

Alive & FREE

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INTRO

Do others know by your actions that you are a professing believer? Why must we be doers of the Word and not hearers only? What do your words reveal about your heart? Do you approach life with a humble spirit? How do you respond when trials come your way? As believers, our lives are to be set apart. The Christian walk should be attractive and contagious so people see the difference Christ makes and want to experience it for themselves. The call upon believers in the Book of James describes a life full of action and virtue.

This Bible Study Leader Guide was created to prepare you in Bible study. This Leader Guide is designed to be just that—a guide. It’s something you can customize to fit your group and your own teaching style. The best way to prepare is to study the Scripture and use the lessons as your personal Bible study. As you interact with Scripture and the material in the Guide, take notes and answer the questions yourself. Learn from the lessons before you attempt to teach them. Allow the Holy Spirit to teach you through this study and then use you to teach your students!

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Act Now

KEY VERSE

James 1:25

SCRIPTURE

James 1:19-27; 2:14-26

NOTES

TEACHING AIM

Students will learn that authentic faith is more than claiming to believe in something. Faith in Christ transforms and compels us to action, while freeing us to live the full life to which God has called us.

GETTING STARTED

Start with an activity called “Details.” Place students into pairs and direct the partners to begin by facing each other and carefully observing each other’s appearance for 60 seconds. Then, partners must turn back to back and alter five things about their appearance. For instance, a watch might be removed or a shoelace untied. Encourage participants to be as subtle as possible. When both partners are ready, they will then turn to face each other and try to identify the items which have been altered.

You looked closely at your partner and tried to remember what you saw. Some of you may have wished that you looked even closer and studied even more intently, because it was difficult to remember what you had seen. As we begin our journey into the Book of James, we will see that we are instructed to look intently into God’s Word, study it diligently, and actually remember and apply what we have learned. Let’s get started!

Mirrors in New Testament times were made of polished metal. People used them to wash their faces, shave their beards, apply cosmetics, and comb their hair. Then they quickly left, giving little thought to the image they had seen. People can repeat this experience in the spiritual realm. We give a quick glance into God’s Word, find a morsel of truth, and jump into another task without remembering or applying what we read.¹

THINK

1. With Christ in our lives, we are transformed and compelled to action.

READ JAMES 1:19-27.

How many of you have already looked into a mirror at least once today? What is one thing that you might notice about your appearance when you look into a mirror?

Let’s be honest—most of us look in the mirror a lot. We like to see how we look. How silly would it be to see that your hair is messed up and then walk away and do nothing about it?

Share with your group that when we look intently into God’s perfect ways and don’t actually go and apply them to our lives, it is just as senseless as looking into a mirror and not fixing your appearance. God intends for us to be changed daily by the gospel and for those changes to be evident in the way we live.

In James 1:22, James's command is literally to "keep on becoming doers of God's Word." He insisted on an obedience which lasts. This does not minimize the importance of hearing God's Word. It does emphasize strongly the need for acting. Too often Christians view a sermon as an interesting moral or theological lecture. We need to do something other than sitting and listening. Jesus pronounced a blessing only on those "who hear the word of God and obey it"²

In Genesis 2:7, God formed the first human being by breathing life into his body. The union of spirit and body produced a living human being. In death the spirit returns to God, and the body decays into dust. A body without the spirit is a corpse. In the same way faith without works is also dead. A person claiming to have faith but lacking works is spiritually as lifeless as a corpse. An inactive faith, entombed in a creed affirmed by the intellect, has no more usefulness than a body with no heartbeat or breath. James did not intend to belittle correct doctrinal views, but he demanded practical holiness as an evidence of real faith.³

In your own words, what does it mean to be a hearer of the Word and not a doer?

When have you seen that lived out in your life? Why is it so easy to fall into a pattern of hearing and not doing?

Describe the ways authentic faith in Christ changes us. For example, there's a popular worship song that says, we are changed "from the inside out."

Share that when we realize that Christ took on death and the wrath of God for us, our hearts are never the same. We owe Him an eternal debt of gratitude. An authentic relationship begins to change us from the inside out, it changes what we desire. We desire to please Him. We desire to look deeply and intently into His Word for instruction, correction, and guidance. We are no longer satisfied with living in our old ways and having sin as our master. We long for something more. Our hearts are fixed on the things of heaven.

2. Our actions are proof of Christ's work in our lives.

READ JAMES 2:14-26.

What does James say will prove that our faith is authentic?

Our profession of Christianity demands a test. The true test of our faith is whether or not we produce fruit.

What are some examples of 'good works' that can be done by teenagers?

Remind students that dead trees don't produce fruit. Living ones do. This fruit had to come from something that was alive. In the same way, a faith that is alive will show itself to the world in a variety of beautiful ways. You've just named some. There are endless possibilities for our faith to show evidence of being alive and active.

How does 'faith' without works have a negative impact on the advancement of God's kingdom?

DIAGNOSE

True freedom comes from being in fellowship with God. The world tells us that freedom means doing whatever we want, often leading to sin and rebellion. Scripture tells us that true freedom comes through being transformed daily by God's Word and putting our faith into action.

Based on the scale below, how do you feel like you live your life on mission for God? Explain.



The topic of faith in this passage is not faith in general but a specific kind of faith, one which has no deeds. The question is not, "Can faith save the lost?" Of course, faith saves the lost. The question is, "Can a faith without deeds save the lost?" The answer to that question is "no."

Give an example of how your life is a testimony to the forgiveness and freedom that only Jesus can offer.

In what ways is your life living proof that Jesus is real and can change lives?

We are no longer bound by the requirements of the law, because Christ has set us free from the law's penalty. We are alive and we are free. Our challenge is to live that way on a daily basis; to allow God's Word to speak to us and change us; to be doers of the Word and not just hearers; to produce fruit for God's kingdom not because we have to, but because we want to.

MOVE

For the next 24 hours, each time you look into a mirror, think back to the point James is making and ask God to show you at least one part of your life that needs work. Ask Him to use His Word, a fellow believer, circumstances, or some other method to speak to you. Honor Him with your willingness to change and to be both a hearer and a doer.

PRAY

Draw students' attention to the key verse. Instruct the group to repeat the verse multiple times.

At some point during our study, I hope to speak with each of you individually about how the gospel of Christ has changed me. I would love to find out about your hobbies and interests, your families, and your hometowns. In the end, though, there is really nothing I would rather talk about than the gospel.

As you finish today's session, what areas of your life need to be transformed (speech, thoughts, relationships, and so on)? Write your prayer to Him in the space provided.