divine plan. Then ask:

- *What is unusual about James's reference to Job?*
- *Is Job an example of patience? Why or why not?*
- *What would Job's experiences have taught these early Christians? What do they teach us?*

Job's story was one with which James's readers would have been very familiar. While Job did appear less than patient with God, he emerged from his tragic circumstances more loyal to God rather than less loyal. His faith was stronger instead of weaker. Job's experiences reminded these early Christians and remind us that no one is immune from trouble, tragedy and difficulty. Faith in God enables us to place such circumstances in a broader perspective. Patience in suffering produces endurance that enables us to experience God's compassion and mercy.

Apply Biblical Truth

► Refer again to some of the concepts and conclusions from Richard Swenson's book *Margins: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives*. Once a practicing physician and medical school professor, Swenson devotes his time to writing and speaking on the intersection of faith, health, culture and the future.

Swenson views "margin" as the space that once existed between ourselves and our limits, a commodity we held in reserve and could expend when unforeseen circumstances arose. He contends that most of us no longer recognize "margin" or know what it is. We are overbooked, over-scheduled, overcrowded and overstressed. As a result, we live lives that are off-balance and void of inner peace.

As a Christian, Swenson wrote his book in part to help people make themselves more available for God's purposes. While some of his suggestions are counter-cultural (don't buy a computer; don't wear a watch), many individuals have followed them and have found the balance and focus that was lacking in their lives.

► Suggest that the perspective, focus and balance that both Swenson and the epistle writer James encourage represent age-old struggles. Recall Psalm 90:12, where the Psalmist prays that God will "teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart."

Viewing life and its circumstances from a faith perspective requires discernment—"a wise heart"—that only God can give. The pace of our lives, our culture and the demands on our time would seem to indicate priorities that are often other than God-focused. Being doers of the Word requires a much different perspective.

► Close with the following illustration sometimes used by experts in the fields of time management and setting priorities.

A man who was speaking to a group about time management displayed an empty jar. He then filled the jar to the top with stones and asked, "Is the jar full?"

Those in the group replied quickly that it was.

Then the man dropped some smaller pebbles into the jar, and they settled in around the stones. "Is the jar full now?" the man asked.

Again those in the group immediately responded that the jar was, indeed, full.

Finally the man poured sand into the jar, and it settled among the pebbles and stones and then rose to the top of the jar. "Is the jar full now?" the man asked.

"Yes!" the group responded.

"So what is the point of this illustration?" the man asked them.

"Even when you think the jar is full, you can always get something else in," someone replied.

"No," the man said. "If you want to fit the big stones into the jar, you have to put them in first."

Stress that Christian faith requires that Christ be first and center in our lives. When he is, we are able to place all of the other "things" of life into perspective. We can live patiently, expectantly and hopefully with the overall big picture in view.

Praying with Confidence Leaders Guide

James 5:13-20

¹³Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. ¹⁴Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. ¹⁶Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. ¹⁷Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. ¹⁸Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest. ¹⁹My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, ²⁰you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Theme: Christian faith results in confident and powerful praying.

Before You Teach

► Read the focal passage, the lesson from the Students Guide and the following teaching suggestions.

- ▶ Consider how you will lead adults to begin thinking about prayer. Copy the quotations about prayer (see below) onto sheets of paper, one quotation per sheet. Plan to display these around your meeting area. Or, if you prefer, research and compile other quotations about prayer you find and display these.
- ▶ If possible, prior to leading this Bible study, visit a local bookstore and note the number and titles of books it offers related to prayer.
- ▶ The online article “Lynn Eib: Bearing Patients’ Burdens” contains an illustration suggested for closing this Bible study. You may wish to read it in its entirety at www.christianitytoday.com/tcw/2003/004/10.8.html.

As You Teach

Introduce the Lesson

- ▶ Call attention to the quotations about prayer you have displayed around your meeting area. Ask various individuals to read them aloud. Then ask each person to identify the one to which he or she most relates. Also encourage adults to express disagreement with one or more of the quotations, if they wish to do so.

Use some or all of the following quotations and/or others you find.

- Prayer does not change God, but it changes him who prays. *Soren Kierkegaard*
- Grant that I may not pray alone with the mouth; help me that I may pray from the depths of my heart. *Martin Luther*

- Prayer for many is like a foreign land. When we go there, we go as tourists. Like most tourists, we feel uncomfortable and out of place. Like most tourists, we therefore move on before too long and go somewhere else. *Robert McAfee Brown*
- The most eloquent prayer is the prayer through hands that heal and bless. The highest form of worship is the worship of unselfish Christian service. The greatest form of praise is the sound of consecrated feet seeking out the lost and helpless. *Billy Graham*
- The value of persistent prayer is not that he will hear us ... but that we will finally hear him. *William McGill, Episcopal priest*
- The relationship to one’s fellow man is the relationship of prayer, the relationship to oneself is the relationship of striving; it is from prayer that one draws the strength for one’s striving. *Franz Kafka, Prague German Jewish author*
- I believe that God prays in us and through us, whether we are praying or not (and whether we believe in God or not). So, any prayer on my part is a conscious response to what God is already doing in my life. *Malcolm Boyd, Episcopal priest*
- Let us not be content to wait and see what will happen, but give us the determination to make the right things happen. *Peter Marshall, Senate chaplain, prayer offered at the opening of the session, March 10, 1948*
- What seem our worst prayers may really be, in God’s eyes, our best. Those, I mean, which are least

supported by devotional feeling. For these may come from a deeper level than feeling. God sometimes seems to speak to us most intimately when he catches us, as it were, off our guard. *C S Lewis*

- We need to find God, and he cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of silence. See how nature—trees, flowers, grass—grows in silence; see the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence.... We need silence to be able to touch souls. *Mother Teresa*

► Acknowledge that within the Christian faith, few things prompt more curiosity and discussion than prayer. People want to know how prayer “works.”

Ask adults to identify some of the common assumptions, misconceptions and questions about prayer. As each is verbalized, encourage them to express their views and opinions and relate personal experiences. Help them start the dialogue by offering a few observations or questions of your own, such as:

- *What constitutes prayer?*
- *How often should we pray, and for what?*
- *Does God hear and answer every prayer?*
- *What does it mean to pray “without ceasing”?*
- *If God already knows everything we need, why do I need to pray and tell God about it?*
- *Why does God heal some people for whom we pray, and not others?*

► Stress our culture’s curiosity about prayer by noting the number of books you located when visiting a local bookstore. Or note that a topical search related to prayer on Amazon.com yields over 14,000 “relevant results.”

Acknowledge that, in spite of the tremendous number of resources available to us and the number of sermons ministers preach on the subject, many people seem to prefer talking about prayer over actually praying.

James viewed prayer not as a crutch or a bandage when life seems to be falling apart but as a way of life and a vital practice within the faith community. Consistent and confident prayer changes lives both in quiet and in dramatic ways.

Explore the Bible

► Call attention to James 5:13 and note that James’s approach to prayer is best viewed within the context of prayer as understood by the Jews. This view, reinforced in the Gospels and throughout the rest of scripture, sees prayer as an ongoing conversation with God. Because God is concerned about all of life’s details and realities, James instructed his readers to pray at both extremes of human experience and at all points in between.

Note, too, that James viewed prayer as more than a personal devotion or exercise. His use of “any among you” indicates that he viewed prayer as an important thread in the fabric of the gathered faith community.

► Preface the reading and discussion of James 5:14-16 by again stressing the importance of understanding it within the context of life in Jewish communities at the time James wrote. Visiting, praying for and anointing the sick with oil were common practices among the Jews when someone

was ill. Oil helped clean and soothe wounds, but because it was applied by hands, it also allowed the sick person to receive comfort from that therapeutic touch. Oil was also highly symbolic within Jewish life, used to set apart kings, priests and prophets.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud James 5:14-16, and lead adults to consider the counter-cultural implications of James's instructions to "call for the elders of the church" (v 14). Ask such questions as:

- *How were James's instructions revolutionary?*
 - *What were community leaders more accustomed to doing when someone was sick?*
 - *What did James advise them to do instead?*
 - *What is the significance of "anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord" (v 14)? How would a Christian in the first century have understood this?*
 - *What is the connection, both for individuals and for the community, between healing and forgiveness of sins?*
 - *What was James's goal for the faith community in giving these instructions?*
- Ask a volunteer to read aloud James 5:17-18 and lead adults to consider answers to the following questions:
- *Why did James use Elijah as an example in prayer?*
 - *What did James hope to help his readers understand?*

Remind adults that Elijah would have been immediately recognizable among James's predominantly Jewish audience. Summarize some of the highlights of Elijah's life, using information in the Students Guide. Also recall the story James referenced from 1 Kings related to Elijah's prayers. Then ask:

- *Why do you think James was careful to include the statement that Elijah was "a human being like us" (v 17)?*
- *How did James establish a connection between Elijah and the oppressed Christian community to whom he wrote?*

Apply Biblical Truth

► Guide adults to consider the implications of James's writing for their lives by recalling a short story titled "Prayer," by Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy.

In Tolstoy's story, a three-year-old boy named Kostya is dying of an incurable disease. His mother believes that God can heal him and prays to that end, although she moves alternately between hope and despair, living victoriously and giving in to the disease. She prays, Tolstoy writes, "imbuing her prayer with all the power of her soul, although somewhere deep within her she feared that God would not move the mountain—that He would act not according to her desires, but according to His own will."

Kostya dies, leaving his mother to ask why God would allow this when she prayed so fervently that he would live.

Encourage adults to discuss the idea of "unanswered" prayer by asking such questions as:

- *When we pray for an individual's healing and that does not happen, does that mean that God has not answered our prayers? Why or why not?*
- *What do you conclude when God does not answer your prayers according to your specifications?*
- *Does God answer every prayer?*
- *Do our prayers sometimes appear to go unanswered because we pray wrongly? What are some examples of this?*
- *What does God teach us when God answers our prayers in ways other than we specify?*

► Close with the following illustration.

Lynn Eib was a 36-year-old wife and mother of three young daughters when she was diagnosed with colon cancer. Her surgeon put her survival chances at 40 percent, because the disease had spread to several lymph nodes.

After undergoing surgery and completing chemotherapy treatment, she didn't want to visit the oncologist's office again. Yet she knew that other patients were no doubt dealing with many of the same fears and other feelings she'd had.

"I remember how lonely it felt to sit in a recliner and watch those toxic chemo fluids drip through my veins during treatment,' she says. 'I wanted to take away other patients' pain and give them peace, but I couldn't. Then God told me: You know the One who can. And you can tell them about me'" ("Lynn Eib: Bearing Patients' Burdens," www.christianitytoday.com/tcw/2003/004/10.8.html).

As a result, Eib started a cancer prayer support group and later began looking for an opportunity to help patients full-time. In the meantime, her oncologist, Dr. Marc Hirsch, had observed the impact her prayer support group had had on people and wanted to do something to better meet the spiritual and emotional needs of his patients. He asked Eib to begin working for him as a patient advocate.

Eib particularly connected with one patient, Susan, who was diagnosed with colon cancer in her 40s. She prayed often with her, and Susan attended the prayer support group. Her cancer went into remission. One night, Susan called Eib and said, "I think I know about God, but I don't know him personally." Eib led Susan to become a Christian. Susan's cancer returned, and she died a short time later.

While situations such as this are difficult, Eib says, "I've learned not to limit God. He can heal physically, but if he chooses not to, that doesn't mean he hasn't been at work. Sometimes patients experience an even more miraculous emotional or spiritual healing instead."

► Remind adults that while God does sometimes answer our prayers in ways we anticipate, perhaps just as often the answers are different than what we expect. Because we have limited our vision and are looking for one particular result, it's possible we might miss the other ways God responds to our prayers. Christian faith results in confident and powerful praying that does not limit God. Often one of the most important ways God answers our prayers is in the assurance of God's presence and the comfort that brings, and in the deep connections we feel within the community of faith when we pray together.

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