

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

Hearing and Doing God's Word

Goal for the Session *Children will puzzle on connecting words and actions as taught in the letter from James.*

■ 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?

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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

Some children in this broad age range generally assume that adults do what they say and teach. But older children are keen observers of the adults around them, and sooner or later they recognize that words and actions don't always match. However, this session takes a slightly different route about matching words and actions. The children will be encouraged to act on the word of God or the teachings of Jesus as a way of showing God's love to others. The focus is on how they can do this rather than judging others.

God of love, reassure me of your love as I examine how my words and actions show your love to the children I teach. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- copies of Resource Sheet 1 on card stock
- scissors
- markers or crayons
- green cloth
- battery-powered white candle
- offering basket
- Bibles
- Singing the Feast*, bit.ly/SingingTheFeast
- Color Pack 1, 2, 32

For Responding

- option 2: newsprint, card stock, pencils, markers
- option 3: Resource Sheet 2, scissors

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!

Save the crosses for use in the Gathering activity each week.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, make copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Crosses) on card stock and cut out a cross for each child and teacher. Make a few extras. For option 2 in Responding, divide a sheet of newsprint into four quadrants with these headings: *By myself*, *With family members*, *With my church school friends*, and *With people in my church*. Cut card stock into 4 ¼" x 11" pieces. For option 3 in Responding, cut apart the cards on Resource Sheet 2 (Game Cards). Arrange a green cloth over a table or large box for the worship table. On it, place a Christ candle (battery-powered white candle decorated with symbols of Christ), a Bible, and an offering basket.

Welcome the children by name as they arrive. If they have offerings, have them put them in the offering basket. Give each one a cross from Resource Sheet 1 to decorate. Ask each one to print his or her name on it. When ready to begin, gather the group at the worship table. Play "You Shall Love the Lord Your God" (Color Pack 32, *Singing the Feast*) and invite learners to sing along. Light the Christ candle, pointing out that it is a reminder of Jesus' presence with the group. Note that the green cloth means that the church is in the church season called Ordinary Time or season after Pentecost, when Christians learn more about how to follow Jesus.

Teach this prayer response:

Teacher: God be with you.

All: And also with you.

Then say to each child, "God be with you," and the child responds, "And also with you," and places her or his cross in the basket. Remind the children that placing their crosses in the basket is a symbol of giving thanks for God's love and care.

**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!

Introducing the class
to various types of
literature in the Bible is
one step on the way to
biblical literacy. Older
children who have some
Bible skills like to use
them.

Lead this prayer, asking the children to echo each phrase:

*Loving God, / we are ready to hear your word. / We want to do your word /
so others / will know your love too. / Amen.*

Play a variation on “Simon Says.” The children are to do what you say if the action is preceded by “Simon says.” When the directions are not preceded by “Simon says,” they are to do something totally different. For example, if you say, “Touch your ear,” the children might touch their toes. After a few rounds, suggest that the Bible story is about matching words and actions.

EXPLORING

Invite a child to find the Letter of James in the Bible from the worship table. Explain that the New Testament has four Gospels, books that tell the story of Jesus, a book called Acts of the Apostles that tells about the beginning of the church, and many letters written to churches and to individuals. These letters were read in homes when the people gathered to learn about Jesus and worship God. Show Color Pack 1, a narrow street in an ancient town in Italy. Invite the children to imagine they are walking on this street to a home where they will gather with others to hear a letter from James. Have the child hold the Bible open to James as you read this paraphrase:

Every good thing comes from God, the creator, who does not change. My brothers and sisters, be quick to listen, but slow to speak. Also be slow to become angry. An angry person doesn't show God's love. Stay away from unhealthy things and let the word of God deep inside you grow.

Ask:

- ✻ What does this part of the letter tell you about God?
- ✻ What does it tell you to do?
- ✻ How do you think the word of God gets “deep inside you”?

Read:

Be doers of God's word and not hearers only. People who hear but don't act are like people who look in the mirror and then forget what they look like. Instead, study God's word and do it. Don't listen and then forget, but do what you hear. You will be blessed in all that you do.

Ask:

- ✻ What might Christians do to show that they are doers of God's word?

Show the children Color Pack 2. Invite the children to pass it around. Invite each one to name a way to show God's love to one of the individuals pictured.

RESPONDING

Offer at least two options so children have a choice. One might be more challenging to interest older children who can work on their own.

- 1. Mission Project** Working together helps children recognize the importance of being doers of God's word. This option might naturally follow the conversation at the end of Exploring. Pick up on any suggestions made that connect with mission or outreach programs of your congregation. Talk together about how your group might take part in one or more of them. Notice which ones gather more interest, and explain to the group what they might do. Conclude this option by praying together as they begin this work of doing.
- 2. Bumper Stickers** This option focuses on encouraging others to do God's word. Help the group fill the newsprint sheet with ideas in each quadrant: *By myself*, *With family members*, *With my church school friends*, *With people in my church*. Provide 4 ¼" x 11" card stock pieces, pencils, and markers for the children, working in pairs or alone, to create bumper sticker slogans about doing God's word. Display the bumper stickers where others will see them.
- 3. Doer Game** For the game, spread out the game cards from Resource Sheet 2 upside down. The children, one at a time, select a card, turn it over, read the action described, and tell whether it is a way to follow the teaching from James. If it is not, invite the group to tell how to be a doer of God's word in that situation.
- 4. Mirror Actions** Some children more easily connect hearing and doing if they can act out being doers of God's word. Have the children stand in a line facing you. They are to "mirror" what you do. First explain that you will pantomime various ways of hearing God's word: praying, reading the Bible, singing hymns. Then invite volunteers to act out other ways. Next, explain that you will pantomime actions for doing God's word: shaking hands, waving, and smiling. Then invite children to act out other ways of doing God's word.

Younger children may need time to consider how to be doers of God's word. The doer game and mirror actions provide examples and time to think about them.

EASY
PREP

CLOSING

Gather at the worship table. Light the candle, if necessary. Sing or clap to the song "You Shall Love the Lord Your God" (Color Pack 32, [Singing the Feast](#)). Invite children to name ways to be doers of God's word.

Lead the prayer response:

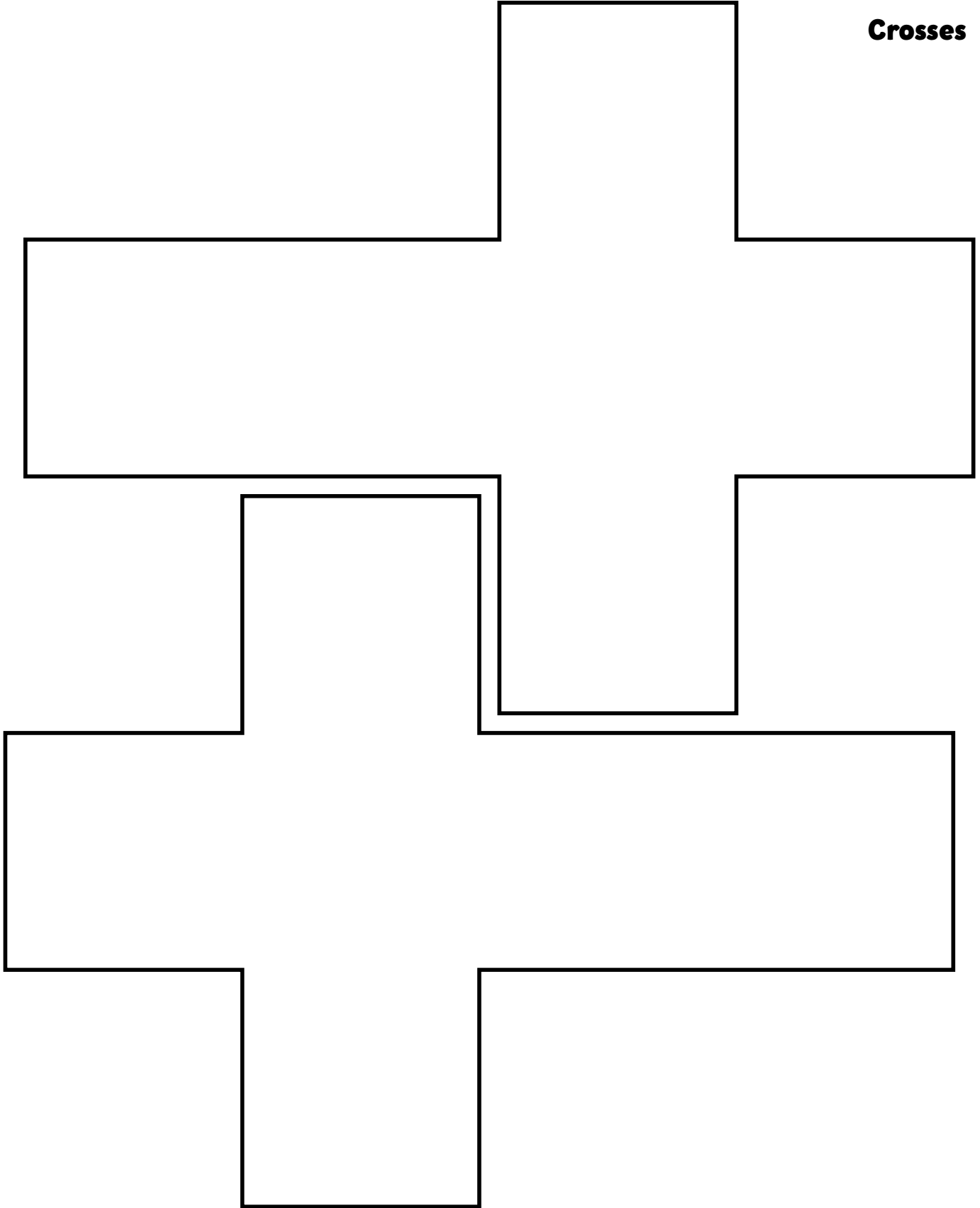
Teacher: God be with you.

All: And also with you.

Follow with this echo prayer: *Loving God, / be with us / during this week. / We want to be / doers of your word. / Amen.*

Say good-bye to each child and invite each one to return.

Crosses





Game Cards

<p>Colton saw a boy fall down at recess and ran to help him get up.</p>	<p>Nate asked the new boy to eat with him at lunch.</p>	<p>Bella gave one of her birthday presents to a homeless shelter for families.</p>
<p>Emma and Emily sold lemonade and used the money to buy food for the food pantry.</p>	<p>Tom saw his grandmother crying and went outside to play.</p>	<p>Molly told her friends to stop teasing a new girl.</p>
<p>Dylan's church school class voted to collect money to help flood victims. Dylan spent his money on a new computer game.</p>	<p>Ethan told his mom he would babysit. After a while, he left his little sister home alone.</p>	<p>Hannah's choir was singing at church on Sunday. Instead, she went swimming with friends that morning.</p>
<p>Sarah took a comic book from a store without paying for it.</p>	<p>Grace texted a mean message to one of her friends.</p>	<p>Jacob pushed his way to the front of the line so he could be first at the movies.</p>

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Ps. 45:1–2, 6–9

Complementary
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Jas. 1:17–27
Mark 7:1–8, 14–15,
21–23

Pure Religion

Goal for the Session Adults will affirm with James that Christian faith includes social ministry and personal morality.

■ 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?

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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?

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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 re-create 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

YOU WILL NEED

- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for the next session

For Responding

- option 1: paper and pens, Resource Sheet 1
- option 2: copies of Resource Sheet 2, pens
- option 3: piece of newsprint, marker, magazines, glue stick or tape

It is always helpful for the leader to be the first person to arrive. It allows you to arrange the room, get settled yourself, and be a warm, welcoming presence for participants as they arrive.

The letter of James includes more than 100 imperatives, pleading for Christians to demonstrate their faith to others with action.

Focus on Your Teaching

Many Christians feel confused about the relationship between Christian belief and Christian action. Is one more important than the other? Can one exist without the other? Unfortunately, some denominational cultural wars have pitted Christian evangelism against Christian social justice, causing further confusion. Some in your group may believe that Christians should favor one over the other.

Today's lesson provides an opportunity to examine that relationship. Encourage participants to see this as a both/and characteristic of discipleship. Both Christian faith and Christian action arise from the same source, Jesus Christ.

Empowering God, may your words open my mind and heart to the strength you give through your Spirit to work in the world. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Welcome participants as they arrive and introduce any newcomers.

Have participants turn to the person next to them and tell them about a person in their life who practices what they preach. Each participant should take only a couple of minutes to describe the person's actions. As a single group, have participants call out characteristics of people who practice what they preach based on what they heard from their partner.

Tell the group that today's lesson is about the relationship between our beliefs and our actions as seen in the book of James.

Lead the group in this prayer or one of your choosing:

Loving God, for the testimonies of those who have gone before us, we thank you. May your discerning Spirit guide us during this study so that we are witnesses to your transformative light. Amen.

EXPLORING

Have participants find the book of James in their Bibles. Invite a volunteer to read James 1:17–27 aloud.

Ask the group to read the passage again in silence and choose one phrase or sentence that most sticks in their mind. After a minute has passed, invite people to call out the phrase or sentence and offer a brief comment about what intrigues them about it.

Distribute Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on James 1:17–27) and have a volunteer read the “What?” excerpt aloud. Invite initial reactions to the excerpt. Have volunteers read aloud the three biblical passages named in the excerpt that also promise hearers will be blessed in their doing (Luke 11:28; 12:43; John 13:17). Note that James’s words are supported by Jesus’ teachings.

Tell the group that for a time in the history of the Protestant church the book of James was viewed with suspicion. Martin Luther, one of the original reformers of the church, believed the book of James *only* emphasized Christian actions as important. Luther believed that the apostle Paul’s message of salvation by faith alone proved that any attempt to win God’s approval by our actions was foolishness. Therefore, he argued at one point that the book of James should be removed from the Bible. As generations passed, however, most came to believe that it is not an either/or argument. People should believe *and* act according to our faith. Have participants take a few minutes and find passages in the Gospels where Jesus demonstrates and insists on followers doing concrete actions of mercy and justice. Some examples they may find include Matthew 25:31–46; Luke 6:27–31, 43–45; John 13:14–15.

Invite a volunteer to read the “Where?” excerpt aloud. Ask participants to name examples where Christian communities and churches have demonstrated their faith through actions helping others. Examples mentioned may include establishing schools and social programs, or participating in civil rights or antiwar struggles.

Read James 1:26–27 aloud again to the group. Ask:

- ✧ How do verses 26–27 connect with verses 22–25?
- ✧ What mandate do verses 26–27 present to Christians?

EASY
PREP

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities, depending on the length of your session:

1. **My Witness** Give each participant a piece of paper and pen. Have a volunteer read the “Now What?” excerpt to the group. Have people make a list of three or four of the faith beliefs they hold as most important for Christians to have and another list of three or four kinds of actions they do as disciples. They may wish to use some of the actions read in the excerpt if they are relevant to their lives of faith.

When they have finished, invite participants to take a minute or two to reflect on these questions. Answers will not be shared but they may wish to write on their paper.

- ✧ How does my personal morality resemble James’s definition of religion?
- ✧ How is my involvement in social ministry similar (or not) to James 1:17–27?

- 2. The Transforming Current** Distribute Resource Sheet 2 (The Transforming Current) and a pen to each participant. Explain that this is a longer excerpt from the same author as the “So What?” excerpt on Resource Sheet 1. Have a volunteer read the “So What?” excerpt and another volunteer read Resource Sheet 2.

Invite participants to silently read the excerpts again and then consider the illustration on Resource Sheet 2. Have them think of themselves as one of the many creeks running into a Christian current that can transform the world. Ask them to write actions they take individually and other actions the larger movement takes that help transform the world into a more peaceful and just place. Finally, ask them to think of a few actions they can take in the next week and to write them down. They may be actions of practical morality or community acts of justice. Stress that they are all part of this transformative current.

- 3. A Genuine Religion Collage** Have a volunteer read the “Now What?” excerpt from Resource Sheet 1. Invite participants to sit around a table with a piece of newsprint titled “Genuine Religion.” Have them find pictures in magazines of their understanding of genuine religion based on today’s lesson and paste them on the newsprint, forming a collage. Consider posting the collage in the classroom or somewhere in the church where others might see it.

CLOSING

Ask participants to recall the phrase or sentence that initially stuck in their mind when they first heard the passage read at the beginning of the session. Now, after studying the focus scripture, is it still the verse that they will most remember from the text? Invite a few volunteers to respond.

Challenge the group to be doers and not just hearers of the Word. Also, invite them to be especially mindful of this challenge in the coming week and to return to the group ready to tell one action they took during the week. It may be an action of personal morality, such as being slow to anger. Or it may be a more social act of mercy or justice.

Conclude with this prayer or one of your choosing:

Loving God, you called us to live with one another and to act justly and love mercy. Help us to walk humbly with you as we listen for your Spirit as it guides us in your ways. Amen.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for the next session, or e-mail it to the participants during the week. Encourage class members to read the focus scripture and resource sheet before the next session.

Focus on James 1:17–27

WHAT is important to know?

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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.

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SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

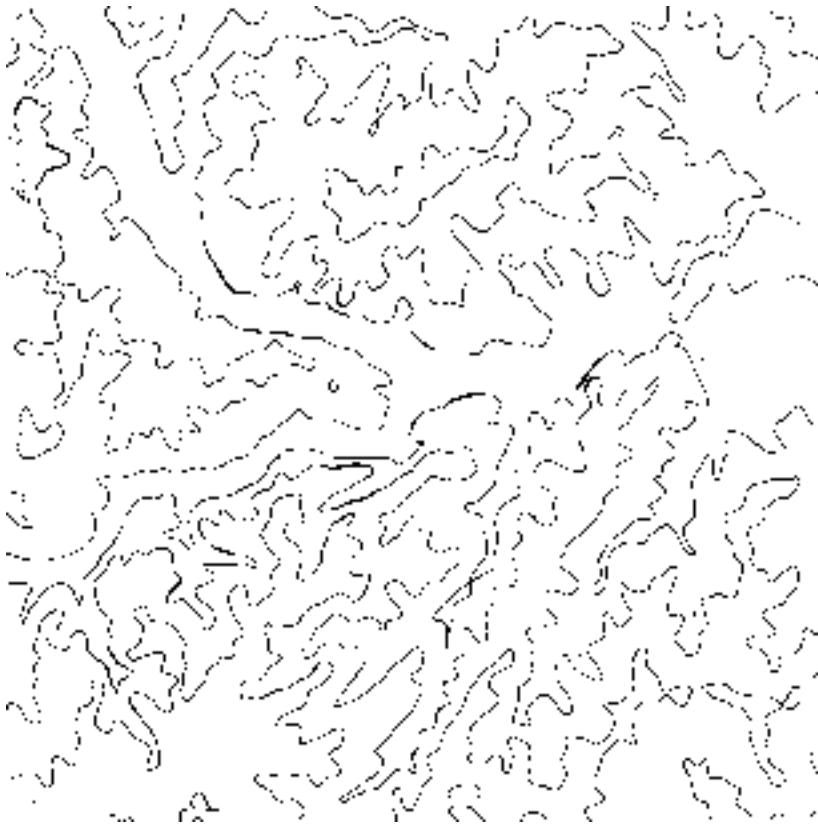
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The Transforming Current



James calls us to make a distinction between worthless and worthwhile religious morality. The discernment of the difference between these two kinds of religious morality is an ongoing process. It exists in a fluid relationship with the changing circumstances in which we find ourselves every day. Hence, James calls us to continual accountability and to a deeper appreciation of the vicissitudes of our emotional lives. By acknowledging and taking responsibility for our own anger, we may exercise self-control and become decision

makers, architects of relationships, and builders of the beloved community. This is what James requires of us. He does not ask us to undergo psychoanalysis or psychotherapy, or to engage in fundamental character reconstruction. Rather, he calls us to be responsible, taking seriously our emotional lives, our religious faith, and our behavior. We can envision ourselves as early signs of God's new creation. We can begin by embracing the whole of ourselves and taking responsibility for our constructive and destructive potentials. Living this way can increase our critical discernment. It can foster the development of persons and communities. Such living, when joined by the faithfulness of many others, can become a strong current that helps to transform the world.

Excerpted from Archie Smith Jr., *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 4* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 18.

Joining the Feast

Year B, Fall
Proper 17—Reign of Christ Sunday



What you will find in *Joining the Feast!*

The Church Year Calendar

Describes the important church festivals and special days for the coming season. It provides theological reflections on their importance for the church's life and our own lives.

The Shape of the Season

Presents an overview of the focus scriptures for the weeks in the coming season. It discusses the biblical and theological significance of each of the passages.

Joining Worship and Learning: Making the Connections and Time with Children

A helpful feature in this section of *Joining the Feast* is the inclusion of the stories on the focus scriptures from the multi-age course. These stories can be used in the children's time during worship. Notice that some songs are used by several age levels but not in the same session. If you are interested in including a prayer, poetry, or artwork from an age level, speak with the leader in advance. May your congregational worship be enlivened by these suggestions to join worship and learning.

Joining Mission and Learning

Help the participants in *Feasting on the Word Curriculum* resources connect with existing service opportunities in your congregation. Review this list, and offer suggestions to the leaders. Give this chart to the chair of the mission or outreach committee so that the work of the committee can be strengthened through the church school.

Litanies and Prayers

A selection of poetic prayers and responsive readings that helps worship leaders connect the church's educational and worship experiences to find fullness and blessing in the praise and service of God.

Children's Bulletins

A fun activity page is provided weekly to give children a sense of belonging and help them feel welcome in the worship experience. These special children's bulletins connect their worship experience to the education themes.

Joining the Feast

We invite you to “Join the Feast”!

Our exciting *Feasting on the Word Curriculum* offers great opportunities for the local church. Pastors, educators, and participants can experience the wonder of God’s nourishing word to us. For church schools, for study groups, and for those preparing to teach or preach, the resources here will deepen and strengthen our faith. We have an amazing “feast” set before us! We desire and can find further understanding in our faith—of who God is and what God has done!

Joining the Feast helps pastors, educators, and worship leaders plan for education and worship. We want to assist in reflecting on how to incorporate scriptural and seasonal emphases across different parts of the church’s life.

Joining the Feast can be shared in education and worship committees. It enables important biblical themes to be integrated into the church’s study and worship experiences. A chart of suggestions for ways educational emphases can be used in worship is a feature of what follows here. Church school teachers can discuss these materials with one another to enhance education for all age levels in the church. Pastors who plan their lectionary preaching will find taking an overall look at this church season to be useful for their preparations. In all this we want to join teaching and preaching. We want the church’s educational and worship experiences to find fullness and blessing in the praise and service of God!

An important goal for pastors and educators in the church is to connect or join the church’s educational experience with the church’s worship experience. People of all ages who participate in church school study can find their Christian faith enhanced when the Scriptures read and proclaimed in worship reinforce and expand what they have been considering in their educational time. Education and worship can be mutually supportive in helping God’s word in Scripture come alive in the Sunday morning experience. Consideration of the same lectionary reading in preaching can deepen the insights gained in church school.

Pastors who want to build on what has been done in education welcome this *Feasting on the Word Curriculum* as a way to prepare congregational members for directions into which the sermon can lead. Those who participate in the education time will find the insights gained there enhanced by preaching that considers the same passage and brings God’s word to bear in fresh and nourishing ways. So as we “Join the Feast,” joining the church’s educational and worship dimensions can bring to life the richness of God’s word in Scripture.

Donald K. McKim



Color the pictures of the doers. What could be done to fix the other situations?

A Letter from James

based on James 1:17–27

When the Christian church was just beginning, people gathered in each other's homes to learn about Jesus and worship God. Church leaders and teachers wrote letters to them about following Jesus. This is part of the letter written by a teacher named James:

Every good thing comes from God, who does not change. My brothers and sisters, be quick to listen but slow to speak. Also be slow to become angry. An angry person doesn't show God's love. Stay away from unhealthy things, and let the word of God that is deep inside you grow.

Be doers of God's word and not hearers only. People who hear but don't act are like people who look in the mirror and then forget what they look like. Instead, study God's word and try to do what it says to do. Don't listen and then forget, but do what you hear. You will be blessed in all that you do.



BE A DOER OF GOD'S WORD.

