

Semicontinuous
Song 2:8–13
Ps. 45:1–2, 6–9

Complementary
Deut. 4:1–2, 6–9
Ps. 15

Jas. 1:17–27
Mark 7:1–8, 14–15, 21–23

Faith in Action

Goal for the Session

Third- and fourth-graders will name actions they can perform in response to James’s instruction to both hear and do the Word.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on James 1:17–27

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Aaron L. Utti

One not doing the Word is deceiving him/herself. This is like a person who looks into a mirror and then goes away unmindful of his or her faith. What is this deception about? On a practical level, someone might say, “I really believe in Jesus; I really believe in the resurrection,” but then give no evidence of such faith in dealing with his or her neighbor (2:18–19). It is not enough merely to hear the word. James promises that hearers will be blessed *in their doing* (cf. Luke 11:28; 12:43; John 13:17). The mere hearer is deceived; the doer is blessed.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Haruko Nawata Ward

Historian Jeannine Olson noted Calvin’s contribution to modern society through his creation of welfare institutions. The city of Geneva during the Reformation period had many poor, widows, and orphans. Calvin himself came to Geneva as a French religious refugee. In his *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* (1541), Calvin established the General Hospital and designated the offices of deacon and deaconess to supervise citizens’ works of mercy as the “doers of the pure religion” in care of the poor.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Archie Smith Jr.

Actions Speak Louder Than Words. James counsels us to a practical morality that is quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger. What we do matters, and what comes out of our mouths can make a difference, for good and for ill. But our actions speak louder than our words. Words may touch our emotional life and help us anticipate what is going to happen. But our actions establish the structures of meaning that build our worlds. Through faithful activity we create and recreate ourselves in trustworthy ways and help build worlds worthy of trust. Actions add value to our words and give them life. In this way, morality has the practical aim of creating relevance, meaning, and integrity in the world.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Peter Rhea Jones

The justly famous definition of genuine religion at James 1:27 is juxtaposed against a religion that is “worthless” (1:26), “barren” (2:20), or even “dead” (2:26), so the stakes run high. In a kind of dialectic of Christian existence, James understands pure religion as being inclusive of both social ministry and personal morality. One’s relationship to God means showing mercy (2:13), striving for peace (3:18), helping the needy (2:15–16), loving the neighbor (2:8), and recognizing the social justice of a fair minimum wage (5:4). In terms of personal morality, it means keeping from the “stain” (Moffatt) and being “uncontaminated” (Jerusalem Bible).

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

James 1:17–27

Focus on Your Teaching

Children of this age are usually more than willing to help people in need. They will be delighted to hear James’s counsel. They will respond positively to naming and providing “hands-on” help to others. With your guidance, they will learn how powerful it is to match the Word with compassionate action. Together you will begin a year of living Christian discipleship in word and deed.

Jesus, my Savior and teacher, guide me as I lead the children this week, so that we all may choose to lead lives in which compassionate words are matched by compassionate action. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- ☐ green cloth
- ☐ battery-powered white candle
- ☐ *Singing the Feast*, bit.ly/SingingTheFeast
- ☐ gold ribbons, confetti
- ☐ Color Pack 1, 2, 31
- ☐ Bibles

For Responding

- ☐ option 1: hand mirror
- ☐ option 2: copies of Resource Sheet 1, paper lunch bags, markers, stapler, supplies for project chosen
- ☐ option 3: Resource Sheet 2, scissors

If possible, display Color Pack 1 in a place where it can remain for the church school year. Refer to this “Seasons of the Church Year” diagram often to help children learn about the difference between the Christian church year and the civic calendar.

■ LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, if using option 2 in Responding, contact a care agency in your community and ask about packing lunches or snacks for their use. Gather the supplies needed, asking other adults and groups in the church to donate some of the items. For option 3 in Responding, cut out the cards on Resource Sheet 2 (Game Cards).

As children arrive, play “Celebration Music” (*Singing the Feast*). Greet learners by name and welcome them to a new year of learning about Jesus. Invite the children to help arrange the green cloth and the candle in the center of your meeting space.

Gather around the candle and show Color Pack 1, pointing out that this Sunday is in Ordinary Time, called the season after Pentecost by some churches. It is a season to focus on exploring what it means to follow Jesus. While it is “Ordinary Time,” today is a celebration to welcome everyone to church school. Invite learners to arrange the ribbons and confetti around the candle.

Light the candle, welcoming Christ in your midst. Pray aloud:

Jesus, be with us both in our hearts and minds. Guide our actions that we may be kind and caring toward one another and all whom we meet. Amen.

Invite learners to tell about times they have helped other people. Ask:

- ✠ What was easy or difficult about helping?
- ✠ How do you feel when you are able to be of help?

To find James 1:17–27:

Go to the Table of Contents in the front of the Bible and find James. Go to the first page of James. Look for the large number 1 at the beginning of the first chapter. Look at the small numbers by the lines of writing to find verse 17. This reference tells you to read from verse 17 to verse 27.

Many biblical scholars say that the “James” mentioned in James 1:1 was the brother of Jesus.

EXPLORING

Introduce today’s Bible reading as part of a letter written after Jesus’ life on earth. The author of James writes about what it means to follow Jesus’ teachings. Give each learner a Bible and work together to find James 1:17–27, using the helps in the sidebar as needed.

Read aloud verses 17–21 as children follow along in their Bibles, then stop and discuss:

- ✂ How is God named in verse 17?
- ✂ What does James say about God?
- ✂ What does verse 18 say about how God loves humankind? Because God loves and cares for us, how might we act toward other people and other creatures?
- ✂ In verse 21, James tells us to welcome the word or the message that is planted in our hearts. This is James’s way of telling us to welcome Jesus, who is also known as God’s Word. How might we welcome Jesus into our lives? (*Possible answers include worship, reading the Bible, prayer, attending church school, serving projects.*)

Read aloud verse 22 as learners follow along. Discuss together the meaning of the saying “actions speak louder than words” as it relates to James’s words in this verse.

Read aloud verse 27 as learners follow along.

- ✂ What does James urge us to do as Jesus’ followers?

Ask the children to define the terms *orphan* and *widow*. Be sensitive to any learners who may have been orphans. Explain that Christians today understand James’s words about orphans and widows to mean people who truly are orphans and widows, and also to mean any person in need.

Show Color Pack 2 and then pass it around the group. As each learner holds the picture, ask the child to offer an idea about what kind of help this boy might want. Ask:

- ✂ How might we find out what he needs or wants?
- ✂ What are some ways that we, or other people, could care for him?
- ✂ In what ways might the boy in this photo be able to care for us or for others?

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

1. **Mirror, Mirror** As an active way to consider matching words with faithful action, play a game of “Mirror, Mirror.” Tell how James explained that if we look in the mirror and say “I am a Christian,” but later are mean to other people, our words and actions don’t match. Stand in a circle. Select one child to be “It.” “It” stands in the center with eyes closed, holding a mirror. The other children turn to a neighbor and pretend either to shake hands or to raise a hand in a fist. Once they have chosen their gestures, they call out, “I am a Christian.” “It” calls out, “Mirror, mirror on the wall, where are the Christians in this hall?” “It” opens his or her eyes and holds the mirror up to someone making a kind gesture. This child says “I am a Christian” into the mirror, and then

EASY
PREP

becomes the new “It.” After several rounds, ask: How did it feel to say “I am a Christian” into the mirror? Did you change your gesture for a chance to look in the mirror? Wonder together whether it is possible to act kindly at all times. Assure children that God forgives us when we have acted badly and always gives us a second chance.

There may be other ways that the learners can help those in need in your community. If your congregation has an ongoing mission or serving project, plan an activity for your group that supports your church’s work in a meaningful way.

- 2. Brown Bag Kindness** Give learners the opportunity to care for others, demonstrating their desire to be active followers of Jesus. Tell them about the group in your community for which you will prepare lunches or snacks and what you will include in each one. Give each learner a lunch bag label from Resource Sheet 1 (Brown Bag Label) to decorate with markers. Have them write the name of your church in the blank. Invite each learner to take a bag and fill it with the lunch or snack items assembled. Show children how to fold down the top of the bag and staple the label on the fold to close the bag. Conclude by blessing the lunch bags:

God, thank you for food to eat and to share. Bless the people who will eat these meals and watch over them. Amen.

If possible, plan a way to involve the children in delivering the bags.

- 3. What Would I Do?** Reinforce James’s challenge to hear and do by playing a game. Spread out the game cards cut from Resource Sheet 2 (Game Cards). Invite learners to pick a card, turn it over, read the action described, and tell if the individual is following James’s teaching. If the actions do not follow what James says, ask the group to name different actions a person could take to be consistent with James’s instructions.

CLOSING

Gather in a circle and say, “James wrote that those who both hear and do the word of God will be blessed.” Sing together “You Shall Love the Lord Your God” (Color Pack 31, [Singing the Feast](#)).

Offer the following prayer, inviting learners to form a circle, stack their hands in the center, and repeat the prayer after you, like a team cheer:

Jesus, our Savior and teacher / help us to be your true followers. / Help our actions / match our pledge to follow you. / (Everyone lifts their hands in the air and shouts, “Amen!”)

As you say good-bye to each learner, offer this blessing: “(Name), God bless you as you find ways to help others in Jesus’ name.”

You Shall Love the Lord Your God

You shall love the Lord your God, alleluia!

You shall love the Lord your God, alleluia!

With all your heart and soul and mind, alleluia!

With all your heart and soul and mind, alleluia!

Brown Bag Label

O taste and see that the LORD is good.
—Psalm 34:8

Please enjoy this gift
prepared for you by

_____ Church.

O taste and see that the LORD is good.
—Psalm 34:8

Please enjoy this gift
prepared for you by

_____ Church.

Game Cards

Colton saw a boy fall down at recess and ran to help him get up.	Alex invited a new classmate to eat at his lunch table.	Bella gave one of her birthday presents to a children's group home.
Emma sold lemonade. She used the money she earned to buy cereal for the food pantry.	Tom saw his grandmother crying. He gave her tissues and a hug.	Molly told her friends to stop teasing a new girl.
Dylan's church school class was collecting money to help flood victims. Dylan didn't give any money because he wanted to buy chips.	Ethan told his mom he would watch his little sister while she worked in the garden. After a while, he left his little sister alone.	Hannah promised the pastor she would light the candles for worship on Sunday. On Sunday morning, she went swimming with her friends.
Sarah took a comic book from a store without paying for it.	At recess, Grace told Emma something mean about Suzanne.	Jacob pushed his way to the front of the line so he could be first.