

# Shoe Leather Christianity

Youth Study Guide

By Chip Dean

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# How to Use this Group Curriculum

Because understanding who Jesus is and all that Jesus does is so essential for everyone to know, the most effective way to teach about Jesus is discussion based. It would not make any sense to spend the entire time teaching, lecturing, and giving a speech when living for Jesus is all about, faith, trust, life, action, and application. Work hard when teaching your students to help them to process, think through, and apply the truths found while studying about Jesus

No one knows the world of the student like the students themselves. Because this is true, the teacher should seek to facilitate these discussions and not hog the class time. Teachers will learn a great deal how to teach their students and how to apply Scripture to their lives just by listening. Conversation may seem to get off course, but the rabbit trails you are hearing are none other than the thoughts, the priorities, the level, and the patterns in which your students are caught.

When it comes to teaching on the doctrine of Jesus, we will keep it simple, conversational, and applicable. The way to get your students to experience true life change is by helping them own these truths, principles, and commands by God. You do not want them to just hear you, you want them to hear God. You do not want them to be impressed by your lesson, but you want the Holy Spirit to impress His

conviction upon them. You do not want them to be like you, but you want them to live like Jesus.

This study will allow you teach your students logically through a lesson. In each lesson, every session will begin with an **intro**, transition into their **need** to listen, offer a time of **Bible** teaching, point them to the **gospel**, and **apply** the truths to their lives today. Discussion questions will be provided in each of those sections. If you time your lesson well, your student will gain a full understanding that day from the life changing theme about Jesus.

## Breakdown of the Lesson Sections:

**Intro:** This is the section of the lesson that you will begin to focus the group's attention toward the lesson of the day. This is not a quiet down time, but this is a time that you want to get them talking. Do your best not to stop the conversations happening, but seek to turn the conversations to the introduction section of the lesson. Introductions will be a time for stories, questions, and entertaining topics to talk about that will lead into the lesson.

**The Point:** A one sentence summary of the goal of the lesson. This should act as your guide throughout the lesson to help them walk away with a clear point.

**Preparation:** This section contains suggestions for you as you think through and prepare the lesson.

**Need:** This is the section of the lesson that you will show your group why they will need to listen that day. This will be your opportunity to show not only do you have a clue into what's going on in their lives, but God's Word will actually speak into what's happening daily with them. This will whet their appetite and show them that today's lesson is actually for them.

**Bible:** This is the section of the lesson that you will teach the Bible to your group of students. You will open up the Word with them along with your The Jesus Series study guide, and you will help your students to understand God's timeless truths for their lives.

**Gospel:** This is the section of the lesson that we will make sure to point everything truth, principle, and application to the gospel of Jesus. Students today must be taught that God is not calling us to simply be moral, but God is calling us to be followers of Jesus by obeying the gospel. Everything that is taught from the doctrine of Jesus flows from the gospel. Every call to applicable obedience is made possible alone by the death, resurrection, and Lordship of Jesus Christ.

**Apply:** True life application from God's Word best happens after the Bible has been taught and the teaching has been centered on the gospel. Students today need to hear biblical, gospel-centered application that truly reaches into their real lives. General application will not bring real life change. Only specific application that has knowledge of the Bible and current culture will motivate students to live their lives daily for their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

**Discussion:** Discussion is the key to a successful Sunday School group session. Discussion questions from each section helps to keep every student involved in an ongoing conversation than a one directional lecture. It would be practically impossible to ask every discussion question provided, but we wanted to provide plenty so that you can decide which questions are best for conversation in your specific group. Feel free to come up with your own discussion questions since you know your group best. Make sure your discussion questions spark a conversation about life application, Biblical understanding, theological truth, missional living, and a discipling culture.

**Conclusion** This section contains final application, thoughts, and a list of daily devotional passages they can read in the week ahead to be in the Word each day.

This logical flow of teaching lessons from introduction to application has been proven over the years to change the thinking, hearts, and ultimately lives of students. Don't just teach, but facilitate. Don't just talk, but listen. Don't just go through a lesson, but prayerfully and purposefully lead your group through a gospel-centered discussion.

# Shoe Leather Christianity Lesson 1: *Enduring Life's Hard Knocks*

## Theme

Read pages 1-9 in *Shoe Leather Christianity* by Dr. Johnny Hunt. **This week's theme is *Enduring Life's Hard Knocks*. During this session your students will learn who goes through trials, why we go through trials, and how to endure trials. The point of this session will be to look to Jesus as He went through trials, and to become like Jesus as we respond in our trials.**

## The Point

**God desires Christians to endure trials with joy so the gospel will not be maligned.**

## Preparation

**Prepare a personal testimony appropriate to share with students illustrating your own journey through trials.**

**Be clear and concise; share with emotion and with care, not allowing your testimony to overtake the lesson.**

**Study the content and shape your teaching plan to fit your group and style. God has given you unique insights, experiences and knowledge to aid in effectively communicating these truths to your small group. Make this lesson yours!**

## Intro

As you begin, it is necessary to relate with your students. Don't just ask them to sit and quiet down, but take a minute to listen to their conversations. Engage in their conversations and demonstrate your desire to be real with them, showing you yourself are real. You will be amazed how much more you can speak into their lives during this session if you listen, talk, and ask questions about their week. God will give you direction.

The goal of the introduction is to get students thinking about today's theme from the view point of their world. Since the session is all about **life's hard knocks (trials)**, ask

different questions about **hard times in life** and be willing to answer them yourself.

- **What is the hardest thing you've ever had to do in your life?**
- **When do you feel like life has been the most unfair to you?**
- **When in your life have you ever had to exert the most physical effort?**
- **When in your life did you have to think the hardest to solve a major problem?**
- **What have you ever had to pray for the most in your life?**

Your openness and transparency will encourage the same from your students. Don't steal the show by hogging all of the talk time, but be willing to contribute when they won't.

## Need

Let your students know you understand **life can be rough. As a transition, this would be a good time to share with them one of God's greatest trials in your life. You may share one with them that you've already been through, or one that you're going through right now.** Make sure they most of all hear your faith in Jesus. He is always the hero. We never are. Your testimony will help them to understand they are not alone or the only ones enduring hard times.

Before getting into the Bible, whet your student's appetite to hear more about this. Ask them provocative questions, and write their answers on a board or a sheet of paper for them to see.

- **How would you define "trial?"**
- **How can you tell the difference between a trial and just a bad day?**
- **Who goes through trials? Who doesn't?**
- **Is there anything a person does to initiate trials in their life?**
- **Is there anything a person can do to end a trial?**
- **What would be the difference between a trial by God and a temptation by Satan?**

This section will not only get your student thinking and wanting to learn more, but it will also get them thinking specifically about the truths of today's lesson.

## Bible

(Make sure you have read pages 1-9 in *Shoe Leather Christianity*)

As we move through this section of studying the Bible, make sure that your teaching is relational. Students get preaching (lecturing) on Sunday mornings and often times on Wednesday nights. The point of small groups is to give them a different kind of opportunity to learn God's Word. What preachers cannot do on Sunday morning is have an

open dialogue with their listeners like small group leaders can. Enjoy this discussion while you teach your students.

### **Read James 1:1.**

We are often our worst at home. Where do we get the most attitude? Where do we rebel the most? Where do we argue the most? We usually are at our worst with our families because we know they will always love us no matter what.

***Question: Are your siblings different in public than they are at home? Where are they at their best and worst? Do you feel you are the only one who sees these differences? Why can this be difficult?***

The author of James is none other than the half-brother of Jesus! How much more difficult would it have been for James to write a book about the brother he grew up with if Jesus had a sinful childhood? If anyone would have known Jesus did wrong, it would have been James!

***Question: What does James writing a book about his brother say for the perfection and sinlessness of Jesus?***

In this verse, James only calls himself a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. If there was ever a time, this would be the time to name-drop. James could have flashed his “brother of Jesus” card to get everyone to listen. But James doesn’t identify himself as the brother of Jesus, James identifies himself as a servant to the Lord Jesus Christ.

***Question: What does this say for Jesus’ true identity as Lord and Savior?***

This book is written for Christians all throughout history and all over the world, but this book was originally written to Christians who were going through tremendous persecution in the first century. These were Christians who were persecuted by the world specifically because they lived for Jesus as Lord.

***Questions: In what ways have you been persecuted emotionally, verbally, or physically because you live for Jesus? Would you be honest enough to admit a time you dodged persecution for Jesus because you didn't stand up for Him?***

### **Read James 1:2-3 "The Reality of Life's Hard Knocks"**

James had the audacity to tell his readers to choose to be joyful when they go through hard times. That's like telling someone to smile when they cry, to laugh with a broken bone, or to cheer up and be happy at a funeral. It sounds so backwards, but James didn't just tell his readers to look at the bright side of life. His command to choose joy is much deeper! James said we are to choose joy because our trials give us endurance.

What is the hardest sport you've ever played? What is the most exhausting practice you've ever had? If not sports, what have you spent countless hours practicing and working at to become better? James said we are to choose joy as we endure hardship because we know that it is making us better. The harder you practice, the better you become at your sport. The harder you work, the better the musician or student you become. But this is far more than sports, band, or school: this is the Christian life!

The amazing part is that we actually have the ability to choose joy when we're going through hardships because God blesses us with the ability to actually choose joy. Not only that, but we are commanded to choose joy because living with joy in the midst of a trial is a much better way to live. Not bitterness, not frustration, not complaining, but joy is actually a much more enjoyable way to live. Like choosing to be double-teamed in a sport, we choose joy because God has counted us worthy to go through a trial. Satan has counted us worthy to go through an attack. When we go through life's hard knocks because of our faithful life for Jesus, God blesses by our becoming more like Jesus with the ability to endure more in life. Its like wanting to run faster, play longer, or study deeper. We joyfully go through trials because we become more like Jesus.

**Make up a hypothetical situation where a Christian goes through a trial, chooses joy instead of negativity and becomes more like Jesus through it. Read Romans 5:3-5. How is it similar?**

**Read James 1:4 "Reasons for Life's Hard Knocks"**

We choose to have joy in our trials because we know that when we respond rightly, our trials will produce Christ-likeness in our lives. In baseball, every player ultimately wants to bat, field, throw, and run the bases well. In basketball, players practice hard to shoot, play defense, pass, and run the floor well. In college, students who excel don't just want to do well in one class, they want to ace all of their classes. That's what James is getting at about the spiritual life! The more we grow in our patience and endurance during the trials of life while we choose joy, the

more well-rounded Christians we will be. In other words, we will be more like Jesus in every area.

***Question: How many areas of the spiritual life can you think of that a Christian could become more like Jesus? Write your groups answers on the whiteboard or a piece of paper for everyone to see.***

The point of the Christian life is ultimately to become as much like Jesus as possible. God didn't save us to sit and wait. Instead, God saved us to become like Jesus so that we can live more for Jesus. Romans 8:29 explains it all. God chose that we would become more like Jesus so that Jesus would get the glory from His disciples.

## Gospel

**This is the most important section as it helps us all to understand how the gospel is central to the book of James.** God would never want a Christian teenager to simply have faith or choose joy through a trial. God's point is this: the way to endure a trial is to choose joy by asking for wisdom so you can live like and for Jesus. Let's take a deeper look at the gospel to see how to use our trials for Jesus' glory.

**We must first take a look at the person of Jesus.** Jesus is the God of all trials, but He is also the sinless man who endured all trials perfectly. In James 1:1, James says that he serves the Lord Jesus. The Lord is a title that only belongs to God. Not only is James calling Christians to go to Jesus in their trials, but he's also reminding Christians that Jesus

has sovereignly allowed them to go through their trials for spiritual growth. Jesus wouldn't ask anyone to do anything that He Himself wouldn't do. 1 Peter 2:21-25 clearly shows us that Jesus went through the worst of trials and remained perfectly righteous as He continued to trust His Father.

***Questions: What other passages and stories from Scripture can you remember about Jesus that reference Him as Lord over our trials and the man who perfectly endured every trial?***

**Secondly, we will take a look at the death of Jesus.**

Jesus' death was the ultimate trial that forgives us of all of our failed trials. 1 Peter 2:21-25 also shows us that not only was Jesus perfect in His trials, but His ultimate trial was the way we can be forgiven when we fail within our trials. We will not get life perfect when we go through trials like Jesus, but when we confess our sin to Him, He will forgive us even when we get life wrong through our trials.

***Question: In what ways do you think Christians sin against Jesus during their trials and need forgiveness?***

**The last part of the gospel we must take a look at is the resurrection of Jesus.** Jesus' resurrection is the only thing that can give us power to endure any trial. If Jesus' death forgives us of our failures, then Jesus' resurrection gives us power for our obedience. Romans 6:4 tells us that we can walk in "newness of life" because of Jesus' resurrection!

***Question: What are some common ways to obey God through every trial for any Christian?***

The last section “Apply” will specifically walk us through how to respond faithfully in the midst of any trial.

## Apply

### **Read James 1:5-8 “Resources to Endure Life’s Hard Knocks”**

When a Christian goes through a trial in life, it can be very difficult to know how to handle it, what to do, and why it’s happening. God promises that when we don’t know, He will give us wisdom when we ask. God guarantees wisdom to everyone without fault. Praise God that He finds no fault in us because Jesus died for all of our faults and covered them with His blood! *Question: What trial have you gone through before that you wish you would have asked God for wisdom?*

**Below are the resources God gives every Christian to respond during any trial.**

**1. Wisdom.** When we are going through a hardship in life and we need to ask God for wisdom on how to endure it, we must ask Him in faith. What does it mean to ask in faith? This does not just mean to ask God knowing He will answer and believe He will help, but asking God in faith specifically means asking because you want the wisdom on how to live for Jesus through the trial.

**2. Prayer.** In order to ask God for wisdom, we must have a prayer life during our trials. Some Christians never go to God during their trials because they rely only upon

themselves in hardships. Other Christians only go to God during their trials because they see God merely as a lifeguard waiting for people in distress. In all of life, prayer is absolutely necessary, but never neglect God during hard times. Jesus went through horrible trials, He will understand. God calls you to pray to Him. He will listen. When you pray and talk to God for companionship and comfort during your trials, don't forget to ask God for the wisdom to respond right.

***Question: What are some requests every Christian should pray to God while going through difficult times?***

**3. Faith.** Who is the kind of Christian that God would not give anything to? If you had a little brother or sister and they broke everything of yours ever given to them, would you keep giving them your stuff? Of course you wouldn't; not because you don't love them or have a relationship with them, but because they don't use your stuff correctly or for the right reason. Why would God bless a Christian with His resources if they never use His stuff the right way or for the right reasons? That person is without proper faith.

***Question: Have you ever met a two-faced Christian? How would you describe a two-faced Christian? God would describe a two-faced Christian as one who requests things from Him, but who wouldn't use God's blessings for Jesus' glory.***

## Conclusion

God has called us to choose joy during trials in our lives because they make us more like Jesus. Through our trials we are to pray for wisdom to become like and to live for our Lord. When we pray during our trials, we should always pray in faith by asking God to use our trials to make us more like Jesus and to glorify Jesus more.

***Question: Now that you've studied James 1:1-8 as a group, how should you pray for each other specifically to end the session and during the rest of the week?***

## This Week's Daily Devos:

Sunday: James 1:1-8

Monday: Judges 1:1-26

Tuesday: Judges 1:27-36

Wednesday: Judges 2:1-10

Thursday: Judges 2:11-23

Friday: Judges 3

Saturday: James 1:9-27

*Your openness and transparency will encourage the same from your students. Don't steal the show by hogging all of the talk time, but be willing to contribute when they won't.*

## Need

Jesus said in John 16 His leaving was beneficial and necessary so the Helper (Holy Spirit) could come. Jesus is talking about His ascension to be with the Father, which took place after His death and resurrection. In essence, Jesus is saying that we need the Holy Spirit and as disciples He will be very beneficial to our lives. It seems impossible that it would be an advantage for Jesus to leave, and yet Jesus makes that truth clear.

## Discussion

- **What advantages do we have in the Holy Spirit?**
- **Why would the idea of exchanging Jesus for the Holy Spirit have worried His disciples and followers? Is this exchange odd to you? Why or why not?**
- **How have you seen the Holy Spirit work in your life? In your worship? In your mission? In your study of the Scripture?**

## Bible

***Wrap up discussion time and segue to Bible study with one or two sentences summarizing today's lesson. Open in prayer or ask a student to pray.***

# Discussion

- **Can anyone identify a passage in the Old Testament where we see the Holy Spirit or evidence of His work?**

While the Holy Spirit is present in all of Scripture, He is nowhere better explained than in John 16:5-15 by Jesus Himself. Jesus explains very succinctly what the Spirit will do:

**1. The Holy Spirit Convicts the World.** Read John 16:5-11. Interestingly, this is the only reference to the Holy Spirit having direct interaction with the world, meaning the lost world (Kostenberger, 2004). He will convict the world of three things – sin, righteousness, and judgment.

**a. Sin** – Lost people do not recognize their sinfulness before God but continually justify their actions. Relativism tells us that each person decides what is right and wrong for themselves. Notice the verse says “because they do not believe in Me.” The world’s primary sin is lack of faith in Jesus.

People cannot be saved without recognizing their lostness. Only the Holy Spirit through the Word of God can overcome blindness to sin and reveal the need for saving faith in Jesus.

**b. Righteousness** – The world also believes it can attain its own righteousness and right standing with God or with itself through effort. The verse says, “Because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me,” meaning that Jesus is the ultimate standard of righteousness. He is allowed to be with the Father because He is perfectly righteous. Because we can’t physically see Him living out the example of righteousness in front of us, the Holy Spirit must reveal what right living looks like. So the Holy Spirit must both convince the world that Jesus is the standard of

righteousness before God and that its own righteous actions are not good enough (Isaiah 64:6).

**c. Judgment** – Satan, the leader of all evil, has been judged and condemned, and along with him, all who do his will, meaning human beings who follow the devil. This references not only Satan worshipers, but all who deny Christ. Jesus said if we're not with Him, we are against Him. The world needs to know its fate without Christ. We do not die and cease to exist (humanism/evolution), we do not inherit a world or land of our own based on good works (Mormonism/Islam) and we do not unite with the spirit realm (Hinduism, Buddhism). "It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment" Hebrews 9:27. Only the Spirit can convince the world of that.

One of two things result from the conviction of the Holy Spirit. The lost will either be "cut to the heart" and ask how to be saved, as in Acts 2:37, or will reject the message. The world will one day be judged by these same measurements, their sinful rejection of Christ and their reliance on their own works.

## Discussion

- **If you ask "what does it take to get into heaven," what do most people say? What do you say?**
- **In your opinion, who in your world or the world at large is blinded to their own sin, their false righteousness, and their coming judgment? (Ask students to be general – "a good friend" or "my aunt" when referring to personal examples)**
- **Why do you think they are blind to their sin? Why is it difficult to convince them otherwise?**

**2. The Holy Spirit reveals the Word to believers.** Read John 16:12-13. Here Jesus shifts from what the Holy Spirit will do in the world to what He will do directly for the disciples, and ultimately for us. Jesus said something very personal and powerful in verse 12 – there are many more things He wanted to tell His followers! He already taught them day in and day out for three years, but now that His death, resurrection, ascension, and the beginning of the church were about to occur, there was going to be so much more for the disciples and the church to know, understand, believe, and follow. But, if Jesus was going to ascend, how would they learn this? The Holy Spirit would reveal it! Often, people think that in the end of verse 13, when Jesus said, “the things to come,” it means prophecy, referring to Revelation. While the content of Revelation is certainly included, Jesus isn’t referring primarily to prophecy of the future, but rather the “many more things to say” from verse 12. This is referring to all the church would need to know about living in obedience to Christ. We also know from John 14:26 that the Spirit would remind the disciples of all that Jesus said. Put these together and you have the New Testament (The Gospels – what Jesus already said. The Epistles – what Jesus still had to say).

Second Timothy 3:16 clearly states the source of all Scripture is God. Second Peter 1:20-21 explains how the Holy Spirit spoke it to men, almost giving an explanation of what Jesus describes in John 16:13. So, if the Bible came from God and was written by the Holy Spirit, it would make sense that only the Spirit can enable us to understand it. Read 1 Corinthians 2:14-16. What does this passage say about the non-Spirit filled man and his ability to understand Scripture? What does it say about the Spiritual person’s ability?

# Discussion

- **Do you find the Bible hard to understand? Have you met someone who didn't believe it because they couldn't understand it?**
- **Do you ever wonder how a preacher or Bible teacher gets so much out of a verse? Read 2 Peter 1:13. What does that say about every believer's ability to know and follow God?**
- **Based on 2 Peter 1:3, do you think the primary goal of the Holy Spirit is how much we understand a verse or how much we live out a verse? (Life and godliness – that is action, not just knowledge).**

The Holy Spirit wrote the Scripture and reveals the meaning for the purpose of action in our lives. The fruit of the Spirit comes as He reveals the Word to us and we obey it.

**3. The Holy Spirit Glorifies Jesus.** Read John 16:14-15. Just as Jesus always pointed to the Father, the Spirit will always point to Jesus. He does this by revealing to us more about the fullness of who Jesus is. Jesus said everything the Father has is His, and all that He has the Spirit has. It is difficult to know all that this means, but it is clear that Jesus is glorified the more we come to understand, believe, and discover about Him, because when we do, we can't help but be in awe and worship. The Spirit does this work of showing us more and more of Jesus.

## Discussion

- **What other ways do we learn about the person Jesus besides the Bible? (History books, literature, etc.).**
- **Why are those sources insufficient to understand Him?**
- **On a scale of 1-100, 1 being new Christian level and 100 being someone in heaven with Jesus, how well do you think you know Jesus?**
- **Are you satisfied with how much you know Him? How can you know Him more? (Read Jeremiah 29:13).**

## Gospel

The Holy Spirit who indwells the heart and life of every believer is the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 8:11). Because of that truth, we have access to the Holy Spirit who convicts us of sin and points us to Jesus so that we too may be raised from the dead. The Spirit reveals to us who Jesus is and the Spirit gives us the power and understanding to love, serve, and live like Jesus daily.

## Apply

*Ask students to silently respond to these questions or jot down their reflections privately:*

- **Have you been convicted of your sin by the Spirit and responded with repentance and faith in Jesus?**
- **Do you still experience frequent conviction over existing sin?**
- **Does Scripture pierce your heart or pass over it?**
- **Is Bible reading a duty or delight?**
- **Is the Bible starting to make sense to you?**
- **Are you living a Spirit-filled life?**

## Conclusion

His revealing of Scripture, His fruit He bears in us, His gifts He grants to us – all are for the purpose of exalting Jesus. If we reach a conclusion about a passage of Scripture that would point us away from Jesus, the Spirit didn't reveal it. If our good works bring attention to us, then it's not the Spirit's gifts. If our daily actions aren't exalting Jesus, it's not the Spirit's fruit.

*Ask students to identify one thing they know now about the Holy Spirit they did not know before small group today.*

*Wrap up by asking one student to summarize the point of the lesson in one sentence.*

# As You Go

Use any or all of the following to wrap up small group time.

*Charge your students to ask three people close to them to identify the following: one thing they are pursuing/doing apart from the Spirit (could be sinful or just a hasty, poorly thought out endeavor), one thing that evidences the Spirit at work in their life (the repentance of a certain sin or effective ministry of theirs) and a suggestion for them in pursuit of the Spirit's continued work (more Bible reading, accountability). Ask them to write these things down and encourage them to share one next Sunday.*

*Ask your students to identify the Holy Spirit or His work in any Scripture they read this week and prepare to share their findings next Sunday.*

*Ask your students to meditate this week on everything that happens during the Christmas season (parties, presents, shopping, church programs, conversations, commercials, school activities, family events, etc.) and look for the work of the Holy Spirit in it. Where is He at work? Where is He rejected?*

# Shoe Leather Christianity Lesson 2: *Real Faith*

## Theme

**Read James 1:9-27 and pages 11-18 in *Shoe Leather Christianity* by Dr. Johnny Hunt.** This week's theme is ***Real Faith***. During this session your students will learn to remember six things while going through trials. These six key areas of trials will help them remain faithful to follow Jesus.

## The Point

**God calls and equips Christians to maintain genuine faith while facing trials.**

## Preparation

**Study the content and shape your teaching plan to fit your group and style. God has given you unique insights, experiences and knowledge to aid in effectively communicating these truths to your small group. Make this lesson yours!**

# Intro

As you begin, it is necessary to relate with your students. Don't just ask them to sit and quiet down, but take a minute to listen to their conversations. Engage in their conversations and demonstrate your desire to be real with them, showing you yourself are real. You will be amazed how much more you can speak into their lives during this session if you listen, talk, and ask questions about their week. God will give you direction.

The goal of the introduction is to get students thinking about today's theme from the view point of their world. Since the session is all about having real faith, ask different questions about times in life that require real faith, and be willing to answer them yourself.

- **What's the craziest death-defying stunt you've done that took faith?**
- **Who do you think is the most spiritually strong person on this earth?**
- **Who is the most spiritually strong person you personally know?**
- **Which part of a teenager's life seems to take the most faith for Jesus?**
- **When in your life was it the most difficult to believe God or believe in Him?**
- **How much does it take people of other religions to believe in their god(s)?**
- **How is our faith different from theirs?**

Your openness and transparency will encourage the same from your students. Don't steal the show by hogging all of the talk time, but be willing to contribute when they won't.

## Need

Communicate to your students you understand the difficulty in having faith at all times. As a transition, this would be a good time to share with them a time that you failed to have faith at some time in life. Make sure they hear in your story how Jesus may have even bailed you out when you didn't have faith in Him. Always give Him the glory!

Before getting into the Bible, whet your student's appetite to hear more about this. Ask them provocative questions, and write their answers on a board or a sheet of paper for them to see.

- **How would you define what a faith actually is?**
- **What is the difference between those who have faith in Jesus and those who don't?**
- **What common characteristics are found in the lives of those who have faith in Jesus?**
- **Why is faith in Jesus important and not just faith in "God"?**
- **Why should we have faith in Jesus when bad things happen and He allowed them?**

The goal of the introduction is to get students thinking about today's theme from the view point of their world.

# Bible

(Make sure you have read pages 11-18 in *Shoe Leather Christianity*)

As we move through this section of studying the Bible, make sure that your teaching is relational. Students get preaching (lecturing) on Sunday mornings and often times on Wednesday nights. The point of small groups is to give them a different kind of opportunity to learn God's Word. What preachers cannot do on Sunday morning is have an open dialogue with their listeners like small group leaders can. Enjoy this discussion while you teach your students.

## **Read James 1:9-12 "Real Faith and Humility"**

Keeping within the context of trials in life, James hits us hard with a lesson in humility. When going through an extremely difficult hardship, its really easy for a Christian to get prideful. "That's impossible! How could a Christ-follower get cocky when life gets tough? Isn't that the time people look down on themselves most?" In that case we've got to remember what pride is.

Pride is ultimately looking to yourself rather than looking for Jesus in faith.

During trials, all Christians are tempted to fix it, tough through it, or handle it on their own strength. James is bringing up everyone's need, the poor and the rich, to rely on Jesus during trials and not on themselves. Humility isn't just thinking lowly of yourself, but its thinking less of yourself and more highly on Jesus!

***Question: How can a Christian make sure they are relying on Jesus instead of him/herself?***

### **Read James 1:13-16 “Real Faith and Temptation”**

Notice how James does not say to not be tempted, but he says to not be deceived! When we are going through trials is often when we are at our weakest. Satan loves to prey on those who are at their most vulnerable. When we go through trials, we often doubt, struggle with prayer, neglect the Word, and forsake the church. But while going through hardships is when we need Jesus through prayer, His wisdom through the Word, and His people praying for us most.

James says that one common temptation we go through while within trials is wondering if God is tempting us to sin. It's often very easy to blame God in the midst of a trial. "God if you weren't allowing 'this' in my life, I wouldn't have to sin like 'this.'" James gives us a very solid truth in this. God will never tempt us with sin because God Himself cannot be tempted with sin! Jesus may have been tempted to turn rocks into bread by Satan, but Jesus was never tempted to sin against His Father. We must remember there is a huge difference between temptation and sin as James explains. Temptation is merely the enticement to sin (appetite), but sin is when you give in (eat). James puts it simply for us to not be deceived by temptation.

***Question: Write three major sins on the board (or on paper). How could you explain the difference between those actual sins and the mere temptations that come before them?***

## **Read James 1:17-21 “Real Faith and Salvation”**

James reminds us in verses 17-18 of the faithfulness of God while we’re going through trials. First, James calls us to walk outside on a dark night and gaze at the starry sky. Each star that God hung in place is our assurance of His power and immutability (never changing). The same God who designed the expanse of the sky is the same One who created you and cares for you through your trials. James reminds us that it was God’s Word that brought us to salvation, so it is His Word that will bring us through trials.

***Question: What is your favorite part about a starry-night sky or studying the universe? What does the miraculous and glorious expanse of our universe tell us about our God while we’re going through trials?***

Second, James exhorts us to take a walk to calm down, talk to and listen to God. James is not instructing us to listen to others more; He’s reminding us to listen to God more when we are going through trials! We are so quick to complain about or get angry at God. We need to “put away” those wicked sins and “be quick to listen” to God by “receiving the implanted Word.” Remembering God’s faithfulness and listening to Him is living like you’re saved through trials.

***Challenge: As a class, find as many passages as possible on trials in your Bibles.***

# Gospel

This is the most important section as it helps us all to understand how the gospel is central to the book of James. God's goal is never to just teach us truth, but to live like and for Jesus!

**We must first take a look at the person of Jesus.** Read Philippians 2:8. In the midst of the hardest trial in human history, Jesus' real faith led Him to obedience all the way to the cross.

***Question: Jesus' obedience led to our salvation. What could your obedience lead to?***

**Secondly, we will take a look at the death of Jesus.** Read Philippians 2:8 again. The Bible says that Jesus wasn't just obedient to His death, but it stresses that His death was "even on a cross." Jesus died for us when we aren't humble, when we do fall into temptation, and when we don't live the Christian life as we should. In other words, Jesus' torturous death makes it possible that our pride, spiritual weakness, and disobedience could be forgiven.

***Question: When going through trials, how does your life normally become prideful instead of humble, weak when it comes to temptation, or disobedient when it comes to your Christian walk?***

**The last part of the gospel we must take a look at is the resurrection of Jesus.** Read Philippians 2:9-11. God raised Jesus from the dead, and loves it when people live their lives for Him. If you are saved in Jesus, then His resurrection

gives you the power to live in humility, stand strong against temptation, and be obedient in your Christian life.

***Question: If you are saved, how can you access Jesus' resurrection power to live obediently to Him through hard times in life?***

The last section "Apply" will specifically walk us through how to respond faithfully in the midst of any trial.

## Apply

**Read James 1:22-27 "Real Faith and the Christian Life"**

Not only should we listen to God by going to His Word, but we need to make sure it doesn't stop there. We need to not just hear (read) God's Word, we need to do (obey) God's Word. Many Christians today think they've done their duty by simply going to church or doing their devotion for the day. God isn't just calling us to listen or read. God is calling us to obey His Word! James calls us out on having real faith by having a life of action and not belief alone.

***Question: How would serving others in need help you while you're in need?***

## Conclusion

Trials in life often give us the excuse to live in sin rather than for Jesus. Watch yourself when you go through trials.

Call out your pride to live in humility. Watch where Satan tempts you, and run to Jesus in prayer so that you don't fall to Satan's tricks. Remember that our salvation is proven when we live for Jesus in the more difficult times. If Jesus is truly worth living for, then He's worth it in times of trial and times of peace. Pray about it!

***Question: Now that you've studied James 1:9-27 as a group, how should you pray for each other specifically to end the session and during the rest of the week?***

## This Week's Daily Devos:

Sunday: James 1:9-27

Monday: Judges 4:1-11

Tuesday: Judges 4:12-24

Wednesday: Judges 5:1-18

Thursday: Judges 5:19-31

Friday: Judges 6:1-10

Saturday: James 2:1-13

The same Spirit who was present at creation and caused you to be born again is at work to empower your inner person (that is, your will or heart) so that you might resist

sins you couldn't resist before and do good things which would otherwise be impossible.

The work of the Holy Spirit in our sanctification is seen most clearly in Romans 8:9-16.

Wrap up discussion time and segue to Bible study with one or two sentences summarizing today's lesson. Open in prayer or ask a student to pray.

### **ROMANS 8:9-11**

In this passage we discover that everyone who is a true Christian has the Holy Spirit. Our bodies are dead because of sin which is why we physically die. The same death that eventually came to Adam and Eve because they sinned will come to us because we sinned. Yet, even though our bodies are getting older and will die, the Holy Spirit within us gives us life. If all we had were these mortal bodies we would be stuck in sin and death unable to change but because we have the Spirit we can change, be righteous and live. Verse 11 is an incredible promise. Even though we are dying because of sin, the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead empowers us now and will raise up our bodies one day.

## Discussion

Can you name evidences of the Holy Spirit's work in someone's life? What are signs of His work in you?

### **ROMANS 8:12-13**

We are not debtors to the flesh – we don't owe anything to our old sinful life. We don't have to sin anymore or carry around the guilt and shame that went with it. Therefore, if we continue to live in the flesh – to obey our sinful desires instead of God – we testify that we have not been saved and our destiny is death and not the life given by the Holy Spirit. Instead of living in the flesh, we are told we must put to death the deeds of the body. The deeds of the body are the sins we naturally commit as sinners. How do we put them to death? By the Spirit! The Holy Spirit of God within us gives us the ability change and begin to overcome our sinful ways. This is sanctification: we put to death our sin and become more like Christ by the power of the Spirit. But notice that we must take action and put sin to death. The Spirit empowers us, but we must work at it. As a bulldozer empowers a construction worker, a computer empowers an artist, and a guitar empowers a musician to accomplish far more than they ever could on their own, the Spirit empowers us to change; but we must still do our part.

## Discussion

Have students name a sin they or their friends struggle with. This is not confession time. Pick a familiar sin and write it down. Have your group list practical ways to put that specific sin to death. (Example: Greed can be put to death through generosity, not going to the mall, budgeting, serving the poor, etc.)

How is God calling you to take a specific action in your life to put a specific sin to death?

## ROMANS 8:14-16

There are few changes in life more radical than being adopted into a new family. The Spirit adopts us and makes us sons and daughters of God. If the Spirit has made us part of God's family, we don't have to be afraid of His judgment of our sin anymore. That's why Paul said we haven't been given a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Those who are still slaves to sin, unable to change their ways, should be afraid of God's coming judgment. But those who have been set free from sin and adopted into God's family by the Holy Spirit have no need to be afraid anymore. God has become their "Abba Father." How do we know we've been adopted? Paul says in verse 16 that the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. This is the goal of sanctification: that we would become in practice what God has already declared us to be – the sons and daughters of God! The job of the Holy Spirit is to take adopted children and make them look more and more like their older brother Jesus.

## Discussion

In what ways has being adopted into God's family affected your life and made it different from the life you would have lived if you were not part of God's family?

## Gospel

*Read 2 Corinthians 3:16-18.* Before we are saved and the Holy Spirit comes into our lives we cannot see Jesus for

who He is. The gospel looks foolish, unimpressive and useless. Upon salvation, the Spirit comes and removes the veil from hearts enabling us to see the glory of Jesus Christ in the gospel. It ceases to be foolish, unimpressive and useless and becomes wise, glorious, and powerful. The more we understand and stand in awe of the gospel and the Savior at its center, the more like Him we become. Through the Spirit who pulls off the veil, we can continually behold the wonder of Jesus and His mission to save sinners through His death, burial, and resurrection. We come to know our freedom from sin and death, our adoption into God's family, and our new identity. Out of gratitude for what God has done, we begin to live differently. Sanctification is becoming who we already are in Christ. The Holy Spirit enables us to see who we really are and gives us the power to be who we really are.

## Discussion

- **In your opinion, what is the cumulative impact of entertainment (TV, movies, music, internet) on children as they grow up?**
- **What effect do you think beholding the gospel continually has on a Spirit-empowered believer as they grow up?**

## Apply

In his famous work *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote this about the change God wants to produce in every Christian:

On the one hand we must never imagine that our own unaided efforts can be relied on to carry us through the next twenty-four hours as 'decent' people. If He does not support us, not one of us is safe from some gross sin. On the other hand, no possible degree of holiness or heroism which has ever been recorded of the greatest saints is beyond what He is determined to produce in every one of us in the end.

It is exciting to think that while God saves us wherever we are, He doesn't leave us there. He has plans to change us into something far greater than we can imagine. He does this through the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, sanctifying us to turn from sin and live like Christ. Challenge students to think through the changes God has already brought about in their lives and the changes He wants to bring about. Give everyone a few moments to ponder the following questions. If they are willing, give them the opportunity to share their answers so the class can encourage them.

## Discussion

- **Look on at your life and think of at least one change God has accomplished to make you more like Jesus. Thank Him for what He has done.**
- **Examine your life and look for a change God wants to make. What steps do you need to take this week to do your part?**
- **Imagine your life in the future. What are God's long term goals for you? List several of those goals as you see them from your vantage point today.**

## Conclusion

While the rest of the world hopes they can change, we know that in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit change is not only possible but certain! While we still struggle with sin and long to be better Christians, we do so knowing God will make us in practice what He has already declared us to be in the gospel. So let us join with the Holy Spirit who has adopted us into God's family and revealed to us the glory of the gospel by putting to death sin and striving to become all that God has called us to be.

*Wrap up by asking one student to summarize the point of the lesson in one sentence.*

## As You Go

Challenge students to draft New Year's resolutions geared to accompany God's sanctifying work in their lives.

Encourage them to be thoughtful, realistic and strategic. Challenge them to find biblical reason for their resolution. Ask them to write down their finished resolutions and bring them to share next week (if they desire). Challenge them to answer these questions during their process:

- **Why do New Year's resolutions often fail?**
- **Why are resolutions important for Christians?**
- **How will you include God in keeping your resolution?**
- **How will you respond if you fail? How would God have you respond?**

# Shoe Leather Christianity

## Lesson 3: *Christians Rendering the Royal Law*

### Theme

**Read James 2:1-13 and pages 19-26 in *Shoe Leather Christianity* by Dr. Johnny Hunt.** This week's theme is ***Christians Rendering the Royal Law***. During this session, your students will learn how to love other people equally because God graciously loves us just as much as others.

### The Point

**Showing partiality hinders the advance of the gospel and is unacceptable for the Christian.**

### Preparation

**Illustrate partiality before beginning the lesson. Before students arrive (or even after they do), arrange a few chairs in the front of the class or next to you and ask**

**two or three students to come sit by you. Have some candy or gum ready and give it to only a few students. See if these actions provoke any response from the class. Use this as a transition to the lesson.**

**Study the content and shape your teaching plan to fit your group and style. God has given you unique insights, experiences and knowledge to aid in effectively communicating these truths to your small group. Make this lesson yours!**

## Intro

As you begin, it is necessary to relate with your students. Don't just ask them to sit and quiet down, but take a minute to listen to their conversations. Engage in their conversations and demonstrate your desire to be real with them, showing you yourself are real. You will be amazed how much more you can speak into their lives during this session if you listen, talk, and ask questions about their week. God will give you direction.

The goal of the introduction is to get students thinking about today's theme from the view point of their world. Since the session is all about God's law, ask strategic

questions about life situations where commands are relevant and be willing to answer them yourself.

- **Who would be the most awesome person to visit your Student Ministry worship service?**
- **If that person came, what if your Student Ministry selected you to be their host?**
- **How do you think your student ministry would react to them coming?**
- **Do you think more people would show up with that person being there?**
- **What kind of special treatment or attention do you think that person would receive?**
- **What if a poor person who no one knew that night came? Would they get the exact same treatment?**
- **What do you think God has to say about all of this?**

Your openness and transparency will encourage the same from your students. Don't steal the show by hogging all of the talk time, but be willing to contribute when they won't.

## Need

Communicate to your students you understand the difficulty in loving at all times. As a transition, this would be a good time to share with them a time you showed partiality in your treatment of others. Make sure they hear in your story how Jesus may have even convicted you for your lack of love. Always give Him the glory!

Before getting into the Bible, whet your student's appetite to hear more about this. Ask them provocative questions, and write their answers on a board or a sheet of paper for them to see.

***How would you define favoritism? How would you define partiality?***

***Have you ever been the victim of favoritism or partiality?***

***Have you ever watched someone get emotionally hurt by favoritism?***

***Do you ever think that God plays favorites?***

***How do you think Jesus handled favoritism while He was on earth?***

This section will not only get your student thinking and wanting to learn more, but it will also get them thinking specifically about the truths of today's lesson.

## Bible

(Make sure you have read pages 19-26 in *Shoe Leather Christianity*)

As we move through this section of studying the Bible, make sure your teaching is relational. Students get preaching (lecturing) on Sunday mornings and often times

on Wednesday nights. The point of small groups is to give them a different kind of opportunity to learn God's Word. What preachers cannot do on Sunday morning is have an open dialogue with their listeners like small group leaders can. Enjoy this discussion while you teach your students.

### **Read James 2:1-7 "The Folly of Favoritism"**

Keeping within the context of trials, we see where many of the trials James referred to were coming from. The rich people of the day loved to mistreat, abuse, and falsely accuse the Christians. Naturally, the Christians would do everything possible to win the rich people over, or impress them enough to leave them alone. When a rich person would show up in their services, they would quickly escort them to the best seat in the house. But when a poor person showed up, the Christians would scoot him back to the nose bleed section.

***Question: How do Christians today show favoritism to rich people to gain better treatment and avoid poor treatment? In what ways do Christians neglect to love the poor?***

James gives two reasons why Christians should not show favoritism to the rich. First, Christians should not show favoritism to the rich because it has no place in the faith of Jesus (James 2:1). God has proven that He loves all people equally through the grace of the gospel of Jesus, and as followers of Jesus we should do the same. James also says that within the faith of the gospel, God has chosen the poor as well to be rich in faith. In other words, if we don't choose to love and minister to the poor for the sake of faith in the gospel, then we are not doing the will of

God. Second, Christians should not show favoritism to the rich because it is the rich that mistreat, abuse, and falsely accuse Christians. Why do we try to impress those who have the power to hurt us the most? Favoritism for personal gain has no place in the gospel!

***Question: Who are the people you notice that tend to call out, isolate, and make fun of Christians? Do you ever notice Christians trying to make friends with more of the popular crowd? Who would be considered “the poor” in your school that Christians could team up to minister to?***

### **Read James 2:8-9 “Identifying the Royal Law”**

Favoritism and partiality are both a huge part of a person’s life. We all show favoritism and partiality in some way because we are sinners. We will always struggle with them both. James says that we must love our neighbors as ourselves. His use of “neighbor” refers to anyone around us. If we are to love anyone around us as ourselves, then we are to love everyone around us equally. After explaining all of this, James calls us to obey this from God’s royal law. What makes God’s law royal is that King Jesus purpose of the law. The reason we are to obey this is because the kingdom of Jesus is at stake on earth! If we want to live for our King, then we must live *like* our King. King Jesus does not show favoritism or partiality. He loves all equally.

***Question: How might a Christian teenager’s life look completely different if they truly loved other people as much as they love themselves? If someone viewed the Bible as Jesus’ royal law, how might they obey it more?***

## **Read James 2:10-11 “Unity of the Royal Law”**

Christians love to make excuses when it comes to sin: *It could be worse! I can't help it, I'm human! At least I'm not doing what they're doing!* In this passage, James communicated the point isn't the sin we're committing but the One we're sinning against. The royal law is unified because it's all connected to the character of God. When we break God's law at any point, we are making a point that we want more than Him. James is reminding us that favoritism and partiality are just as sinful as horrible sins like adultery and murder. While adultery and murder have terrible consequences, favoritism has consequences as well when we choose not to love and share the gospel with the poor.

***Question: Have you ever heard anyone use these excuses for sin before? How should we respond when we hear these excuses?***

## **Read James 2:12-13 “The Law of Liberty”**

Christians far too often sell out God's law. We normally think that God's law is no big deal to God because He shows us grace; therefore it's not a big deal to us. The reason God shows grace is because Jesus died for our law-breaking lives, not because He's indifferent. James says Christians should be constantly aware of everything we say and do as obedient or disobedient to God's royal law. If we live a life of mercy, then we can tell our sin has been judged in Jesus. If we do not show mercy, then we prove that we have not received the mercy of God and judgment is coming our way.

***Question: If your life should be constantly aware of God's law, what is one thing you say and one thing you do that needs to change?***

## Gospel

This is the most important section as it helps us all to understand how the gospel is central to the book of James. God's goal is never to just teach us truth, but to live like and for Jesus!

**We must first take a look at the person of Jesus.** Read Matthew 5:17. Not only did Jesus give the royal law since He is God, but Jesus also fully obeyed the royal law when He lived on earth as man. Jesus not only kept the law as a man, but will also be our Judge in the final judgment when we answer for our law keeping and breaking.

***Question: Do you look at Jesus as the Judge you must face at the final judgment?***

**Secondly, we will take a look at the death of Jesus.**

Absolutely everyone sins when it comes to favoritism and partiality. Jesus died so that we can confess these sins, repent of them, and be forgiven.

***Question: How do you see yourself sinning when it comes to partiality and favoritism?***

**The last part of the gospel we must take a look at is the resurrection of Jesus.** Jesus rose from the dead as victor

over sin so that we could have victory in our lives in terms of favoritism and partiality.

***Question: After going through this lesson, how would you like your life to look different when it comes to partiality and favoritism?***

The last section “Apply” will specifically walk us through how to respond faithfully in the midst of any trial.

## Apply

**1. Love the poor.** James said that “God has chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom” (James 1:5). The poor are often overlooked when Christian teenagers invite their friends to church, events, Bible studies, campus ministries, etc. Don’t just go after the popular, the athletic, or your closest friends, but also seek out the poor, marginalized, and outcast in your school to minister to. They are often the most open to the gospel!

***Question: How can you do this better together as a small group this week?***

**2. View the Bible as The Law of the King.** James calls the Bible the royal law and calls Christians to obey it as such (James 1:8-10). Christians often disobey or disregard their Bibles because they don’t see it as their King’s edict or commands to live in such a way for His Kingdom. But that’s exactly what it is! The Bible is the way of life to be lived for King Jesus!

***Question: How can you view your Bible correctly, to read your Bible more accurately, to live your Bible more obediently this week?***

**3. Don't forget judgment.** If you are a Christian, all of our sins are eternally judged in Jesus. But Christians will also go through a judgment for their works. This isn't a judgment of punishment, but a judgment of rewards. Remember, what you do in this life has eternal consequences in the next life. Not only do your actions today mean more rewards in eternity, but also who will come with you into eternal life with Jesus.

***Question: If all eternal rewards were based on how you loved others without favoritism or partiality, how much do you think you'd receive?***

## Conclusion

As Christians, we must love others equally. Their eternity depends on it. Our obedience to our King depends on it. Our eternal judgment and rewards depend on it. Love God by loving others like you love yourself.

## This Week's Daily Devos:

Sunday: James 2:1-13

Monday: Judges 6:11-40

Tuesday: Judges 7-8

Wednesday: Judges 9-10

Thursday: Judges 11

Friday: Judges 12

Saturday: James 2:14-26

# Shoe Leather Christianity Lesson 4: Faith and Works vs. Faith without Works

## Theme

**Read James 2:14-26 and pages 27-35 in Shoe Leather Christianity by Dr. Johnny Hunt.** This week's theme is **Faith and Works vs. Faith without Works.** During this session, your students will be challenged to take a look at their faith by taking a look at their works. James will get in their face through this passage and ask them the hard questions about their salvation.

## The Point

**While a Christian's works do not earn or secure their faith and salvation, they prove it.**

## Preparation

**Think through examples to illustrate the seemingly delicate nature of the relationship between faith and works. (For**

**example: children are sons and daughters solely because of the parent's choice to claim them. Employees are employees because they work hard and follow rules. If they stop, they cease to be employees. In contrast, the actions of a child (good and bad) never affect their position in relationship to their parents) Use your example whenever it seems most helpful during the teaching time.**

**Study the content and shape your teaching plan to fit your group and style. God has given you unique insights, experiences and knowledge to aid in effectively communicating these truths to your small group. Make this lesson yours!**

## Intro

As you begin, it is necessary to relate with your students. Don't just ask them to sit and quiet down, but take a minute to listen to their conversations. Engage in their conversations and demonstrate your desire to be real with them, showing you yourself are real. You will be amazed how much more you can speak into their lives during this session if you listen, talk, and ask questions about their week. God will give you direction.

The goal of the introduction is to get students thinking about today's theme from the view point of their world. Since the session is about faith and works, ask questions

to help them connect these concepts and be willing to answer them yourself.

- **Have you ever met an athlete who talked a lot of trash but their game couldn't back it up?**
- **Have you ever met a habitual liar whose life didn't match their words?**
- **How does it make you feel when someone lies to you and can't support their words?**
- **How do Christians do this with their faith? They say one thing, but live differently.**

Your openness and transparency will encourage the same from your students. Don't steal the show by hogging all of the talk time, but be willing to contribute when they won't.

## Need

Communicate to your students you understand the difficulty in working out your faith at all times. As a transition, this would be a good time to share with them a time you failed in working out your faith. Make sure they hear in your story how Jesus may have even bailed you out when you didn't have faith in Him. Always give Him the glory!

Before getting into the Bible, whet your student's appetite to hear more about this. Ask them provocative questions,

and write their answers on a board or a sheet of paper for them to see.

- **How would you define the difference between a real faith and a fake faith?**
- **How could you tell the difference between a real Christian and a fake one?**
- **How much should a Christian live out their faith to prove they are a real Christian?**
- **What all does Satan and the demons believe to be true about God?**

The goal of the introduction is to get students thinking about today's theme from the view point of their world.

## Bible

(Make sure you have read pages 27-35 in *Shoe Leather Christianity*)

As we move through this section of studying the Bible, make sure that your teaching is relational. Students get preaching (lecturing) on Sunday mornings and often times on Wednesday nights. The point of small groups is to give them a different kind of opportunity to learn God's Word. What preachers cannot do on Sunday morning is have an open dialogue with their listeners like small group leaders can. Enjoy this discussion while you teach your students.

**Read James 2:14-18 "Worthless Faith"**

James is calling out Christians who say they believe in Jesus, they've given their lives to the gospel, but they don't have the works to back it up. The gospel is salvation by faith in Jesus alone and not by works (Ephesians 2:8-9). That point is very important to God because He wants us to know we are never saved by our works, but by our faith alone in the finished work of His Son, Jesus. Yet, when we are saved by our faith in Jesus' work, then God's Spirit lives within us to energize us to do spiritual works only made possible by Him. James brings up a great illustration: If someone says that they have a heart for the homeless but they never help the homeless, then they don't truly have a heart for the homeless. In the same way, if someone says they love Jesus, but they never live for Jesus, then they don't truly love Jesus (John 14:15). People who are truly saved are those who live like they are truly saved. James clearly says that our faith is not proven by what we believe, but proven by how we behave.

***Question: What does a person's life look like who claims to be a Christian but doesn't live like it? What does a person's life look like who believes in Jesus and their life reflects it? (Make two columns on the board or paper and compare/contrast)***

### **Read James 2:19-20 "Wicked Faith"**

Some people are absolutely convinced they are saved because of their beliefs. James points out those who aren't polytheists. They believe that God is One, but that's about all. James says even demons believe such basic faith. In our culture, people say they believe in Jesus, His death, His resurrection, and go to church. But even the devil believes Jesus is real, that He died, that He rose from the dead, and

the devil is in church every single Sunday messing things up! Even Satan and his demons know the facts of the Bible are true. But yet, Satan and his demons do everything against Jesus and His kingdom. In the same way, those Christians who say they believe but don't live for Jesus aren't neutral. Instead they sin and work against the kingdom of Jesus. If their works for Jesus are dead, their faith in Jesus is also dead.

***Question: In today's world, it is very difficult to discern if people truly believe in Jesus. What do you think are the true marks of a Christian/acts only a Christian is capable of?***

### **Read James 2:21-26 "Worthy Faith"**

James brings up popular Bible stories to prove his point, such as the story of Abraham sacrificing Isaac. Abraham proved His faith in God with his willingness to worshipfully obey through sacrificing his only son Isaac (Genesis 22). Notice how not only is Abraham obeying, but James' illustration is about an act of obedience that pictures the gospel. James' point is that a Christian proves their faith by acts of obedience that picture the gospel (confession, repentance, faith, trust, etc). James also gives the example of Rahab who believed in God so strongly that she risked her life to protect God's chosen men from death. Our faith is also proven by believing in God so strongly that we risk our lives to do the right thing for His glory. We put Him before ourselves. By this point, James' point is loud and clear. There's no such category of Christian in God's kingdom for those who do not live for Jesus. Genuine faith in the gospel is best proven by our works specifically through the gospel and for Jesus.

***Question: What other Bible stories can you think of that took specific acts of true faith which would prove real salvation?***

## Gospel

This is the most important section as it helps us all to understand how the gospel is central to the book of James. God's goal is never to just teach us truth, but to live like and for Jesus!

**We must first take a look at the person of Jesus.** Jesus proved that He is the man who is God by His works. Not only did Jesus do powerful miracles, but He also powerfully resisted every single temptation and remained sinless. Not only did Jesus live a completely sinless life, but He also lived a fully obedient life. Not only did Jesus not do wrong, but everything He did was right!

***Question: How does Jesus' fully obedient and sinless life motivate us to live a life of faith that works?***

**Secondly, we will take a look at the death of Jesus.** Jesus died for our sins that we commit when we are saved. Every single Christian struggles with sin while being saved, and Jesus died for every one of those sins. Even when we have faith, we still struggle with the work.

***Question: How can you be real with your group and confess ways you fail to work out your faith?***

**The last part of the gospel we must take a look at is the resurrection of Jesus.** Jesus rose from the dead to give us victory over sin so that we can have the power to work out our faith.

***Question: If God could change your life in one huge way this week where you could work out your faith more for Jesus, what way would that be?***

The last section “Apply” will specifically walk us through how to respond faithfully in the midst of any trial.

## Apply

**1. Help provide needs within your church** James talks about a specific way to work out our faith by providing for the needs of our “brothers and sisters” (James 1:15-16).

***Question: As a group together, figure out a way to provide for needs within your church out of your faith in Jesus Christ.***

**2. Put your faith to action.** As a group, write down specific things you believe about Jesus in one column, then in another column write down specific ways to live that faith out.

**3. Be willing to risk your life for your faith in Jesus.** Just like Rahab in Joshua 2, when might Jesus ask you to risk your life for your faith in Him? How do you know if you’d be willing to give your life for your faith in Jesus?

# Conclusion

As Christians, we must constantly step back and evaluate our lives to discern whether or not our works are a true reflection of our faith. If our works are weak, then our faith is weak. Do not be a deceived Christian like so many others. Make sure you truly know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. When you do, your works will naturally prove your faith!

## This Week's Daily Devos:

Sunday: James 2:14-26

Monday: Judges 13-14

Tuesday: Judges 15-16

Wednesday: Judges 17-18

Thursday: Judges 19-20

Friday: Judges 21

Saturday: James 3:1-12

# Shoe Leather Christianity Lesson 5: *Do Our Words Injure or Inspire*

## Theme

Read James 3:1-12 and pages 37-45 in *Shoe Leather Christianity* by Dr. Johnny Hunt. This week's theme is *Do Our Words Injure or Inspire?* During this session, your students will learn the importance of the words that they say. They will learn how their words affect the lives of others, and worship the God who created their tongue.

## The Point

**The way a Christian uses his or her tongue should point the world to Jesus and His gospel at all times.**

## Preparation

**Prepare a personal testimony appropriate to share with students illustrating a time you failed to tame your tongue. Try to use an example they can relate to.**

**Study the content and shape your teaching plan to fit your group and style. God has given you unique insights, experiences and knowledge to aid in effectively communicating these truths to your small group. Make this lesson yours!**

## Intro

As you begin, it is necessary to relate with your students. Don't just ask them to sit and quiet down, but take a minute to listen to their conversations. Engage in their conversations and demonstrate your desire to be real with them, showing you yourself are real. You will be amazed how much more you can speak into their lives during this session if you listen, talk, and ask questions about their week. God will give you direction.

The goal of the introduction is to get students thinking about today's theme from the view point of their world.

Since the session is all about **words that injure or inspire**, ask them questions revolving around that theme.

- **Who is the most fun person you've ever been around? Who tells the best stories, the best jokes and has the best punch lines?**
- **Who is the most encouraging person you've ever been around? Who uses their words to build people up and make them feel loved?**
- **Have you ever watched an untrue rumor spread through school or among friends that ruined someone's reputation?**
- **Do Christian teens talk differently than non-Christians at school at home, at school, on dates, on the field, etc.?**

Your openness and transparency will encourage the same from your students. Don't steal the show by hogging all of the talk time, but be willing to contribute when they won't.

## Need

Communicate you understand the difficulty in **taming your tongue** at all times. As a transition, this would be a good time to share with them a time that you failed in **taming your tongue**. Make sure they hear in your story how Jesus may have even bailed you out when you didn't have faith in Him. Always give Him the glory!

Before getting into the Bible, whet your student's appetite to hear more about this. Ask them provocative questions,

and write their answers on a board or a sheet of paper for them to see.

- **What are positive ways that we can use our words for God and others?**
- **What are negative ways that we could use our words toward God and others?**

This section will not only get your student thinking and wanting to learn more, but it will also get them thinking specifically about the truths of today's lesson.

## Bible

(Make sure you have read pages 37-45 in *Shoe Leader Christianity*)

As we move through this section of Bible study, make sure your teaching is relational. Students get preaching (lecturing) on Sunday mornings and often times on Wednesday nights. The point of small groups is to give them a different kind of opportunity to learn God's Word. What preachers cannot do on Sunday morning is have an open dialogue with their listeners like small group leaders can. Enjoy this discussion while you teach your students.

### **Read James 3:1 "Biblical Teacher: Positive Role but Precautionary Measures"**

James begins his talk about words with a warning to teachers. James went after teachers in the church because they are the ones responsible with teaching God's Word to

the people. In John 1:1, Jesus is called the Word who was with and was God. God's Word gives us truth, and God's Son gives us life. So the reason teachers will be judged with stricter judgment is because they are the ones who are called to teach the Word of God about the Son of God to the people of God. That is not something God plays around with! The church absolutely must have teachers who teach God's Word correctly. These teachers must point God's people to Jesus constantly. As well, they've got to apply God's Word to life currently.

***Question: Who is the best Bible teacher in the church you've ever had, and what made them your favorite? The church needs faithful teenagers to replace their Bible teachers someday. Does this verse scare you away from teaching or challenge you to stay faithful so that you can be a teacher?***

### **Read James 3:3-5a "Power of Words to Direct One's Life"**

Have you ever ridden a horse? Many people are afraid to pet horses, much less get on the back of one. Horses are huge, powerful, fast animals. It is incredible to think that a smile child on a saddle with reigns in their hands can control a creature many times their size and weight! In an even greater way, ships are monstrous vessels that were only controlled by the wind back in James' day. Could such an enormous vehicle zooming through water be controlled by the hand of one man at the wheel? That's the way they've been designed. Think about this, in the same way, the human tongue is small, but it directs life! The human tongue can make a deal worth billions of dollars. The human tongue can educate people to live successful lives. The human tongue can communicate love or hate. It

can cause laughter or sadness. It can encourage or curse others. It can worship or sin against God. The human tongue is a tiny member in our body, but its affects are absolutely huge in life!

***Question: Who is the most encouraging person you've ever been around? What's the most encouraging thing they've ever told you? What may be the hardest thing someone has ever told you? How powerful have words been in your life?***

### **Read James 3:5b-8 "Power of Words to Destroy One's Life"**

James paints the picture of the human tongue being like a wildfire taking a dry land by storm. Just like wildfire that is not controlled or contained ruins homes, businesses, and lives out West, the human tongue kept uncontrolled can ruin the same. Fires can be controlled. Huge beasts like whales, lions, and elephants can even be tamed. These are some of the most fierce animals in the world, yet man has found a way to tame them and put them on display for us to watch in circuses, zoos, and aquariums. But James says that no man can tame the tiny tongue! Is that true? Seriously, no one can tame their tongue? It absolutely is true! Apart from Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit, the human tongue spews the sin of the human heart. The tongue sounds evil because the heart is evil (Matthew 12:34).

***Question: Have you ever said something you seriously regretted? Have your words ever hurt your Christian witness? Has an untrue rumor about you ever spread like***

**wildfire? How should Christians handle rumors and lies through conversations and social media?**

**Read James 3:9-12 “Power of Words to Disclose One’s Life”**

Let’s be honest: we struggle with our tongues. We do love to bless God through praise, prayer, worship, etc. But because of our sin, we struggle with our language, jokes, gossip, etc. James is pointing out in this passage that while a Christian can struggle with their tongue, they can’t get away with it. Just like a vine can’t produce two completely different types of food, or a spring produce two completely different kinds of water, the heart can’t produce two different kinds of lifestyles. Yes, we struggle, but the difference about the Christian is that we are convicted of our sin! When the Christian sins with the tongue, we must confess our sin to God, ask for forgiveness from Him and others, and make it right. Every Christian will struggle, but no Christian will be dominated by their tongue. Jesus changes the Christian’s heart so that they will gain victory over the tongue. One of the clearest ways a person can truly tell if they are a Christian is by their tongue. Does their tongue bless Jesus, talk to Jesus, and worship Jesus? Or is their tongue characterized by hurting others, arguing, cursing, etc?

***Question: Write on the board two columns. In one column, hear from your class honest answers about what spiritual words Christian teens should be speaking but don’t. In the other column, be honest and write sins of the tongue that Christian teens struggle with today of which we must confess and repent.***

# Gospel

This is the most important section as it helps us all to understand how the gospel is central to the book of James. God's goal is never to just teach us truth, but to live like and for Jesus!

We must first take a look at the person of Jesus. Read Matthew 7:28-29. It is mind boggling to think that Jesus lived for 33 years and never sinned with His tongue. Everything that Jesus said was obedient. He always said the right thing. Jesus even taught truth without any error whatsoever in such a way that people were astonished at His authority in teaching. Jesus is the only human being who ever walked the earth with perfect control over His tongue.

***Question: What are your favorite words of Jesus recorded in Scripture? Is there anything Jesus said or how He said it that you wonder if it could have been sin?***

Secondly, we will take a look at the death of Jesus. Jesus died for the sins committed by our tongue. All of the hate, gossip, cursings, lies, inappropriate jokes, etc. Jesus bore the sins of our words in His body so that God would fully forgive us of our evil words.

***Question: What sins of the tongue do you think you struggle most? How will this recognition encourage you to pray to represent Jesus with a faithful tongue?***

The last part of the gospel we must take a look at is the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus rose from the dead to give us

victory over our tongues so that they can be used for His glory and other's good.

***Question: If God could change your life in one huge way this week where you could work out your tongue more for Jesus, what way would that be?***

The last section "Apply" will specifically walk us through how to respond faithfully in the midst of any trial.

## Apply

**1. Make sure teachers are teaching you the Word of God about the Son of God.** The one measuring stick we use to judge and evaluate teaching and preaching is not entertainment or enjoyment, instead it is asking ourselves if our teachers are communicating God's Word to us in such a way that we are growing closer to Jesus!

***Question: As a group, how can you encourage your Sunday School Teachers of your need to learn God's Word and grow in God's Son?***

**2. Pray now about becoming a teacher later.** Every single teenager in their student ministry needs to pray about becoming a teacher later. After being under biblical teaching through your teenage years, you will be the ones the church needs to step up and teach the younger generation!

**Question: How many of you see yourselves as being a Sunday School Teacher later?**

**3. Bless people by encouraging them this week.** Too many people just want to be encouraged by others. Instead, rest in the encouragement that God has given you and encourage others because you've been encouraged! Bless others so that they will be a blessing to God.

**Question: What is a way that your Sunday School group can bless others this week by speaking words of encouragement to them? Hold each other accountable!**

**3. Identify areas of your life that you sin with your tongue.** Pay attention to what you say this week, how you say this week, and how you speak to others. Once you identify sinful patterns, confess your sin to Jesus and ask Him to change your sin to obedience.

## Conclusion

As Christians, we live with the challenge of taming our tongues to bless Jesus with our words. We can't forget the fact that our words affect the lives of others in ways greater than we could ever imagine. Even more than that, remember our words either bring glory to God or take glory from Him. Use your tongue this week to bless the One who created you and gave you your tongue!

## As You Go

This week, take some time to read the book of Proverbs. There are tons of passages in this wisdom book that teach about wisely exercising your tongue. Highlight or copy any

verses that speak to you, specifically addressing speech. Ask God to plant this wisdom deep in your heart and that it would be evident in how you use your tongue.

# Shoe Leather Christianity Lesson 6: *Getting Wisdom*

## Theme

Read James 3:13-18 and pages 47-56 in *Shoe Leather Christianity* by Dr. Johnny Hunt. **This week's theme is Getting Wisdom. In this lesson, your group will learn why wisdom is important, where to find wisdom, which wisdom to reject, and how to share wisdom with others.**

## Intro

As you get your session started with your students, it is necessary that you relate with them. Don't just ask them to sit and quiet down, but take a minute to listen to their conversations. Engage in their conversations to show them that you want to be real with them, and that you yourself are real. You will be amazed how much more you can speak into their lives during this session if you listen, talk, and ask questions about their week. God will give you direction.

The point of the introduction is to get them thinking about the theme you will be teaching them by starting out in

their world. Since the session is all about **getting wisdom**, ask them questions revolving around that theme.

- **Who is the smartest person you know? What makes them so smart?**
- **Who do you know at your age that gives better advice than others your age?**
- **Do you know someone who is really smart in school but they have no common sense?**
- **Do you know someone who has great common sense but they aren't a very good student in school?**
- **Which would you say is more wise in life? The book smart (good in school) or the street smart (common sense)?**

The more you will be open and transparent, the more your students will be. Don't steal the show by hogging all of the talk time, but be willing to contribute whenever they won't.

## Need

Let your students know that you completely understand that it can be very difficult to **get wisdom** in life. As a transition, this would be a good time to share with them a time that you failed in **getting wisdom**. Make sure they hear in your story how Jesus may have even bailed you out when you didn't have faith in Him. Always give Him the glory!

Before getting into the Bible, whet your student's appetite to hear more about this. Ask them provocative questions, and write their answers on a board or a sheet of paper for them to see.

- **How would you define the word "wisdom"?**
- **How would a "wise" person's life look differently than others?**
- **Where do today's teenagers turn for wisdom in life?**
- **What is the difference in God's wisdom and the world's wisdom?**
- **On a scale of 1 - 10, how wise would you say you are?**

This section will not only get your student thinking and wanting to learn more, but it will also get them thinking specifically about the truths coming that you are about to teach them.

## Bible

(Make sure you have read pages 47-56 in *Shoe Leader Christianity*)

As we move through this section of studying the Bible, make sure that your teaching is relational. Students get preaching (lecturing) on Sunday mornings and often times on Wednesday nights. The point of small groups is to give them a different kind of opportunity to learn God's Word. What preachers cannot do on Sunday morning is have an

open dialogue with their listeners like small group leaders can. Enjoy this discussion while you teach your students.

### **Read James 3:13-14 “Developing a Heart to Nurture Wisdom”**

Let's be honest, in a life full of trials, we need someone who is wise to talk to. How can we know if someone is truly wise to get good counsel from? James says that the people who have true wisdom are those who have good conduct and meekness. Let's be honest, those type of people seem almost the opposite of wise in our world today. It seems like the world points out people of wisdom who haven't lived a moral life, who aren't meek whatsoever, but who have figured out how to live however they want and have the most fun possible. But we have to back up and ask the question, "What is wisdom?" Wisdom is understanding biblical knowledge where we know how to live it out for Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:30-31). In that case, James is absolutely right! The people we should get wisdom from are the ones who have biblical understanding, live a life of good conduct, and show their wisdom in meekness. We know that we are growing in wisdom if our lives reflect that!

On the other hand, we should not accept wisdom or counsel from those who show bitterness in life, jealousy for others, and that life is all about them. There is a lack of wisdom there because that is not the fruit of understanding God's Word, not the evidence of good conduct, or exhibiting meekness that is found with real wisdom. After all, why would we want to learn from someone who is bitter because obviously their lifestyle isn't making them happy? Why would we want to get

advice from someone who is living in jealousy of others when they are miserable about what others have that they don't have? Why would we want counsel from someone who's life is all about themselves because they obviously wouldn't be concerned about us to give solid direction? If wisdom is a real understanding about life and how to live life, then wouldn't you want to grow in wisdom? Just so you know, James is showing us that we aren't growing in wisdom if we're becoming more bitter, jealous, and self-centered in life. If we are that way, James says not to kid ourselves, we aren't wise! Wisdom brings understanding, righteousness, and humility.

***Question: Where do all of your non-Christian friends seem to get their advice and counsel on how to live their lives? Who are specific people who Christian teenagers can turn to who would give them real, biblical, life-changing wisdom on how to live?***

### **Read James 3:15-16 "Wisdom from Below"**

When it comes to getting good wisdom to make wise choices, we have to remember what everyone is ultimately looking for. We all want our decisions to bring us peace and happiness. As well, we have to remember how we all want to be treated when we're being real and asking for advice on how to live. We want to be treated with gentleness, we want our wisdom-giver to be open to reason with us, full of mercy toward us, impartial, and sincere. James just described someone who would let us be honest, who wouldn't judge us, who would listen to our whole situation, and who would truly care about us. James then lays out our reward for taking their wisdom and living it out: we would live in righteousness that brings glory to Jesus

because the peace they gave us produced peace in our own lives. Remember, bad wisdom brings bad decisions, and bad decisions produce trouble not peace. But when we follow good wisdom and make good choices, those good choices produce peace not trouble.

### **Read James 3:17-18 “Wisdom from Above”**

When it comes to which “wisdom” you listen to, your decision will reveal what your heart really wants. In other words, if you want advice to make life more about you, then you’ll listen to the wisdom from below. But if you want sound, biblical wisdom that will make life more about Jesus for you and others, then you will seek and get wisdom from above. James tells us in these verses what wisdom from above will bring us: purity, peace, gentleness, openness, mercy, good fruits, impartiality, sincerity, and righteousness. If you really think about it deeply, these are the outcomes we all want from situations where wisdom is needed! We want our lives to be peaceful. We want people to be pure and gentle with us. We desire to be shown mercy, impartiality, and sincerity. We want to be treated with righteousness. If we want those things for ourselves, then we should want the same things for others. How do we make sure to live in those ways? There’s no other way than by getting wisdom from above (God’s Word and prayer) so we know how to handle every situation we encounter. When we do, we will have an entire harvest of righteousness and peace. When wisdom from below brings sin and fighting, wisdom from above brings righteousness and peacefulness.

***Question: Do you have an example of a friend who took bad advice from someone else and it brought trouble***

***in their life? What is the best advice given from biblical wisdom you received ultimately produced peace in your life?***

## Gospel

This is the most important section as it helps us all to understand how the gospel is central to the book of James. God's goal is never to just teach us truth, but to live like and for Jesus!

**We must first take a look at the person of Jesus.** Read Matthew 1 Corinthians 1:29-30. We have to remember that wisdom is not a what, but wisdom is a Who. Jesus Himself is the wisdom of God. That is why it is said that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. Wisdom is knowledge applied to life. So when we learn from Jesus, grow in Jesus, and become more like Jesus, we are learning to live His way, by His truths, and the life He wants for us. Jesus is wisdom!

***Question: How would you answer a friend who asked you, "Why do you take advice from some guy that lived 2000 years ago?"***

**Secondly, we will take a look at the death of Jesus.** We have all done things in our lives that were very unwise. Its amazing how quickly our lives get filled with bitter jealousy, selfish ambition, disorder, etc (James 3:14-16). Take comfort in the fact that Jesus died for that sin in our life. Jesus took on our sin of false wisdom and paid the price for it so that we can be forgiven. We have to confess

where we've followed evil wisdom, turn from following evil wisdom, and ask for God's forgiveness.

***Question: What false wisdom do you think you fall for the most and follow?***

**The last part of the gospel we must take a look at is the resurrection of Jesus.** Jesus rose from the dead to give us victory over our wisdom! When we put our faith in the resurrection on a daily basis, God gives us the power to choose the right wisdom to live by and to grow in His wisdom to give to others.

***Question: What question do you think you get most from friends where you can offer them biblical wisdom that would help their life most?***

The last section "Apply" will specifically walk us through how to respond faithfully in the midst of any trial.

## Apply

**1. Get wisdom from God's Word.** The number one place for you to get wisdom from God is by getting into His Word.

***Question: As a group, how can you encourage your Sunday School Teachers of your need to learn God's Word and grow in God's Son?***

**2. Get wisdom from God's people.** Every single teenager in their student ministry needs to pray about becoming a teacher later. After being under biblical teaching through your teenage years, you will be the ones the church needs to step up and teach the younger generation!

**Question: How many of you see yourselves as being a Sunday School Teacher later?**

**3. Give wisdom for God's glory.** Too many people just want to be encouraged by others. Instead, rest in the encouragement that God has given you and encourage others because you've been encouraged! Bless others so that they will be a blessing to God.

**Question: What is a way that your Sunday School group can bless others this week by speaking words of encouragement to them? Hold each other accountable!**

## Conclusion

Wisdom is huge to God because God is all wise. Because of sin, every Christian needs to learn how to apply biblical knowledge to life. This is called wisdom. Every Christian needs to know how to grow in wisdom through the Word, where to find wisdom from others, which wisdom to reject (the world), and how to give wisdom to others.

# Shoe Leather Christianity Lesson 7: Corrupt Desires

## Theme

Read James 4:1-6 and pages 57-65 in Shoe Leather Christianity by Dr. Johnny Hunt. **This week's theme is Corrupt Desires. In this lesson, your group will learn to identify sinful desires, how they ruin relationships (especially our relationship with God), and how we can turn our desires back into ones that God created us to have.**

## The Point

**God designed us with good desires, misdirected by sin and now in need of purifying, redirection.**

## Preparation

**Prepare an example for your students of a good desire gone bad (it does not have to be personal but it can**

**be). Explain the role of the world and the heart in this transformation.**

**If applicable to your group, use this quote in your teaching: “God will either give us what we ask or give us what we would have asked if we knew everything he knows.” Tim Keller, *Prayer*, pg. 228.**

**Study the content and shape your teaching plan to fit your group and style. God has given you unique insights, experiences and knowledge to aid in effectively communicating these truths to your small group. Make this lesson yours!**

## Intro

As you begin, it is necessary to relate with your students. Don't just ask them to sit and quiet down, but take a minute to listen to their conversations. Engage in their conversations and demonstrate your desire to be real with them, showing you yourself are real. You will be amazed how much more you can speak into their lives during this session if you listen, talk, and ask questions about their week. God will give you direction.

The goal of the introduction is to get students thinking about today's theme from the view point of their world.

Since the session is all about **corrupt desires**, ask them questions revolving around that theme.

- **What's one thing you wanted for Christmas (any Christmas) you actually got?**
- **What's something you wanted for Christmas but never got?**
- **What's the biggest prayer request God has ever answered for you?**
- **What's the biggest prayer request that God hasn't answered for you yet?**
- **What have you always wanted to be "when you grow up"?**
- **Have you ever had a friend use you for things you had that they didn't have? How?**

Your openness and transparency will encourage the same from your students. Don't steal the show by hogging all of the talk time, but be willing to contribute when they won't.

## Need

Communicate your understanding of the tension in **living with desires**. As a transition, this would be a good time to share with them a time that you failed in **the wrong desires**. Make sure they hear in your story how Jesus may have even bailed you out when you didn't have faith in Him. Always give Him the glory!

Before getting into the Bible, whet your student's appetite to hear more about this. Ask them provocative questions, and write their answers on a board or a sheet of paper for them to see.

- **How would you define the word "desire"?**
- **What makes a desire good or bad?**
- **Why do you think God created us with desires?**
- **Do desires make life better or worse?**

This section will not only get your student thinking and wanting to learn more, but it will also get them thinking specifically about the truths of today's lesson.

## Bible

(Make sure you have read pages 57-65 in *Shoe Leader Christianity*)

As we move through this section of studying the Bible, make sure that your teaching is relational. Students get preaching (lecturing) on Sunday mornings and often times on Wednesday nights. The point of small groups is to give them a different kind of opportunity to learn God's Word. What preachers cannot do on Sunday morning is have an open dialogue with their listeners like small group leaders can. Enjoy this discussion while you teach your students.

**Read James 4:1 "Desires that Control Us"**

Do you ever wonder why life is the way it is? Why are there so many wars in this world? Why do countries not get along with each other? Why does terrorism exist? Why can't people just cooperate? If we ask ourselves those questions, then we also must ask about ourselves. Why do I argue with others? Why do I allow some people to make me angry? Why can't my family get along? Why do I have enemies? Why do I pick on certain people? Have you ever wondered these questions about your church? If there is ever a place meant for peace and love it would be Jesus' church! Why do people argue in the church? Why do some fight? Don't just think about senior adults or people your parents' age. Aren't teenagers who don't get along in the church just as contrary to the work God is doing? So why are these things happening within Jesus' bride? James says it's all because we have desires that are warring within us!

When God created us, He made us in His image, with His desires, and innocent from sin (Gen 1:26-28). But when Eve was offered the fruit by the slithering serpent, the Bible teaches she saw the tree was good for food, a delight to her eyes, and that tree was desired to make one wise (Gen 3:6). At that point, satanic temptation started in the world and desires went to war. The desires of God from His image in man and the desires of sin collided and sin won. Because of Adam and Eve, humanity is born sinful. We are still born in God's image, but the curse of sin has distorted His image within us. We are born with a sin nature where evil rules and reigns over our desires, but when we are saved through the gospel, God's desires rule and reign within us. The problem then becomes this: the saved person and the church have both godly and sinful desires that remain at war within them. We want life to be peaceful, we want

to be loving, but we also want to argue and fight. The war continues.

***Question: As a group, list 10 things that would make-up the picture perfect home. Then, list 10 things that aren't picture perfect but a part of every home that ruins that image.***

### **Read James 4:2 "Desires that Contest Others"**

James talked about even more different desires that are within us. Every person has the inner desires of "better and more." These can be godly desires when we want to live better and more like Jesus, or when we want to be a better witness and win more to Jesus. These desires can also be sinful when we want people to treat us better or where we want more stuff to have in life.

James said that when we want more stuff in life, we end up murdering others. You could probably trace every single murder to someone wanting something or someone they did not get. James was not just talking about someone literally dying, but also about hate. Jesus said that if you hate someone, it is the same as murder (Matt 5:21-22, 1 John 3:15). No, He didn't mean if you hate them you might as well kill them, but he means you're just as guilty in God's eyes. James, the brother of Jesus, is bringing up this same verse saying that our hatred of others is just as bad as murder. Hate for some people can actually cause them to think murderous thought. Hate between people can murder their relationship. This all sounds so horrible because it is! Satan loves the fact that our desires are causing us to fight, argue, hate, and kill! This should not be a part of the church of Jesus Christ. We must kill that sin!

James went on to say that when we covet and can't get what we want, then we fight and argue.

We want people to think more highly of us. We want people to treat us with unconditional grace. We want people to think we're awesome. We want people to forgive us immediately. We want people to think we're funny. We want people to treat us better than they treat others. We want people to give us what we want. We want our parents to buy us what we want. We want, we want, we want. And when we don't get what we want from others, our parents, etc, then we fight and argue with them. When people don't give us the personal respect we want, then we give them attitude and often start a war of words.

James said we don't get things because we don't ask for things. Our problem is we want what we think people can give us to make us happy, but it isn't even possible for other people to make us happy. The way this world is wired is that our only true, lasting happiness can come from Jesus. So when we are busy fight, arguing, hating, and murdering because people aren't giving us what we want, we aren't even going to the source of where we get what we want. God wants us to go to Him for what we need. He wants to provide for us. He wants to be our source of joy. He wants to be our Heavenly Father who blesses us. We're down here fighting with people when He's telling us to simply ask Him for our needs and wants!

***Question: Do you ever get tired of the senseless drama going on around you in school and at home? If you are, how do you think God feels about the drama that happens in your own life from your own desires that aren't met by others?***

## **Read James 4:3 “Desires that Conceal Motives”**

We might say, “I’ve tried going to God, but it doesn’t work! I’ve tried praying, but He never gives me what I want. I’m not going to Him any more for my needs!” James says that’s the problem. We are going to God to use what He gives us on our own desires, when we should be going to God to use what He gives us for His glory. Why would God give you more ammunition for Satan’s gun when He wants to give you gifts for Jesus’ glory? As Christians, we absolutely must humble ourselves and remember that life is all about Jesus and not ourselves. We must squash our own selfish, sinful desires. We have to identify those, confess them, and repent. We must ask God for His desires so that we can use His gifts and blessings on Jesus’ glory (Psalm 37:4).

***Question: Have you ever been around the person that wants everything from everyone to use on themselves but they’ll never give back? How does God see that in our own lives?***

## **Read James 4:4-6 “Damage from Corrupt Desires”**

James gives us a very strong rebuke here. He is calling us cheaters. If you know anyone who has cheated on their spouse, you know it is absolutely devastating to the couple and the family. James used that strong word picture to communicate how awful it is that we are literally cheating on God. How are we cheating on God? We are cheating on God because we are His bride but yet we enjoy the romance of the world. James used the terms “friend” and “friendship.” With those terms, he’s not communicating if you have unsaved friends, but he’s calling out people who have more of a relationship with the world than with Jesus

Himself. Do you love the things of the world more than you love Jesus? Are your desires more for the world or for God? James calls the friend of the world an enemy of God saying that there is no way they can be saved! How do you know if you're an enemy of God? Is your life characterized by arguments, fighting, hate, prayerlessness, selfishness, and a love for the things of the world?

In verse 5, James said there are Christians who allow their desires to get out of control by going over to the world. For those straying Christians, God's Spirit yearns within them to repent and return because God is jealous for His children. How do we know if we're a rebelling Christian or an unsaved person who is a rebel? We know if we're a Christian if we can sense the conviction the Holy Spirit puts in us so much that we desire to return to Jesus. Basically, we know we're truly a Christian if we miss Him, if we're sorry, and if we return to Him. Otherwise, we just need to get saved!

In verse 6, James explained what to do. We are to understand that God grants grace by giving us what we don't deserve. Yes, God is against the one who is too proud to come to Him. But, God shows grace to the humble. To humble ourselves before God means to confess our sin to Him, to tell Him that He's right and we're wrong, to ask for forgiveness and return to Him. God then gives us what we don't deserve: forgiveness, what we need, and the right desires, the very things we wanted all along.

***Question: What if a friend came to you and asked you to help them to know if they are truly saved or not? How would you help them discern if they are a true Christian or if they need to give their life to Jesus?***

# Gospel

This is the most important section as it helps us all to understand how the gospel is central to the book of James. God's goal is never to just teach us truth, but to live like and for Jesus!

**We must first take a look at the person of Jesus.** Jesus was the first person ever born and also who lived a full life without sinful desires because He is fully God and fully man. He did not have conflicting desires. He did not fight or argue in sinful ways. He did not covet. He always asked from His Father with pure intentions. He was always faithful to His Father yet loved the world without becoming one of the world. Jesus remained perfectly humble throughout His life. The desires of Jesus' heart for the world can be summed up with Matthew 23:37-39.

***Question: How does it make you feel that God accepts you and treats you through the obedience of Jesus rather than our disobedience? When we are saved through the gospel, Jesus' righteousness becomes our own!***

**Secondly, we will take a look at the death of Jesus.**

When Jesus died, the Bible says that He not only bore our sin in His body but also became our sin. Jesus not only took on our sinful, selfish, worldly desires, but He also became the sins we so often struggle with when it comes to our desires. Jesus' death killed the power of sin for those of us who have trusted in Him.

***Question: How would a person live differently if they knew they no longer had to live under the power of a dictator who was destroying their life? How would a***

***person live differently if they knew they no longer had to live under the power of sin that Jesus freed them from by His death?***

**The last part of the gospel we must take a look at is the resurrection of Jesus.** Jesus death kills the power of sin in our lives, and Jesus' resurrection awakens our soul to living in obedience for God. Jesus rose from the dead so that we can live with His desires of love, selflessness, prayerfulness, worshipfulness, faithfulness, etc.

***Question: Be honest with your group and tell them which righteous desire of Jesus you need most in your life. Believe that He will work that within you!***

The last section "Apply" will specifically walk us through how to respond faithfully in the midst of any trial.

## Apply

**1. Be real about sinful desires within you.** Think to yourself about the sinful desires you struggle with. Read this passage of James 4:1-6 and ask God to be honest with you about your sinfulness. Then be real with God by confessing those desires as sin. Then ask other's forgiveness who you've sinned against because of your desires.

***Question: After going to God and asking for His forgiveness, who is the first person in the world you need to ask their forgiveness for the sinful attitude you've had toward them?***

**2. Don't look at people for what you can get from them, but look at them for what you can give to them.** Our joy as a Jesus follower will never come from what others will give to us because we have no control over that. Rather, our joy in following Jesus will be from how we can graciously give to others. Be passionate about blessing others, not taking advantage of others.

***Question: As a group, think of a person or a family you could bless over the next month in some way.***

**3. Learn to ask God for things that will glorify Him.**

When our hearts grow more for God, our prayers turn from things for us to things for Him. If we truly see God as supreme, then we want our lives, our situations, and even our gifts from Him to return glory to Him. A parent wouldn't give their kid something that hurt them, neither would our Heavenly Father. He only gives us what's best for us.

***Question: What is something your group could pray for from God today that would ultimately glorify Him?***

## Conclusion

God is a good God who created us with desires. Desires make life much more enjoyable and less boring. When sin came into the world, Satan hijacked our desires and made them sinful. Only through the gospel can we see God turn our desires back for the things of Jesus than ourselves. And when our desires are turned back to Jesus, then our

relationships will grow in love rather than use each other for selfish gain.

## As You Go

People often quote Psalm 37:4 as a way to assure themselves God will eventually give them everything they want. Take some time this week to study the whole chapter. What name is repeated throughout the entire chapter? What does this repetition indicate? What or Who should we ultimately desire, according to the Psalmist?

# Shoe Leather Christianity Lesson 8: *Living Humbly*

## Theme

Read James 4:7-12 and pages 67-74 in Shoe Leather Christianity by Dr. Johnny Hunt. **This week's theme is Living Humbly. In this lesson, your group will learn how to take steps of humility in their life, why they should live in humility, and how God will bless them when they do.**

## The Point

Through Jesus, true humility is possible for the Christian and attractive to the non-Christian.

## Preparation

Prepare a short caricature of the most humble person you've ever had the blessing of knowing personally.

Study the content and shape your teaching plan to fit your group and style. God has given you unique insights, experiences and knowledge to aid in effectively communicating these truths to your small group. Make this lesson yours!

## Intro

As you begin, it is necessary to relate with your students. Don't just ask them to sit and quiet down, but take a minute to listen to their conversations. Engage in their conversations and demonstrate your desire to be real with them, showing you yourself are real. You will be amazed how much more you can speak into their lives during this session if you listen, talk, and ask questions about their week. God will give you direction.

The goal of the introduction is to get students thinking about today's theme from the view point of their world. Since the session is all about **living humbly**, ask them questions revolving around that theme.

- **Don't name them, but describe the most cocky, arrogant person you know. What are some things that they say (without giving them away)? How do they make others feel around them?**
- **Don't name them, but describe the most humble person you know. They may have a lot to brag about, but they are not about lifting themselves up. What are some things that they say? How do they make others feel around them?**
- **When have you caught yourself bragging about yourself the most? What happened that was so**

**awesome you just had to let everyone around you know about it?**

- **When have you seen God humble you the most? How were you different at that time of your life?**

Your openness and transparency will encourage the same from your students. Don't steal the show by hogging all of the talk time, but be willing to contribute when they won't.

## Need

Communicate your understanding of the difficult task to **live humbly**. As a transition, this would be a good time to share with them a time that you failed in **living humbly**. Make sure they hear in your story how Jesus may have even bailed you out when you didn't have faith in Him. Always give Him the glory!

Before getting into the Bible, whet your student's appetite to hear more about this. Ask them provocative questions, and write their answers on a board or a sheet of paper for them to see.

- **Draw two sections on the board and list adjectives or qualities that go with pride and humility.**
- **Put students into groups of two or three and have them come up with their best definition for pride and their best definition for humility.**
- **How are the friends of the prideful person different from the friends of the humble person?**

This section will not only get your student thinking and wanting to learn more, but it will also get them thinking specifically about the truths of today's lesson.

## Bible

(Make sure you have read pages 67-74 in *Shoe Leather Christianity*)

As we move through this section of studying the Bible, make sure that your teaching is relational. Students get preaching (lecturing) on Sunday mornings and often times on Wednesday nights. The point of small groups is to give them a different kind of opportunity to learn God's Word. What preachers cannot do on Sunday morning is have an open dialogue with their listeners like small group leaders can. Enjoy this discussion while you teach your students.

### **Read James 4:7 "Submit and Resist"**

It's unbelievable all the devil has going on today to trap teenagers in sin. He has had thousands of years to build up temptation, culture, freedom, and enticement to get teenagers to sin more than ever. It seems everywhere a teen turns, evil is lurking. Living in this world is definitely dangerous. Depression, suicidal thoughts, broken families, rampant homosexuality, narcissistic social media, crude language, racism, rebellion against parents, and so much more is out there to hijack the teen's heart from Jesus. What can teens do to avoid these spiritual pitfalls? James put it very simply but powerfully: submit to God and resist the devil. In other words, the way to run from sin is to run

to Jesus. Repentance isn't just turning away from sin, but it's walking with Jesus. Submission to God means to live the way His Word teaches. Resisting the devil means to say no to the temptations he throws your way. Remember, Jesus resisted every temptation by Satan. Have you ever thought about this? Jesus was tempted more than us! How is that true? Because Jesus said no to temptation throughout His life; we say yes and give in quickly. Jesus constantly said no, and through His power so can you. When you submit to God and resist the devil, he will flee from you. The first step every sinner must make is the humble step toward God Himself.

***Question: What are the top 5 temptations Satan throws at teenagers today? List one path of resistance for each temptation you can employ thereby submitting to God's way.***

### **Read James 4:8 "Come Near and Be Cleansed"**

In James' writing, you can see God speaking to Him in order to make His people more humble. After submitting to God and resisting the devil, the next step of humility a believer must make is to continue toward God. So many people get power over a sin and experience His forgiveness, but they don't keep walking toward God with Jesus. They just call on God the next time they get deep into sin again. James tells us to continue to draw nearer and nearer to God. When we do, a huge promise is fulfilled. This is the promise of both the Old and New Testaments. God's greatest gift, most awesome blessing, and biggest promise is that we will have more of God! He is the best gift, blessing, and promise He can give us. We must continue to draw closer and closer to God on a daily basis

so that our hands are continually cleansed and hearts are purified from sin. We cannot cleanse ourselves.

***Discussion: Share with your group your personal experience of feeling the closest to God you ever have, and how they can learn from your experience to experience it themselves.***

### **Read James 4:9 “Be Miserable but Joyful”**

In order to humble ourselves before God, there must be times that we become very real about our sin against Him. Every Christian should have times every once in a while where we reflect on ways that we've rebelled against God, ways that we've obeyed Satan, ways that we've turned to evil, and ways that we've sinned against others. When a Christian introspectively dwells on their personal sinfulness, they can't help but feel wretched, mournful, saddened, and gloomy. This is not some fake, conjured-up emotion. This is not even to be public. James described a time of confession to God where we confess every single detail of the sinful ways we've been living, calling it for what it is, being honest, and telling God that He's right. This also might involve a mentor or accountability partner, someone we can trust, who will pray for us (James 5:16). Before confession we should experience conviction. After conviction and confession, we should repent and turn from our sin. As we repent, we should live in obedience with Jesus.

***Question: Talk about this as a small group. How often should a Christian have this deep type of confession with God? What benefit would it to their life if every Christian did this that regularly?***

## **Read James 4:10 “Be Humbled by Exalted”**

The “therefore” in this verse means that everything James has written in this section leads up to this next statement. Everything so far in this section leads his readers to how to be humbled so we can be exalted. How can we humble ourselves to God? We are to humble ourselves by submitting to Him, resisting the devil, drawing nearer to God, cleanse our hands, purify our hearts, and emotionally confess our sin to Him. Why should we go through all of this? God promises us in His Word that He will exalt those who humble themselves before Him! Everyone wants to be exalted. Being exalted, lifted-up by the world is short-lived and fake. But when God exalts us it is eternally and for real. Does this mean that every Christian will become famous, will be the boss, or will get their TV air time? God is ultimately promising exaltation for eternity, not just in this life. If our lives are to model Jesus, we must remember that He wasn't exalted until after His suffering unto death. Listen, you would rather your exaltation from God be in eternity since this life is temporary and eternity is forever!

***Question: How would you answer a friend who asked you, “Why would you live like a Christian when the rest of the world doesn't respect you? Why would you choose a way to live so God might bless you for it after you die?”***

## **Read James 4:11-12 “Humility Applied”**

James gives us one last way to live humbly toward God. He commands us not to speak evil against one another as Christians. Satan loves to puff up our pride as we talk about each other negatively, derogatorily, in jealousy, in gossip, in trash-talking, and even starting rumors. It's absolutely

sick how Satan gets the church to talk about one another as the world does. Why do we do this to each other? It's because of our pride. The devil loves for us to feel better than others, even other Christians in our church. James calls us out for doing this by telling us that we then think we've become Jesus! While we are to hold brothers and sisters accountable, we are called to gently rebuke each other, and we are even told to speak the truth in love to one another, but we are not to talk bad about each other behind each other's backs. Only Jesus is perfect, we are not. Only Jesus wrote the law in the Bible, we did not. Only Jesus is able to judge others, we are not. Only Jesus is able to save the Christian and destroy the unsaved, we are not. James' last step of walking toward a life of humility is to show each other grace, to love each other, to speak well of each other, and to learn to put others before ourselves.

***Question: Have you ever seen a drama erupt at church? How does the world respond when they hear of it? Has there ever been drama worth hurting the testimony of Jesus?***

## Gospel

This is the most important section as it helps us all to understand how the gospel is central to the book of James. God's goal is never to just teach us truth, but to live like and for Jesus!

**We must first take a look at the person of Jesus.** Jesus' life was one of constant humility. Everything Jesus did was for His Father's glory and for our salvation. Every sin He

resisted, every law He obeyed, and everything He taught was constantly with His Father and us in mind. He never did anything for Himself. He left His own exaltation in the hands of His Father. He suffered pain for us. He did all this because He loved His Father first and loved us fully. Jesus was the epitome and perfect example of humility that we can strive to imitate. Jesus lived this way so that we don't have to live humbly to be saved, but we have the power to live humbly once we are saved!

***Question: After going through today's lesson, how much more motivated are you to live humbly like Jesus than ever before?***

**Secondly, we will take a look at the death of Jesus.** The most humble act in all of human history is Jesus going to the cross. Knowing the pain of the torture and the emotional agony of His Father turning His back on Him, Jesus humbly took on the cross to glorify His Father and to purchase our salvation.

***Question: How could a Christian today live more humbly by taking on more suffering for someone else that might lead to their salvation?***

**The last part of the gospel we must take a look at is the resurrection of Jesus.** Jesus, like God promised, when Jesus humbled Himself, God exalted Him to the name above every name, as King, and at His right hand. Jesus' long awaited exaltation finally happened after a life full of humility, obedience, resistance, submission, suffering, and pain.

***Question: What if Jesus had let up and didn't humble Himself in one of those ways? Would He have remained sinless? Could we still be saved? How could our humility lead to someone else's salvation?***

The last section "Apply" will specifically walk us through how to respond faithfully in the midst of any trial.

## Apply

**1. Make goals this week as a group to spend daily time in God's Word and prayer.** The easiest life lived for God is a life lived in community with other believers. Help each other by holding each other accountable in God's Word this week. If we are called to submit ourselves to God so that we can resist the devil, then we have to do that by drawing closer to God in His Word each day and through prayer. (James 4:7-10)

***Question: What are your goals as a group this week to spend time in God's Word and hold each other accountable?***

**2. Pray for each other this week to be the humble person and not the prideful person.** Look back at the columns on the board of characteristics of the prideful person and humble person. Remember that we cannot be that humble person without God working humility in our life, or without following Jesus throughout our day. As you leave your group this morning, spend time in prayer for each other to live in humility instead of pride.

**3. Last thought to leave on: Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but its thinking of your self less and Jesus more.** Many people think humility is always putting yourself down, but humility is actually thinking of Jesus more and seeing yourself through Him.

## Conclusion

God calls His people to humility by pursuing Him and repenting of sin. He promises when we do live in humility, we get the best gift He can give us: Himself! Jesus lived a life of humility that lead to our salvation. God calls us to live a life of humility that can lead to the salvation of others.

## As You Go

If you dare, ask a few trusted friends and/or your parents to give you personal advice regarding your own humility and where it needs work. Remember...the most humble response is to thankfully receive the feedback without defense. It's not easy, but it might make you more like Jesus!

# Shoe Leather Christianity Lesson 9: *Leaving God Out of Life*

## Theme

Read James 4:13-17 and pages 75-83 in *Shoe Leather Christianity* by Dr. Johnny Hunt. This week's theme is Leaving God Out of Life, specifically looking at how we often make plans without considering or consulting God's will. The challenge will be to move from an "I'm in charge of my life" attitude to an attitude of total submission to God's will.

## The Point

**The Bible calls Christians to plan wisely while ultimately submitting their life's course to God.**

## Preparation

**Prepare one of the following: 1.) A personal testimony about a time you made plans without consulting God and a time you did, sharing the outcome of both endeavors. 2.) Choose an age-and-content appropriate movie where the main character made lots of plans and none of them worked out. Use either to start a discussion or illustrate a point during the lesson.**

**Study the content and shape your teaching plan to fit your group and style. God has given you unique insights, experiences and knowledge to aid in effectively communicating these truths to your small group. Make this lesson yours!**

## Intro

Begin by relating to and with your students. Don't just ask them to sit and quiet down, but take a minute to listen. Engage in their conversations and demonstrate your desire to be real. You will be amazed how much more you can speak into their lives if you listen, talk, and ask questions about their week.

The goal of the introduction is to get students thinking about today's theme from the view point of their world. Since the session is all about having real faith, ask different questions about times in life that require real faith.

(Your openness and transparency will encourage the same from your students. Be willing to contribute if they won't.)

- **What are your plans for the next few years of your life? Goals? Desires? Dreams?**
- **If you're a senior, what are some of the common questions everyone asks you about your life?**
- **Have you ever known someone who is always planning something or plotting something? (Ex. My brother-in-law is always coming up with a new business idea)**

## Need

Communicate your understanding of the difficulty of working out your faith. To transition, share a time that you failed in working out your faith. Make sure they hear in your story how Jesus may have even bailed you out when you didn't have faith in Him. Always give Him the glory!

Write answers to these questions on a board or a sheet of paper for them to see.

- **Do know anyone who says they believe in God but plans their life like God isn't really a part of it?**
- **Do you believe God has specific plans for your life?**
- **Do you think God is concerned about your daily plans or only about the big things (college, marriage, career, etc.)**

# Bible

(Make sure you have read pages 75-83 in *Shoe Leader Christianity*)

Make your teaching relational. Students get preaching (lecturing) on Sunday mornings and often times on Wednesday nights. Small groups provide an interactive environment for learning God's Word. Engage in and enjoy discussion as you teach.

## **Read James 4:13 – Our Proceeding without God**

James is calling out Christians who say they believe in Jesus and have given their lives to the gospel, but make plans uninformed by God about where and how long they will live somewhere, how they will conduct business and how much money they will make. Does this sound familiar? "When I get to high school, I'll play this sport and get this scholarship then I'll go pro." "I'll make straight A's this year, get into a great college, and get a job making \$100,000 a year by age 30." "When I get out of high school, I'm moving out of my parents' house as fast as possible." "I will be married before age 24." The problem with this process, and the one described in James, is that it completely disregards God's plans. This person is not consulting their Creator and Author of their life. They have singularly determined their plans and decided those plans will succeed. There is nothing inherently wrong with making plans and setting goals; Scripture encourages this diligence. Yet, Scripture also calls the Christian to filter these plans through the Bible and prayer with God's will and glory as the chief end, regardless of how the initial plan changes.

***Question: Have you ever known a Christian who sets limits on where they will go or what they will do in service to God? (Ex. I'll go on a mission trip to anywhere but Africa. I'll teach Sunday School to any group but preschoolers. I'm good with whatever job God provides, as long as it makes this much money.) Do you think Christians not called to vocational ministry should be just as open to God's plan for their lives as full-time ministers/missionaries? Do you think God has a plan for those not in paid ministry positions?***

### **Read James 4:14 – Our Presuming Upon God (or Assuming God's plan)**

Nobody believes they'll die young. Younger people typically give little thought to their death. Folks your parent's age begin thinking about death but assume it is still very far away. If you were to ask a friend, "As you think about high school/college, what are you planning for your death?" they would think you were weird. However, in James 4:14 as well as in Luke 12:16-21, Scripture clearly teaches no one is promised tomorrow. James was not condemning those who plan but rather highlighting the importance of our attitude and approach to God in the midst of our planning. Do we assume God is going to grant us long life? Do we assume God is going to let us make all A's? Do we believe that God would never let us get injured on the sports field, ending our chances of future sports career? Do we assume His stamp of approval on all of our whims and desires simply because we're saved? Read Psalm 90:12.

***Question: What does it mean to “number our days?” How might our plans, choices, etc. look different if we kept the perspective that it we don’t know when our lives will end?***

### **Read James 4:16-17 - “Our Pretentions Toward God”**

The Greek word for *boast* carries the idea that the person is thinking very highly about his or herself. The person James described has high degree of confidence to accomplish their goals and plans. He or she makes plans without consulting God and pursues those plans without depending on God, thereby living a life without faith, a practice Paul identified in Romans 14:23 as sin. James agreed in verse 17 – the man knows he should place faith in God, but does not. Scripture clearly identifies this as sinful and specifically arrogant. To be pretentious means to exaggerate your importance, to place on yourself more significance than you have or deserve.

***Question: James used very strong words to describe how arrogant and sinful it is to assume we can accomplish success apart from God. Do you consider this when thinking about, answering questions about, or making plans about your future? Do you think it is arrogant to make plans without involving God?***

### **Read James 4:15 - “Our Planning Under God”**

Even though some people intentionally try to live without God and others forget God, we all discover the impossibility of escaping Him (Psalm 139:7). Even if God allows our little plans without Him to succeed, His ultimate plan will successfully surface. Because God is ultimately

in control, we should run to Him, not away from Him, submitting our lives and future to Him.

***Question: What does it look like to live life with a “if God wills” attitude? Do we still make plans? Is that fatalistic? Is it uncertain?***

## Gospel

This is the most important section as it helps us all to understand how the gospel is central to the book of James. God’s goal is never to just teach us truth, but to live like and for Jesus!

Jesus, as God’s Son, the human being, perfectly submitted to God’s plan without fail. Jesus made dozens of references to doing the will of the Father. We see this most clearly in John 4:34 when Jesus said, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent me.” Jesus’ life was characterized by submission to the Father’s will for His life.

Jesus’ death and resurrection were also in submission to and in accordance with God’s plan. Jesus even prayed in the garden before His death, “not as I will, but as you will.” We see throughout Scripture that God’s plan was for Jesus to live, die, be buried, and rise again. In Philippians 2:7-9, Jesus’ submission to the Father in the work of redemption is clearly seen.

Through Jesus’ humility before the Father regarding His plans and His life, we see that when one is submitted to God with their plans, the greatest eternal impact is made,

the most lives are changed, and God is the most glorified, even at great personal cost.

## Apply

**How do we live a life that is not arrogantly independent, but rather in submission to God's will?**

**1. You must have a deep desire to do God's will.** This requires faith to say "yes" before knowing the fullness of His plans, displaying a faith that shows we trust Him more than ourselves. No matter the details, His plan is superior and we trust Him enough to follow.

**2. God's will always agrees with His Word.** Everything about God's will is not revealed in the Bible and the specifics of His will aren't necessarily documented in Scripture. However, God will never will something for your life contrary to the Bible. This is a great starting point when asking if something is God's will: can the action agree with the biblical text and its message?

**3. Knowing God's will requires seeking Him in prayer.** Christians are repeatedly exhorted to seek God for direction in the book of James (1:5-7, 4:2-3) and also by Jesus in the Gospels (Matthew 7:7, 18:19, 21:22; John 14:12-16, 15:7, 16:23-26). Praying for God's direction demonstrates that we both want to do it and need Him to accomplish it.

## Conclusion

As Christians, we must constantly step back and evaluate our lives to discern whether or not we are leaving God out. Do we think about Him when we plan our day, our week, our future? Do you seek His will earnestly in prayer? Do we believe His plans for us are far better than ours?

# Shoe Leather Christianity Lesson 10: *God, the Believer, and Money*

## Theme

Read pages 85-92 in *Shoe Leather Christianity* by Dr. Johnny Hunt. **This week's theme is God, the Believer, and Money.** During this session your students will explore the dangers of self-indulging in riches.

## The Point

Self-indulging in riches causes damage now and could lead to a Christ-less eternity.

## Preparation

**Search for pop culture examples of extreme riches, examples of riches leading to death, destruction or disappointment and quotes from famous or powerful people confessing the emptiness of material wealth.**

**When and if appropriate, use these examples to illustrate points and initiate discussion.**

**Study the content and shape your teaching plan to fit your group and style. God has given you unique insights, experiences and knowledge to aid in effectively communicating these truths to your small group. Make this lesson yours!**

## Intro

Begin by relating to and with your students. Don't just ask them to sit and quiet down, but take a minute to listen. Engage in their conversations and demonstrate your desire to be real. You will be amazed how much more you can speak into their lives if you listen, talk, and ask questions about their week.

The goal of the introduction is to get students thinking about today's theme from the view point of their world. Since this session is about the dangers of riches, ask questions that reveal the love of money in our culture.

(Your openness and transparency will encourage the same from your students. Be willing to contribute if they won't.)

- ***How significant is money in our culture?***
- ***What do many people consider to be proof of success?***
- ***When money is given to you, what are your first thoughts?***
- ***Are riches inherently evil?***
- ***Can someone be legitimately rich and use their wealth for God's glory?***

## Need

Communicate your understanding of the desire for joy and significance and the false belief riches provide these. Give testimony about a time you tried to find joy through riches. Share how this pursuit failed and joy and significance were ultimately found in Jesus.

## Bible

(Make sure you have read pages 85-92 in *Shoe Leather Christianity*)

### **Read James 5:1-3 "The Price of Riches"**

James began chapter 5 by addressing the rich and the dangers that come with being rich. It is as if James is quoting Jesus from His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6:19-21. Earthly riches will soon fade away. They will be destroyed by corrosion and eaten by moths. You can

sense the anger in James' voice as he wrote to the rich and warned them of their destructive path.

James explained that faith and hope in riches leads to misery. In fact, James said a life seeking to store up earthly treasure can ultimately lead to eternity in hell separated from God ("eat your flesh like fire" v. 3). Therefore, James called the rich to be broken over their sin. "Weep because of the misery before you." In other words, James called the rich to mourn the manner in which they have considered riches most significant.

***Question: What can we do to guard against storing up treasures on earth?***

### **Read James 5:4-6 "The Damage Done"**

James moved from the price of loving riches to the details of its destruction. Finding worth in riches does not only affect us, but those around us. Jesus said the two greatest commandments are to love God and then to love others. Our love for riches, however, is rooted in a love for ourselves. We cannot indulge in riches with self-seeking desires and at the same time consider others more important than ourselves.

The people James referred to specifically in this passage were so consumed with their wealth it negatively affected their relationships. Their luxury and self-indulgence led them to defraud their laborers and ultimately murder the innocent; they were blind to their sin. James compared them in verse 5 to cattle who are out eating in the fields not knowing that their day of slaughter was near. The rich were getting richer, hurting everyone around them, and they did not realize that their sin was leading to death and eternal hell.

***Question: Do you love others and care for them more than you do yourself? Is it possible riches have ever hindered your relationships?***

## Gospel

Riches make us feel significant. When we have material goods, we feel like we fit in, improve our social status, and keep up with our peers. What about those who aren't rich? Are they less important? Absolutely not! In spite of what our culture tells us, wealth does not determine significance. This is one reason the gospel is so compelling...it is for everyone.

Jesus considered us significant when He willingly gave Himself up on the cross so that we might be set free from our sin. We don't deserve such love and yet God in His grace gives it to us. Listen to Paul in 2 Corinthians 8:9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."

- **Why do you think Jesus preached more about money in the Gospels than hell and sexual immorality combined?**
- **What do you think Paul meant in 2 Corinthians when he said we became "rich" in Christ?**
- **How are even materially poor people rich if they have received Jesus' gospel?**

The difference in the rich James pointed to and Jesus is that Jesus gave up His riches for the sake of others. He

became poor so that we might be rich in Him. Are we significant in the eyes of Jesus? Absolutely!

## Apply

Seeing the way Jesus loves and cares for us is humbling. If our hearts truly desire is to be like Jesus then we ought to consider others more significant than our riches. The king of the universe gave up His riches for our sake. Our worth is not found in our stuff but in a God who redeems us from death to life. In response, we ought to live in order to help others see that life is about so much more than the things we own. Life is about a Person we can know.

- **What steps can you take this week to treasure Jesus more than material goods?**
- **How does this lesson impact your life goals in terms of money, possessions, faith and what God's called you to do?**
- **How will you guard against becoming one of the rich persons described by James?**
- **It is difficult to keep a friend accountable in this area. How would you advise someone to keep you accountable in the area of greed?**

## Conclusion

Matthew 6:19-21 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where

thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

# Shoe Leather Christianity Lesson 11: *Our Patience, God's Promise*

## Theme

Read James 5:7-12 and pages 93-100 in *Shoe Leather Christianity* by Dr. Johnny Hunt. This week's theme is Our Patience, God's Promise. During this session, your students will learn to strive for patience in circumstances, endurance until Christ comes, and to use care with their words.

## The Point

Christians should be patient with God, each other, and circumstances as they await Christ's coming.

## Preparation

Prepare a personal testimony about a time you lost your patience or a time when God taught you patience through

your circumstances. Try to use an example students can relate to.

Study the content and shape your teaching plan to fit your group and style. God has given you unique insights, experiences and knowledge to aid in effectively communicating these truths to your small group. Make this lesson yours!

## Intro

Begin by relating to and with your students. Don't just ask them to sit and quiet down, but take a minute to listen. Engage in their conversations and demonstrate your desire to be real. You will be amazed how much more you can speak into their lives if you listen, talk, and ask questions about their week. The goal of the introduction is to get students thinking about today's theme from the view point of their world. Get the discussion started in your group

by listing some of the following scenarios and having students share which causes them to lose their patience.

- ***The check-out line is long and slow***
- ***The same person keeps interrupting you in a conversation***
- ***The internet is slow on your phone or computer***
- **Slow drivers when you are running late**
- **Waiting forever to get your food in a restaurant**
- **Class is over but the teacher is still talking**
- **You have to use the bathroom but there is no bathroom around**
- **Someone promised to meet you but they are running late and not answering calls**

Now have students share some of the things that cause them to lose patience. Make sure this stays a lighthearted discussion and doesn't become a forum for complaining about other people!

## Need

Communicate your understanding of the difficulty of practicing patience. Tell students that many of the situations mentioned this morning expose how impatient we are. It has often been said patience is a virtue admired by many but applied by few. Most people want to be patient, but do almost nothing to become patient. Take this opportunity to share a story about how you lost your

patience or how you learned to be patient through a specific circumstance. Be clear about what God taught you through this.

Write answers to these questions on a board or a sheet of paper for students to see.

- **Why is it easy to be patient in some situations but more difficult in others?**
- **Is God glorified when we are impatient? What are some ways we act when we are impatient that are sinful or unhelpful?**
- **What would be different about your life if you had more patience?**
- **How does a person become patient?**

## Bible

(Make sure you have read pages 93-100 in *Shoe Leather Christianity*)

Make your teaching relational. Students get preaching (lecturing) on Sunday mornings and often times on Wednesday nights. Small groups provide an interactive environment for learning God's Word. Engage in and enjoy discussion as you teach.

### **Read James 5:7-8a, "Be Patient"**

It's hard to be patient. It's hard to be patient when people are mistreating us. It's hard to be patient when

circumstances turn against us. It's hard to be patient when it seems like God doesn't care about us. Yet patience is a key attribute of a follower of Christ. Patience is hard because it involves hope and trust. I can only be patient if I am sure that people, circumstances, or God will eventually come through! The farmer puts off harvesting his crop because he is waiting for rain. He is sure it will come! When he doubts the rain, he becomes impatient and misses out on a great harvest. When we lose our patience it's because we've lost hope in people, circumstances or God. Yet if we truly trust Jesus to return and put everything right, we won't lose hope and become impatient.

James wants believers not to lose patience waiting for Christ's return and to abandon or become apathetic toward their faith. If we can patiently wait for Christ's return, we can patiently deal with people and wait on our circumstances to improve. If our hope in Christ is secure, we still have hope even if people or circumstances fail us.

***Question: Think of a time you recently lost your patience. What did you lose hope in and thereby lost your patience? Is there a circumstance or relationship in your life right now where God is calling you to be patient?***

**Read James 5:8b, "Be Strong"**

James wants believers to strengthen their hearts because the coming of the Lord is at hand. This doesn't mean James necessarily thought Jesus was coming next Tuesday, but rather that whether we die and see Him or He returns to the earth, we could all face Him at any moment. Therefore, we cannot allow ourselves to become lazy or weak in our faith. Time is short. We must strengthen our hearts to

continue to live for Christ and to anticipate His judgment on our lives.

***Question: Do we live like we could face Christ at any moment? What can we do to live in anticipation of that meeting?***

### **Read James 5:9, “Don’t Grumble”**

James also wants believers not to grumble against each other. As a motivation, he reminds them again they will face God’s judgment. We often grumble because we’ve lost hope in people so we complain about them. We often grumble because we’ve lost hope in our circumstances so we complain about circumstances or people who have it better than we do. We often grumble because we’ve lost hope in God so we complain about Him or to Him. The same heart that brings forth impatience can also bring forth grumbling. An impatient, grumbling heart has lost hope in God and love for people. We must strengthen our hearts because our grumbling will be judged by God.

***Question: What are some things we like to grumble about? What should our attitude toward those things be?***

### **Read James 5:10-11, “Endure”**

To encourage his readers, James pointed to the Old Testament prophets. They often had to endure great persecution and suffering as they held fast and proclaimed the Word of the Lord. Many of them died before they saw God’s vindication and confirmation of their hope. We look

back on their patient endurance as heroic, even though it might not have felt that way at the time.

He pointed to Job who showed remarkable patience in enduring some of the greatest suffering portrayed in the Bible. He never lost hope and cursed God even though it looked to all the world like he should. Job and the prophets had great hope in God's purposes even when they couldn't see them, God's compassion even when they couldn't feel it, and God's mercy even when they didn't experience it. In the same way, we must endure and hold on to hope even if it seems hopeless.

**Question: Has life ever made you want to give up? How did you keep going? What enables a Christian to endure even when the world seems to turn against them?**

**Read James 5:12, "Don't Swear"**

James wanted his readers to live lives of integrity. He knows what a lack of integrity, especially as it plays out in the words we use, can do to the church and the reputation of Jesus. Thus he gives this command "above all." To be people who can simply say "yes" or "no" and who need no other oaths. Again, we are reminded that judgment awaits those who fail to live with integrity or use their words carelessly. We must speak the truth in love and trust God to sort out the consequences. We don't need meaningless oaths and guarantees to back up our statements.

**Question: What kind of damage can we bring to the cause of Christ with careless words?**

# Gospel

This is the most important section as it helps us all to understand how the gospel is central to the book of James. God's goal is never to just teach us truth, but to live like and for Jesus!

If a lack of patience is rooted in a lack of hope, then impatience is rooted in a failure to understand the gospel. The author of Hebrews urged readers in 10:23 to, "hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful." The confession of our hope is the gospel. Despite appearances, this world of sin, suffering, pain, and death is under the direction of a good and loving God who is working out a glorious plan – the center of which is the person and work of Jesus Christ. Because God was faithful to give us salvation through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, we know He will be faithful to complete the job, take us to heaven, and one day make all things new with the return of Jesus. If we have placed our hope in the gospel, how can we waver in our hope that God will fulfill the rest of his promises? Gospel people have unlimited hope and therefore, can have unlimited patience! In the gospel, God is patient with sinners, rewards those who patiently wait on Him, and gives strength to endure to the end.

- **How does the hope of our sins forgiven at the cross give us strength to be patient with other people?**
- **How does the hope of Christ's resurrection give us strength to be patient in our circumstances?**
- **How does the hope of Christ's return give us the strength to endure whatever life throws at us?**

## Apply

People like to say patience is best learned through experience. In other words, we learn patience as we deal with people and live through circumstances that require us to be patient. We never really know how patient we are until a situation calls us to be patient.

**Go around the room and have students share a situation in their life that is requiring them to learn patience.**

Everybody deals with people and goes through situations that require them to be patient. Yet many people remain just as impatient as they were before; they seem to have not learned a thing! Developing patience takes more than surviving a difficult situation: it takes a heart strengthened in truth. Many truths of the Bible are necessary if we are to be strengthened to patiently endure! We need to know and remember these truths if we are to be patient.

***Which truths of the gospel, the character of God, and the nature of humanity most strengthen us to patiently endure all that life throws at us? What do we cling to in these times?***

Patient people endure to the end. They don't give up, sell out, lose interest, or break their commitment because they hold tightly to their hope and patiently wait for it to come through! Impatient people give up when results don't come quickly, sell out when expectations aren't met, lose interest when it takes time, and break commitments when it gets difficult. They are not confident in their hope and

doubt it will deliver. James mentioned Job and prophets as examples of those who patiently endure.

***Make two lists in your room. On one side, a list of the characteristics of people who endure. On the other side, a list of the characteristics of people who do not. You can also include well-known examples of both. Have students reflect on the lists and which one most characterizes them at the moment.***

## Conclusion

Christians can be patient people because we have the hope of the gospel! We now wait patiently for Christ's return, strengthening our hearts with the truth about God, refusing to grumble or swear, and enduring until we see Jesus and receive His evaluation of our lives. We don't have to waver in our hope and lose patience because our God is faithful; He was faithful to save us and he'll be faithful to take us with Him for eternity.

# Shoe Leather Christianity

## Lesson 12: *Life's Key to Successful Living*

### Theme

Read James 4:13-20 and pages 101-109 in *Shoe Leather Christianity* by Dr. Johnny Hunt. **This week's theme is Prayer: Life's Key to Successful Living. In this lesson, your group will learn when, how, and who to pray for on a regular basis as we grow in our relationship with Jesus.**

### The Point

Because Jesus loves relationship with us, He invites us to talk to Him in every situation of life.

### Preparation

Create a page of typical rote prayers (for food, for the offering, etc.) Ask students to read these in their best monotone voices at some point during the lesson. This should illustrate what prayer is not. Encourage discussion

about the futility of such prayers and how God might view them.

Study the content and shape your teaching plan to fit your group and style. God has given you unique insights, experiences and knowledge to aid in effectively communicating these truths to your small group. Make this lesson yours!

## Intro

Begin by relating to and with your students. Don't just ask them to sit and quiet down, but take a minute to listen. Engage in their conversations and demonstrate your desire to be real. You will be amazed how much more you can speak into their lives if you listen, talk, and ask questions about their week.

The goal of the introduction is to get students thinking about today's theme from the view point of their world. Since this session is all about **prayer**, ask them questions revolving around that theme.

- **If you could have absolutely anyone's number in your phone, who's would it be? Who in the world would you want to talk to at anytime?**
- **Why did you choose that person over everyone else in the world?**
- **How often do you honestly think you'd enjoy talking to them?**
- **What could a conversation with them offer you that would be better than anyone else in the world?**

## **Advice, laughs, knowledge, wisdom, friendship, love, etc?**

(Your openness and transparency will encourage the same from your students. Be willing to contribute if they won't.)

## Need

Communicate your understanding of the difficult task to **pray**. As a transition, this would be a good time to share with them a time that you failed in **praying**. Make sure they hear in your story how Jesus may have even bailed you out when you didn't have faith in Him.

Write answers on a board or a sheet of paper for them to see.

- **Group your students into teams of two or three and have them come up with their best definition of prayer (write it down, then share it).**
- **When is the absolute best time to pray for a Christian? When is the worst time?**
- **Why is prayer more life changing than any conversation with that person you chose earlier?**

This section will not only get your student thinking and wanting to learn more, but it will also get them thinking specifically about the truths of today's lesson.

# Bible

(Make sure you have read pages 101-109 in *Shoe Leather Christianity*)

Make your teaching relational. Students get preaching (lecturing) on Sunday mornings and often times on Wednesday nights. Small groups provide an interactive environment for learning God's Word. Engage in and enjoy discussion as you teach.

## **Read James 5:13 "Praying During Difficulty and Delight"**

So many teenagers today understand the Christian life incorrectly. Many today believe that giving their life to God means they won't go through suffering, pain, and difficult times. Giving your life to Jesus doesn't give you a pass on suffering; rather, it gives us a relationship with Him as He passes through our suffering with us. Here, James called Christians to put the shoe leather of Christianity on in order to live the practical daily Christian life by praying, no matter what they are going through. Jesus ultimately desires relationship with us. So, in Scriptures like this one, He calls us to talk to Him in both the best and worst of times. When we are going through utterly desperate times of suffering, Jesus invites us to come to Him in prayer for understanding, wisdom, healing, strength, and the ultimate Friend to talk to. No one understands suffering like Jesus! Not only suffering, but Jesus also desires that we talk to Him in the great times of life. Here, He asked Christians to sing praise when we are happy. God has created singing as a natural response to happiness. It's so hardwired within humanity that even the world apart from

Jesus lives this way. God designed singing as a way for us to praise and thank Him in the best times of life. The point of this passage is to simply talk to Jesus no matter what we're going through in life!

***Question: Who do you normally talk to when life goes wrong? How can talking to Jesus be even more life changing than their help and advice? What is your favorite radio station or playlist when your day is going great? Why would singing worship to Jesus be even more life changing for you when you're at your best?***

### **Read James 5:14-16 "Praying During Sickness and Sin"**

Not only should we pray when we are going through the worst and best of times, but we should also pray on behalf of the sick. Some Christians today have forgotten that Jesus still loves to heal the sick. We should pray for sick friends and family believing God can heal them. We will never understand why God chooses to heal some and not others, but we can always trust in the fact that God is perfect and He always has a plan. Praying to God in faith for the sick does not mean we believe God will heal every sick person, but it means we believe He *can* heal *every* sick person. While we pray for our sick friends and family, our prayers are ultimately declare our trust that God will accomplish His perfect plan. James points out a severe situation of sickness where we are to call on pastors of the church to come and pray for the seriously ill. Those pastors are even invited to anoint that sick person with oil as a symbol of God doing a special work in their life. While there is no special power in the oil, it can be used in special situations to mark that person for the powerful work of the Holy Spirit.

Whenever we come to God in prayer for each other or ourselves, we should do so practicing confession of sin. Prayer is how we approach our all-holy God through the name of Jesus, and when we do, we must acknowledge our sinfulness and ask for His forgiveness. The only way we have any right to come to God is always through Jesus' death and resurrection alone. It should be part of our normal Christian life to confess our sins to each other so that we can pray for each other and be healed from our addictions, temptations, and weaknesses. What would our church and campuses look like if teenagers truly took hold of this, confessed sin to each other, prayed for each other, and they experienced God's forgiveness? We would experience true Christian community, see the shackles of sin shatter, and live our lives passionately on mission for Jesus with each other!

***Discussion: When you pray for the sick people you know, do you pray truly believing God can heal them? Do you trust God's plan if He doesn't heal them? When is the last time you obeyed by confessing sin to your Christian friends and praying for one another to be rid of your sin? This should happen in friendships, small groups, and especially discipleship groups!***

### **Read James 5:17-20 "Praying Sincerely and Earnestly"**

This is James' final point of his book. After this heartfelt book to the church, how did James sum it all up? Without a personal closing, he concluded with a final thought on how to live practical Christianity by simply praying for each other. This was the perfect way to finalize all he'd been saying! As we all go through trials, we shouldn't play favorites, we should put our faith to work, we should

faithfully tame our tongues, and we should avoid worldly living. How can we accomplish all of this? James taught we are to humble ourselves by realizing our weakness and Jesus' power simply by praying passionately! As Christians, we absolutely must call each other out on sin, encourage each other to live for Jesus, and pray for each other to choose Jesus over sin. This is James' grand conclusion to practical, shoe-leather Christianity!

***Question: What would you say holds Christian teenagers back the most from passionately and personally praying for each other to turn away from sin and follow Jesus daily?***

## Gospel

This is the most important section as it helps us all to understand how the gospel is central to the book of James. God's goal is never to just teach us truth, but to live like and for Jesus!

**We must first take a look at the person of Jesus (God and man).** Jesus' life was characterized by prayer to His Father. He was a man of prayer. It would be easy to think that Jesus wouldn't have to pray since He remained fully God while being human and also the Son of God, but Jesus was faithful to pray without ceasing as the ultimate human being. You can read passages like Luke 11 where Jesus taught His disciples to pray and John 17 which was Jesus' High Priestly prayer.

***Question: Why did Jesus pray if His Father knew His heart perfectly and Jesus was perfect in every way? If God already knows our heart, thoughts, and needs, then why would He still command us to pray?***

**Secondly, we will take a look at the work of Jesus (death and resurrection).** Prayer is ultimately about our relationship and communication with God. We can only come to God in prayer through Jesus because His death has brought us into relationship with Him by our faith. Jesus' death made our prayers possible to God. This is why we pray in the name of Jesus. We are not supposed to just tack His name to the end of our prayers, but pray ultimately for the glory of Jesus and with the mindfulness that we are only able to talk to God because of Jesus' death. Praise God that Jesus has risen from the dead so that we can talk to Him, too! Jesus' resurrection made our salvation possible. Our salvation is our relationship with God, and our prayers are our communication with Him.

***Question: How do most Christians think wrongly of "praying in the name of Jesus" and how does the Bible describe that we should pray in His name?***

**The last part of the gospel we must take a look at is our response to Jesus (repentance and faith).** Jesus' death always calls us to a life of repentance and His resurrection always calls us to a life of faith.

***Question: In all honesty, how should we repent of our prayerlessness, and what does our prayerlessness tell us about our faithlessness in Jesus?***

The last section “Apply” will specifically walk us through how to respond faithfully in the midst of any trial.

## Apply

**1. Humble yourself more this week before God by simply praying.** Prayer is the greatest way that we can humble ourselves before God because it shows that He is in control, we are not, our need for Him, and spending our time on relationship with Him.

***Question: What are your goals as a group this week to pray to God and hold each other accountable?***

**2. Don't pray this week, but talk to God.** So often we say the word *prayer*, but because it's such a familiar word to us, we view it only as religious ritual. Don't think of it as merely praying but as talking to God. We have that awesome privilege to speak to the Creator of the universe, the author of our lives, and the giver of our eternity.

**3. Final thought: How can you pray for one another this week?** Prayer is not just meant to be between you and God, but prayer is also meant to be in community with each other. Discuss how you can seriously pray for each other, and make a goal to pray together each Sunday while you're in Sunday school

## Conclusion

There is no such thing as a situation in life that doesn't call us to prayer with God. No matter what you're going through, go to God for answers, wisdom, help, relationship, and communication. Prayer is only done through the name of Jesus because only the person who has given their life to God through the gospel can have relationship with Him. Because of your relationship with God, pray to Him. Because of our relationship with others, pray together and for each other.



