

SAMPLE

Being Doers of the Word: 13 Lessons from James



13 online adult Sunday school lessons

Produced in partnership with the Baptist General Association of Virginia

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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.

Being Doers of the Word

James 1:19-27

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

Introduction

Outside Yoder’s supply store in Shipshewana, Indiana, a group of southern evangelicals asked a Mennonite farmer if he was saved.

He found their question puzzling. As a faithful member of the Peach Bloom Mennonite Congregation, he had never been asked that question.

The farmer asked his inquisitors for paper and a pen. After writing down the names and addresses of his neighbors, he told the evangelicals to put their question about his salvation to folk on his list. He knew they could speak honestly to the depth of his commitment.

At Henlee Barnette’s memorial service, a former seminary colleague and fellow member at Louisville’s Crescent Hill Baptist Church recalled the long-time ethics professor’s “credo.”

He said that Barnette had written in a pew Bible in the rear of the sanctuary these words: “Remember you show your love of this divine word not by the words you say about it but by living it day by day” (“Henlee Barnette Remembered as

'Unashamed Baptist Radical,'" www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=4901).

St. Francis of Assisi reportedly said, "Preach the gospel at all times. Use words if necessary."

A Mennonite, a Baptist and a Catholic shared a common belief system. They understood that real faith involves action. They knew that walking the walk is a better gauge of authentic faith than talking the talk. They had a living faith.

Yet within much of Christianity, especially within the Baptist family, saying what we believe is more important than how we live. Baptists emphasize right belief more than right practice. We tend more toward mental assent than daily practice.

In many ways, Baptists are heirs of the Christian tradition that asserts the primacy of the Apostle's Creed, which was not written by the apostles although it was adopted by the early church in the second century.

In fact, at the first Baptist World Alliance congress in 1905, Baptists recited the Apostle's Creed ("Proposal Sparks Debate Over Baptists and Creeds," www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=4457).

The creed says, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. ..."

While the Apostle's Creed articulates orthodox Christianity, it skips Jesus' teachings. The creed bypasses the Sermon

on the Mount, the commandment to love neighbor and the examples of how to live. The creed teaches that what we think defines faith—faith has nothing to do with the way we live.

The Letter of James offers another perspective.

The Biblical Witness

Some scholars argue that the Letter of James may be the earliest New Testament book. After all, the author found no reason to identify himself other than as "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1). He wrote authoritatively, showing deep convictions and prioritizing moral values. His writings parallel Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. Not surprisingly, Christian tradition held that James was Jesus' oldest brother.

James 1:19-20 Triple Duty

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.

Speaking kindly to his beloved community, James told the emerging community of followers that they had a triple duty.

First, they should be "swift to hear" (KJV) the "word of truth" (v 18). The "word of truth" meant God's message in the person of Jesus Christ. The concept of swiftness referred to an eager attentiveness.

If indeed the New Testament had not yet been written, then James was instructing early believers that they had a duty

to learn from preachers and teachers. They needed to listen carefully.

Second, they should be “slow to speak.” Being slow meant exercising restraint or caution against overreacting. They had a duty to speak slowly, only after thoughtful consideration.

Third, they should be “slow to anger.” The King James Version uses the word “wrath” instead of anger. Wrath carries the idea of rash, reactionary, reckless behavior. Anger distorted “righteousness” or “upright conduct.” Disciples had a duty to practice and exhibit an upright conduct.

James 1:21 Taking Off, Putting In

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.

One commentator translated the word “rid” as “putting off” and the word “sordidness” as “filthiness.” The image is of someone stripping off their dirty clothes. Disciples were urged to take off their morally unclean behaviors.

James switched metaphors from dirty clothes to agriculture. He shifted from taking off to putting in. He encouraged followers to “receive” or “welcome” the living word, meaning far more than passive acceptance. Welcoming referred to an energetic embrace of the seed of truth sown in the human heart.

James 1:22-25 Hear and Do

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.

This is one of the most often quoted Christian passages, albeit sometimes incorrectly within some circles.

James said, “Be doers of the word, not hearers only.”

The word “doers” was one of James’s favorite expressions. He wrote, “Be doers of the word” (v 22), “hearers of the word and not doers” (v 23), “but doers who act” (v 25), and “not a doer of the law” (4:11).

While James urged disciples to be action-oriented, he did not discount the value of listening to preachers and teachers. He did contrast doing with *only* listening, however. Authentic disciples both hear and do, James said.

Inauthentic disciples hear and do nothing. They behave as those who look at themselves in the bronze or silver mirrors. Since glass mirrors were not available until much later, the mirrors of James’s time offered only an imperfect reflection. But the emphasis was not so much on the flawed reflection as on the fact that viewers forgot what they had seen, as those who heard forgot what they had heard.

Authentic disciples look into the “perfect law” or the foundation of truth found in apostolic teaching. They hear. They do not forget what was said. They take what they learn, and they act.

James 1:26-27

Worthwhile Religion

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.

James contrasted worthless religion with worthwhile religion.

Worthless religion grows out of self-deception and shows itself through uncontrolled speech. Some believers thought they were religious, thinking their words displayed real faith.

One scholar said that self-deceptive behavior differs from hypocritical behavior. Self-deception is a matter of wrong perception of what is important. Hypocrisy is a matter of pretending to believe but behaving differently.

James's concern here was with devotees who really believed that they were practicing real religion. Yet their religion was worthless, vain and empty.

Worthwhile religion, on the other hand, expresses itself in two concrete actions.

First is social concern. James prioritized care for orphans and widows, who represented the poor and powerless in his society.

The word "to care" is translated as "to visit" in the Revised Standard Version and King James Version. The Good News Bible translates the word as "to take care of." The word means more than a social visit with a charity basket.

Reading from the big Bible, we discover that caring for the poor and powerless means helping fully meet their needs so that they have a rightful opportunity to achieve their full human potential. Such care involves both charity and justice.

Second is moral purity. James urged his readers "to keep" themselves "unstained by the world."

The King James Version uses the word "unspotted" instead of the word "unstained." The Good News Bible translates the word "corrupted."

The idea is for believers to be watchful for those pollutants in the world that would pollute one's personal life.

Worthwhile religion finds expression in both social and personal action.

One of the standard Christian observations about this passage is a qualification: James was not substituting good works for real faith. When Christian teachers make this statement, they often offer an unintended result of de-emphasizing the doing good works and emphasizing faith as a matter of mental assent.

Authentic faith never severs behavior from belief, nor prioritizes one above the word. Behavior and belief are co-joined. Behavior informs belief; belief informs behavior. Faith-in-action and action-in-faith are inseparable traveling companions.

Being Doers of the Word

In 2000, a young South African boy spoke at an AIDS conference in Durban. Nkosi Johnson was born HIV-posi-

tive and abandoned by his biological mother when he was 2. When he died at age 12, weighing less than 22 pounds, he had already inspired the world into action.

Speaking about death in an interview with ABC newsman Jim Wooten, Nkosi said, “Do all you can with what you have in the time you have in the place you are” (www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4195336).

His words really frame a strategy for Christians to be doers of the word. We must (1) do all we can, (2) with what we have, (3) in the time we have, and (4) where we are.

Down through the years, Christians have found many reasons for inaction about social injustice and wrongs in the world. We have preferred occasional acts of charity, instead of doing everything we could. We have made excuses that we don’t have enough resources or power to make a difference. We have said we don’t have the time to work for the common good. We have lamented that we aren’t located in a place to make a constructive impact.

Yet an adopted boy dying from AIDS shows us the courage and responsibility to act fully regardless of our circumstances, power, position and place.

James, too, understood that a living faith engages the world continuously without excuses.

A number of years ago at a student conference, a long-time social activist asked the audience, “How many of you have a red-letter edition of the Bible?”

Students proudly shot their hands into the air. After all, these students had been taught to read their Bibles daily and pay especially close attention to the words of Jesus that were printed in red ink.

Then, he said, “How many of you have a green-letter edition of the Bible?”

The students looked at each other nervously. No one wanted to admit that they had never heard of the green-letter edition of the Bible. Everyone wanted to know what it was.

The minister explained that the red-letter edition contained what Jesus said. The green-letter edition contained what Jesus did. He urged the students to know the words of Jesus and to act as Jesus would.

Written by Robert Parham, executive director, Baptist Center for Ethics, Nashville, Tenn.

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. Also gather paper and pencils or pens.

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 helplessly 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."

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Lesson	Writer
Developing a Mature Faith	Bob Fox, pastor, Faith Baptist Church, Georgetown, Ky.
Enduring Temptation	Christopher Church, bioethics professor, Baptist College of Health Sciences; clinical ethics consultant, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, Memphis, Tenn.
Being Doers of the Word	Robert Parham, executive director, Baptist Center for Ethics, Nashville, Tenn.
Living Impartially	Daniel Carro, international cross-cultural specialist, Baptist General Association of Virginia, Richmond, Va.
Completing the Faith	Bob Allen, managing editor, EthicsDaily.com, Baptist Center for Ethics, Nashville, Tenn.
Speaking Thoughtfully	Joe Phelps, pastor, Highland Baptist Church, Louisville, Ky.
Pursuing Wisdom	Carla Nelson, educational facilitator, Canadian Baptist Ministries, Mississauga, Ontario, Canada
Living Single-Mindedly	Alistair Brown, general director, BMS World Mission, United Kingdom
Knowing Who You Are	Jan Turrentine, managing editor, Acacia Resources, Baptist Center for Ethics, Nashville, Tenn.
Living with Faith's Perspective	Mike Smith, pastor, First Baptist Church, Murfreesboro, Tenn.
Knowing What Really Matters	Bert Browning, pastor, Huguenot Road Baptist Church, Richmond, Va.

Practicing Patience

Rod Benson, director, Centre for
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Praying with Confidence

Carol Anne Janzen, lecturer,
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