

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Epistle of Straw?

A verse-by-verse adult Bible study of James · ten sessions

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The Epistle of James

Teacher's Guide

Session One

The Epistle of Straw?

Introducing the Letter of James

A free companion to the Bible study

Larry Herzog Jr.

A Note to the Teacher

Thank you for leading this study. Whether you are a pastor, a Sunday school teacher, a small-group leader, or a parent teaching older children at home, you have taken on the serious and rewarding work of opening God's Word to others. This guide exists to help you do that with confidence.

What you hold is a companion to the main Bible study book. The book itself is written for the student — a reader who will engage the chapter, look up the passages in his or her own Bible, and come to class or group ready to discuss. This guide is written for you — the person responsible for shaping that hour of teaching and conversation.

You will find here a suggested time plan for the session, the theological background you need to handle the material confidently, anticipated questions with suggested responses, teaching tips drawn from real classroom experience, and additional resources if you want to prepare more deeply.

One word about how this guide is meant to be used: it is a tool, not a script. You know your class. You know what will resonate and what will fall flat. You know where the Spirit may be prompting a longer pause or a different emphasis. Use what serves you, set aside what does not, and teach the Word faithfully in the way God has gifted you to teach it.

A Word About Prayer

Before you teach, pray. Pray for yourself, that you would teach faithfully and humbly. Pray for your students, that the Spirit would open their hearts to the Word. Pray for the hour, that Christ would be honored in it. No amount of preparation replaces the prayer of a teacher who knows he is utterly dependent on the Lord of the harvest.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- Read Session One of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- Read the Epistle of James in one sitting, preferably in your preferred translation. It takes about twenty minutes. Getting a sense of the whole will shape how you introduce the parts.
- Read Luther's 1522 Preface to the New Testament in full. It is short — perhaps ten minutes. Luther's Works, Volume 35, contains the English translation. Reading the actual text will spare you from parroting the famous quote without context.
- If you have access to the Book of Concord, glance through Formula of Concord, Article IV (Epitome). You will not teach it in depth this week — that comes in Session Five — but knowing it is there will give you confidence.
- Pray. As noted above, this is not a pious add-on. It is the work itself.

Materials to Have on Hand

- Your Bible (or Bibles, if you use more than one translation in teaching).
- A copy of the Book of Concord, if available. Having it physically present on the table signals to students that you are teaching under the Confessions, not improvising.
- A whiteboard or flip chart, especially for the justification-vs-sanctification distinction. Visual reinforcement matters.
- Copies of the student book for any students who do not yet have one.
- Name tags if you have new students, at least for the first few sessions.

Knowing Your Class

Different classes will bring different backgrounds and concerns to this study. A few patterns to be aware of:

- **Students from Reformed backgrounds** typically do not struggle with James. Calvin loved James, and the Reformed tradition has generally been

comfortable with the letter. These students may be puzzled that there is any question at all.

- **Students from evangelical or non-denominational backgrounds** may never have heard that there is a question about James. They have read "faith without works is dead" and assumed it was uncontroversial. The history of controversy will be new information.
- **Students from Roman Catholic backgrounds** may have been taught that James 2 refutes Luther and justification by faith alone. They will need a careful, patient, non-polemical handling of the question.
- **Lifelong Lutherans** may have grown up hearing the "epistle of straw" phrase without ever knowing exactly what Luther meant by it, or being equipped to answer the charge that Lutherans do not really like James. Giving them solid ground here is a gift.

Whatever mix you have, the same careful answer serves all of them: James is Scripture, rightly read in harmony with Paul, and Luther's pastoral concern — though sharp in its 1522 expression — does not undermine the Church's reception of James as canonical.

Suggested Time Plan

The following is one way to structure the sixty minutes. Adjust freely to fit your class, your venue, and the energy in the room.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and welcome
0:05–0:10	Icebreaker: what do you already know about James?
0:10–0:25	Part One: Who wrote James, and to whom?
0:25–0:40	Part Two: Luther and the "epistle of straw"
0:40–0:50	Part Three: How we will read James
0:50–0:57	Discussion (choose 2–3 questions)
0:57–1:00	Closing prayer and next-week assignment



Pacing Tip

New teachers consistently underestimate how long discussion takes. If your class is engaged, a single good discussion question can easily eat ten minutes. Build in the flexibility to let that happen, and do not feel you must cover every point in the chapter. The chapter is theirs to read; your job is to illuminate, clarify, and pastor — not to re-read the chapter aloud.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

What follows is section-by-section commentary on the student chapter, with suggested emphases, pitfalls to avoid, and material that did not fit in the book itself but that you as the teacher may want at your fingertips.

Opening: "Why Start Here?"

The chapter opens by acknowledging that this study begins with a question rather than with the text. Do not apologize for this. Students who came in with the "epistle of straw" question on their minds will be relieved that you are addressing it openly rather than pretending it does not exist.

A good opening move is to ask the class what they have heard about James before you begin teaching. You will get answers like "faith without works is dead," "consider it pure joy," "the tongue is a fire," and often "didn't Luther not like it?" All of these are useful. They surface the material the class is bringing with them, and they let you know what you will need to address in detail.

What If No One Brings Up Luther?

If the Luther question does not surface organically, you may still want to address it. Most students have at least heard the phrase, and handling it head-on in the first session rather than letting it fester is pastorally wise. You might simply say, "Some of you may have heard that Luther called James an 'epistle of straw.' I want to address that head-on today, because it sometimes gets in the way of our reading this letter well."

Part One: Who Wrote James, and to Whom?

The Four Men Named James

If time permits, briefly sketch all four. Most students will be interested to learn that the New Testament contains multiple men by this name:

- James the son of Zebedee, brother of John, one of the inner three among the Twelve. Martyred around A.D. 44 (Acts 12:2). Too early to be our author.
- James the son of Alphaeus, one of the Twelve. A shadowy figure about whom we know little.
- James the Less, mentioned in Mark 15:40. Possibly the same as James the son of Alphaeus; possibly not. Scholarly opinion is divided.
- James the Just, the half-brother of our Lord. The overwhelming traditional and scholarly consensus for our author.

The Half-Brother Question

Confessional Lutherans have a small pastoral challenge here that should be addressed briefly if it comes up. Rome teaches the perpetual virginity of Mary, which requires that the "brothers" of Jesus be either cousins or step-brothers from an earlier marriage of Joseph. Lutheranism has not dogmatized the perpetual virginity of Mary — Luther himself seems to have held it, but the Confessions do not require it.

The most straightforward reading of the Greek word for brothers (*adelphoi*) in Matthew 13 and Galatians 1 is that James was a true half-brother of Jesus, born to Mary and Joseph after the virginal conception of our Lord. This is the view most confessional Lutheran theologians hold today, and it is what this study assumes. But you do not need to make a big deal of the point; if a student asks, give a brief, gracious answer and move on.

The Earliest NT Document?

This point genuinely surprises most students, and it is worth lingering on. If the class has time, draw out the implications:

- James is writing before Paul has written Romans or Galatians — the very letters he is sometimes accused of contradicting.
- James cannot be responding to Paul's doctrine of justification, because that doctrine has not yet been articulated in the form we know it.
- James is reflecting, instead, the earliest stream of Christian teaching — rooted in the Sermon on the Mount, the Jewish wisdom tradition, and the pastoral concerns of the Jerusalem church.

A Useful Phrase for Class

"When James wrote this, he wasn't arguing with Paul. He couldn't have been. Paul hadn't written yet." This is a simple, memorable framing that helps students re-set their assumptions before they ever open the text.

Part Two: Luther and the "Epistle of Straw"

This is the heart of the session, and the part that requires the most care. Take your time here. If you have to sacrifice minutes from another section, sacrifice them from the closing discussion rather than from this one.

Reading Luther's Actual Words

If you have access to Luther's Works, Volume 35, or an online text of the 1522 Preface, consider reading a paragraph aloud to the class. Hearing Luther's own voice — rather than a summary of it — changes the tenor of the discussion. Students who have only heard the "straw" phrase are often surprised to discover how measured the surrounding context is.

Luther's comparison is explicit: he ranks James against John, 1 John, the major Pauline epistles, and 1 Peter. He is not asking whether James is Scripture; he is asking how directly it preaches Christ. That is a different question, and it is a legitimate question for a pastor to ask, even if we disagree with his conclusion.

The Pastoral Context

Spend real time here. The class needs to understand that Luther's sharpness was not academic petulance; it was the anguish of a pastor who had nearly been destroyed by works-righteousness and was now watching opponents deploy James 2 against the Gospel. If you can help your students feel the weight of that pastoral context, the "epistle of straw" remark stops being a gotcha and becomes a window into Luther's heart.

A specific note: avoid caricaturing Rome. The Lutheran Confessions take Rome's theology seriously enough to answer it carefully. Do the same. When you describe Roman Catholic use of James 2, describe it fairly, not as a straw man. Your Roman Catholic visitors (if any) will appreciate the honesty, and your Lutheran students will learn something about how to engage theological opponents charitably.

What Luther Did Not Do

This is the payoff of the whole discussion. Luther did not remove James. Luther did not forbid reading it. Luther did not deny its inspiration. In his later editions he softened the famous line. And — this is worth emphasizing — his own most famous description of faith, in the Preface to Romans, is fully compatible with what James actually teaches.

The Luther-quoted-Luther moment (where you show that Luther's "Faith is a living, busy, active, mighty thing" is essentially James's point in different vocabulary) is often the moment when something clicks for students. Plan for it.

Part Three: How We Will Read James

The Justification-Sanctification Distinction

Get this on the whiteboard. Literally write it out. Two columns:

- **Justification:** God's verdict. Coram Deo (before God). By faith alone. On account of Christ alone. Paul's primary question.
- **Sanctification / fruits of faith:** The life that flows from that verdict. Coram mundo (before the world). By the Spirit's work in the baptized. James's primary question.

Tell the students, plainly, that this distinction will be on the whiteboard (figuratively if not literally) for the entire ten-week series. Every time James seems to be saying something problematic, the question to ask is: which question is he addressing? Once we know that, the apparent tension dissolves.

A Preview of Session Five

At this point, some student will likely ask about James 2:24. Do not try to resolve it now. Tell the class — and mean it — that you will spend an entire session on that passage, and that you are holding your answer until then so that you can give it the time it deserves. This builds anticipation for Session Five and keeps you from botching the answer in a rushed three-minute treatment.

The One-Sentence Summary

If a student needs to take away one sentence from this session, make it this:
"Saving faith is alone in justifying us, but it is never alone in the life of the

Christian." That sentence is pure Formula of Concord, and it will serve the class well across the whole study.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

What follows are questions that come up reliably when this session is taught. Suggested responses are provided, but these are starting points for your own thinking, not answers to memorize.

"Didn't Luther want to remove James from the Bible?"

No. He ranked it lower among the New Testament books in his 1522 Preface, and he later removed the "epistle of straw" line from subsequent editions. But he never removed the book itself. James appears in every edition of the Luther Bible. The idea that Luther wanted James out is a persistent misconception.

"If James was written before Paul's letters, doesn't that make James more authoritative?"

The date of writing has no bearing on authority. All of Scripture is equally inspired and authoritative. What the early dating of James does is help us read the letter on its own terms, without assuming it is a response to Paul. It situates James in the earliest life of the Jerusalem church, before the great controversies of the later decades had fully developed.

"My Roman Catholic friend says James 2 disproves the doctrine of justification by faith alone. What do I say?"

Say two things. First, that you are going to answer this question in detail in Session Five, and invite them to the session. Second, that Paul and James use the word "justified" differently. Paul asks how a sinner is declared righteous before God (answer: by faith alone, on account of Christ). James asks how a faith-claim is shown to be genuine (answer: by its fruits). Both are true. Neither contradicts the other. The Formula of Concord, Article IV, works this out carefully.

"Why did the Church accept James as Scripture if there were questions about it?"

Some of the early Fathers did have questions — Eusebius in the fourth century notes that James was "disputed" in some quarters. But the Church's consistent practice was to read and honor James as Scripture, and by the time of the fourth-century canonical lists (Athanasius, the Council of Carthage), James was firmly received. The Church received James because it was recognized as apostolic — written by James the Just, leader of the Jerusalem church, and faithful to the apostolic teaching.

"Is James the same as James the son of Zebedee?"

No. James the son of Zebedee was martyred around A.D. 44 (Acts 12:2), too early to have written this letter. Our author is James the Just, the half-brother of our Lord, who led the Jerusalem church until his martyrdom around A.D. 62.

"What if I don't think Mary had other children?"

Lutheran confessional documents do not require a position on the perpetual virginity of Mary. Luther himself seems to have held it. If a student comes from a tradition that insists on Mary's perpetual virginity, you can note that the author of James is the brother (or, by that reading, the close relative or step-brother) of Jesus in either case, and that the identification of the author is not materially affected. Do not turn this into a debate. Pastoral charity here goes a long way.

"I don't really struggle with this. Why spend so much time on Luther's quote?"

A fair question, especially from students who came up in Lutheran circles without ever being troubled by James. Two answers. First: you will be asked about this by friends and neighbors, and it is good to be equipped. Second: understanding why Luther reacted as he did teaches us something about the pastoral stakes of theology, which will help us read the rest of the letter more carefully.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter ends with six discussion questions. You will not have time for all of them. Pick two or three, and shape your choice to the class in front of you. Some notes on each:

Question 1 — Prior impressions of James and Luther

A warm-up question. Good for opening discussion. Everyone can answer it, and it reveals what the class is actually bringing with them. Do not try to correct impressions in this moment; just gather them. The rest of the session will do the correcting.

Question 2 — The early dating of James

Theologically substantial. This is a good question for classes that enjoy the historical-critical dimension. If your class is more devotional than historical in its orientation, save this one for individual reflection rather than group discussion.

Question 3 — James's humility in introducing himself

A pastorally rich question. Works well for small groups and for classes that enjoy contemplative discussion. Invites students to reflect on what it would mean for them to introduce themselves as servants of Christ rather than by their credentials.

Question 4 — Explaining the justification-sanctification distinction

The most important question for long-term retention. If a student can put the distinction in his or her own words, the rest of the study will go better. Consider making this question a pair-share: have students explain it to one another in two minutes before you discuss as a group.

Question 5 — Luther's pastoral reasons for sharpness

Invites charity toward Luther and, by extension, toward theological opponents in general. A mature question that can go deep if the class is willing.

Question 6 — What do you hope to learn?

A good closing question. Records expectations, which you can circle back to in Session Ten when you reflect on what the class actually did learn. Consider writing these down as students share them.

Managing a Dominant Talker

Every class has one. If a student is dominating discussion, a gentle and effective move is to say: "That's a good thought. Let's hear from someone who hasn't spoken yet." Do not shame, but do redirect. Your quieter students will thank you.

For Further Study

If you want to prepare more deeply for this session — or if a student asks for recommendations — the following resources are excellent.

Primary Sources

- **Luther's Works, Volume 35: Word and Sacrament I.** Contains the 1522 Preface to the New Testament and the Preface to James. Essential reading before teaching this session.
- **The Book of Concord.** Especially the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV (on justification) and the Formula of Concord, Article IV (on good works). The Kolb/Wengert edition or the Concordia Reader's Edition are both accessible to laypeople.

Commentaries

- **Curtis Giese, Concordia Commentary: James (CPH).** A thorough, confessional Lutheran treatment. If you buy only one commentary on James, buy this one.
- **Douglas Moo, The Letter of James (Pillar New Testament Commentary).** A careful evangelical commentary. Moo is a Reformed scholar, so his framework differs from ours at points, but his exegesis is consistently strong.
- **Martin Franzmann's treatment of James** in his various writings. Franzmann was a confessional Lutheran scholar with a pastoral voice worth hearing.

For the Historical Background

- **Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History.** Book II, chapter 23 contains the traditional account of James's martyrdom. Useful background for the author's life.
- **Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews.** Book XX, chapter 9 contains the brief but historically significant reference to James's death.

Devotional Reading

- **The Lutheran Study Bible** (ESV edition, CPH). The study notes on James are thoroughly confessional and pastorally framed. Excellent for teachers and recommendable to students.

A Final Word

You are about to teach the Word of God. That is an extraordinary thing, and a weighty one. James himself warned, in the very letter you are about to teach, that not many should become teachers, because teachers will be judged with greater strictness (see James 3:1).

Do not let that warning paralyze you. Let it sober you, and then let it send you to Christ. You are not teaching on your own authority. You are passing on what has been passed down to you, through the Scriptures the Church has received, read, prayed, and confessed for two thousand years. Your job is faithfulness, not originality. If you teach what James actually says, in harmony with the rest of Scripture and in the framework the Confessions give us, you will serve your class well — whether you are a gifted communicator or a plain-spoken one.

Pray before. Pray during. Pray after. Trust the Spirit to do what only the Spirit can do. Teach with joy, because you are doing something worth doing. And next week, when the class gathers again, walk in trusting that the same Lord who gave His servant James words to write in the first century has given you, in your own small way, the privilege of handing those words on.

May the Lord bless your teaching, your students, and the work of your hands.



Soli Deo Gloria

The Epistle of James — Teacher's Guide, Session Two

The Epistle of James

Teacher's Guide

Session Two

Trials, Wisdom, and the Father of Lights

James 1:1-18

A free companion to the Bible study

Larry Herzog Jr.

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Two. Last week you laid the groundwork — introducing James as a book, handling Luther's concerns honestly, and establishing the justification-sanctification distinction that will anchor the whole series. This week we finally open the letter and begin to hear James on his own terms.

The passage before you is unusually rich for an opening. In eighteen verses James touches on trials, wisdom, the double-minded heart, the reversal of rich and poor, the nature of temptation, and — climactically — the new birth by the Word of truth. The temptation for the teacher is to treat each topic in isolation and lose the connections. Resist that temptation. The whole passage moves toward verse eighteen, and keeping that arc visible is the most important thing you can do this hour.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

Before James ever asks his readers to do anything, he tells them what God has already done: God brought us forth, of His own will, by the Word of truth. The Gospel comes first. Teach this as the frame for the whole passage.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- Read Session Two of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- Read James 1:1-18 multiple times, in two different translations if possible. Get the passage into your bones.
- Pay special attention to the shift in verse thirteen, where James pivots from trial (outward testing) to temptation (inward enticement). This is a crucial hinge in the passage.
- Review Luther's Small Catechism explanation of the First Petition of the Lord's Prayer ("Hallowed be Thy name") and the Sixth Petition ("Lead us not into temptation"). These connect directly to James's teaching on prayer and temptation.
- Read the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article II (Original Sin), if you have access. It grounds James's teaching on desire and temptation in the broader Lutheran understanding of the fallen human condition.
- Pray.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three doctrines come into view in this passage, and the class will be better served if you have these clear in your own mind before you teach:

- **The providence of God in trials.** God permits trials and uses them for our good, but He is not the author of evil. The trial is not itself the gift; the refined faith that emerges is.
- **The doctrine of original sin.** James's teaching that temptation arises from our own desire is a statement of the doctrine of original sin. The fallen heart is the source of temptation, worked on by the enemy.
- **Regeneration through the Word.** Verse eighteen teaches that God brings us to new birth through His Word. This is the means of grace — the Word (including the Word joined to water in Baptism) as the instrument by which God creates faith.

Suggested Time Plan

This session has more content than Session One, and the pacing is trickier. Do not feel obligated to treat every topic equally; let the climax in verse eighteen be your destination, and shape your emphasis accordingly.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and brief review of Session One
0:05–0:15	Trials and steadfastness (vv. 2-4, 12)
0:15–0:25	Wisdom and the double-minded heart (vv. 5-8)
0:25–0:30	The reversal of rich and poor (vv. 9-11)
0:30–0:42	God is not the author of temptation (vv. 13-15)
0:42–0:52	The Father of lights and new birth (vv. 16-18)
0:52–0:58	Discussion (choose 2 questions)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and next-week assignment



Where to Slow Down

If you run short on time, the section most worth preserving is the handling of verses 16-18. This is the Gospel moment in the passage, and it is the theological frame for everything else James will say across the letter. Cut elsewhere before cutting here.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Verses 1-4, 12: Trials and Steadfastness

Begin by reading the passage aloud — all eighteen verses. Students hearing the passage read in one sitting will pick up the flow in a way they will not if you just dive into verse two.

When you reach the teaching on trials, the danger is sentimentalism. Avoid phrases like "God will never give you more than you can handle," which is bad theology and not in fact what James says. What James says is that God uses trials to produce steadfastness, and that steadfastness makes us mature. That is different from saying trials are manageable or comfortable. Some trials are devastating. James does not minimize them. He tells us what God is doing through them.

A Distinction Worth Making

The gift is not the trial. The gift is the refined faith that emerges from the trial. Make this distinction aloud for your class. It matters pastorally, because students who are in the middle of a hard trial need to know that God is not pleased with their suffering as such; He is working for their good through it.

The Word "Count"

Spend a moment on the word "count" or "consider" (Greek *hegeomai*). It is a word of deliberate reckoning. James is not asking his readers to feel joy. He is asking them to make a judgment of faith about what the trial is doing. This distinction is pastorally important for any student currently in a hard place. Feelings may remain what they are. Faith reckons differently.

Verses 5-8: Wisdom and the Double-Minded

The logical connection to verses 2-4 is: if trials are God's instruments, we need wisdom to live through them. Make that connection explicit; students often miss it.

The character of God's giving in verse five is the Gospel on display. He gives generously. He gives without reproach. He gives to all who ask. This is the God Jesus teaches us to pray to — the Father whose disposition toward His children is unchangingly generous.

The Double-Minded Person

The double-minded person (Greek *dipsuchos*, literally "two-souled") is not the honest doubter but the divided heart. Be careful here pastorally. Students who wrestle with doubt are often already hard on themselves, and they can hear this passage as condemning them. James is not condemning the honest doubter. He is describing the person who asks God for wisdom while reserving the right to refuse the wisdom God gives.

A helpful analogy: the double-minded person is like someone who asks their doctor for advice but has already decided what they will and will not do regardless of the answer. They are not really asking. They are testing. James's point is that such a person is not in the posture of faith and will not receive what God has promised.

A Pastoral Caution

If a student in your class is visibly struggling with doubt or anxiety, do not let this passage land on them as an accusation. The distinction between the divided heart and the honest doubter matters enormously. The honest doubter who says "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24) is not what James is describing here.

Verses 9-11: The Reversal

This is a brief section, and you can treat it briefly — but do not skip it. James's economic teaching matters, and it is easy for middle-class American Lutherans to spiritualize it away. Do not spiritualize. James means something concrete: the lowly Christian has a real exaltation in Christ, and the wealthy Christian has real cause for sober reflection about the temporariness of wealth.

For a rural North Dakota audience, this passage actually lands well. Farming communities understand economic precariousness in ways that urban professionals

sometimes do not. A bad harvest, a swing in commodity prices, a medical event — any of these can reshape a family's financial life in a season. James's image of the rich man fading like a wildflower in the summer heat would have resonated with his Jewish-Christian audience, and it still resonates with anyone close to the land.

Verses 13-15: Temptation's True Source

This is the theological heart of the passage for the Lutheran teacher, and it deserves real time. Slow down here.

The Pivot in the Word

James has been using *peirasmos* in the sense of outward trial (verses 2, 12). In verse thirteen he pivots to the sense of inward temptation. Many English translations handle this by switching vocabulary — from "trial" to "temptation." In the Greek, it is the same word with a shift in sense. Point this out to the class. It helps them see that James is drawing a sharp distinction: trials may come from God (providentially), but temptation to sin does not.

God Tempts No One

This is one of the clearest statements in the New Testament that God is not the author of sin. Read it carefully. God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself tempts no one. This matters for Lutheran theology because we hold a strong doctrine of providence — God ordains all things, even the trials of His people. But providence does not make God the cause of sin. Sin has its own source, which is the fallen desire of the creature.

Connecting to the Catechism

Luther's Small Catechism explanation of the Sixth Petition — "Lead us not into temptation" — says: "God tempts no one, but we pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us..." This is almost a direct quotation of James 1:13, and it is worth reading aloud in class. It shows students that James has shaped the very prayers of the Lutheran tradition.

Desire, Sin, Death

The progression in verse fifteen is important: desire, when it conceives, gives birth to sin; sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death. Three points to draw out for the class:

- Temptation is not sin. The pull toward sin arises in us because we are fallen creatures with disordered desires. Feeling the pull is not yet yielding. This matters pastorally — Christians who feel the pull of sin sometimes conclude they have already sinned by feeling it. James says otherwise.
- Yielding is sin. When desire conceives — when we consent and act on the pull — sin is born. The responsibility is ours.
- Unchecked sin leads to death. This is the long arc of the fallen life apart from grace. James is not saying every individual sin leads immediately to death; he is describing the trajectory of sin allowed to grow to maturity.

Verses 16-18: The Gospel Climax

This is the passage the whole session is moving toward. Arrive here with energy. This is where James reveals what has been under everything he has said to this point: the unchanging goodness of God, and His prior act of giving us birth through His Word.

The Father of Lights

Take a moment to let the image work. Lights vary — the sun rises and sets, the moon waxes and wanes, stars are eclipsed by clouds. But the Father who made them does not vary. His disposition toward His children does not shift with circumstances, our performance, or the passage of time. This is a wonderful pastoral truth, and students often hear it with relief.

Born Again by the Word

Verse eighteen is Lutheran gold. Several things to emphasize:

- **"Of His own will"** — God's initiative, not ours. We did not cause our own new birth. He brought us forth because He willed to.
- **"He brought us forth"** — the word describes giving birth. This is the doctrine of regeneration. God gave us spiritual life, just as He gives biological life.
- **"By the Word of truth"** — the means of grace. God uses the Word (including the Word joined to water in Baptism) to create faith in us. This

is the Lutheran doctrine of the means of grace, and it is taught here in a single verse by James.

The Means of Grace in One Verse

James 1:18 is an excellent proof-text for the Lutheran doctrine of the means of grace. God does not create faith immediately or through our own spiritual exertion. He creates faith through the Word. This is why we preach the Word, read the Word, sing the Word, baptize with the Word, and commune with the Word. The Word is how God gives us life and preserves the life He has given.

Firstfruits of His Creatures

The phrase "firstfruits of His creatures" can feel opaque. Explain it briefly. In the Old Testament, the firstfruits of the harvest were the first and best offering presented to God, a pledge of the rest of the harvest to come. James is saying that Christians are the firstfruits of God's new creation — a pledge and foretaste of what God will do with all things. This places the Christian life in cosmic perspective. We are the leading edge of God's restoring work in creation.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

"If God uses trials, isn't He responsible for the bad things that happen to me?"

The Lutheran answer is careful. God permits trials and uses them for our good, but He is not the author of evil. The evil that trials contain (the illness, the betrayal, the loss) has its source in the fallen world, in human sin, or in the enemy. But God, in His providence, weaves even these things into His purposes for us. This is the same mystery Paul points to in Romans 8:28 — God works all things together for good. He does not cause all things, but He uses all things.

"What if I ask God for wisdom and nothing happens?"

Two things to say. First, check the posture. James's qualification is real — we must ask in faith, without doubting. If we are asking while reserving the right to refuse God's answer, we are not really asking. Second, recognize that God's answer often comes through ordinary means — through Scripture, through counsel from mature Christians, through the preaching of the Word, through unfolding circumstances. We may be waiting for a dramatic sign when God has already provided the answer through the ordinary means He has given.

"Doesn't the Lord's Prayer ask God to lead us not into temptation? Doesn't that imply He might?"

Luther's Small Catechism answers this beautifully. "God tempts no one, but we pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us..." The petition is not asking God to refrain from tempting us; it is asking Him to preserve us from being tempted by the enemies that would lead us astray. James 1:13 and the Sixth Petition are in full agreement.

"What about the difference between trials and temptations? They feel the same to me sometimes."

They can feel the same, and the same outward event can function as both. A financial crisis, for example, can be a trial (testing whether our trust is in God or in money) and also a temptation (to despair, to dishonesty, to envy). The same circumstance presents both dimensions. What James clarifies is where the pull toward sin comes from. The outward circumstance may be providentially permitted by God. But the inward pull toward sin arises from our own desire, not from God.

"If God has given us new birth by the Word, why do I still struggle with sin?"

This is a deeply pastoral question and deserves a real answer. The Lutheran doctrine of the *simul iustus et peccator* — simultaneously justified and a sinner — addresses it directly. In this life, the Christian is both a new creation in Christ and still a fallen creature with remaining sin. The new birth is real, and it is the defining reality of our existence before God. But it does not yet fully transform our fallen flesh. That will wait for the resurrection. Meanwhile, we live as those who have been born again but are not yet glorified — fighting the old Adam daily, returning daily to the Word, and trusting that the one who began a good work in us will bring it to completion.

"Is James teaching prosperity theology with his language about the lowly being exalted?"

No. James's exaltation of the lowly is a spiritual exaltation in Christ, not a promise of material prosperity. The poor Christian is exalted in the sense that he or she is a child of God, heir of the kingdom, joint-heir with Christ — a dignity infinitely greater than any earthly wealth. James is doing precisely the opposite of prosperity theology. He is saying that material wealth is fragile and temporary, while the exaltation in Christ is eternal.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. Pick two that suit your class. Some notes on each:

Question 1 — Counting trials as joy

The most pastorally rich question. Works especially well for classes with members who have weathered real trials. Be prepared for one or more students to share something deeply personal. Receive it gratefully and do not rush to comment.

Question 2 — God's generous giving

A good question for classes where students struggle with a view of God as stingy or reluctant. This is more common than we sometimes realize, especially among students who grew up under harsh or demanding religious teaching. Let this question offer a different portrait of God.

Question 3 — The double-minded pattern

A good self-examination question. Works well for a mature class willing to be honest about the ways we hedge our prayers. Handle with care in a class that includes new or fragile Christians; a premature demand for self-examination can discourage rather than help.

Question 4 — Valuations of rich and poor

Potentially politically charged. Be aware of your class. In a diverse class this question can be enormously valuable; in a class where political positions run hot in one direction, it can derail the session. Judge the room.

Question 5 — Blaming God for temptation

A probing question that works well for personal reflection, perhaps less well for public discussion. Consider inviting students to sit with this one quietly rather than discussing it aloud.

Question 6 — New birth as God's act

The theological payoff question. If your class enjoys doctrine, this is the one to pick. It also sets up Session Three well, since we are about to see how the Word that gave us birth continues to shape our ongoing life.

The Most Important Takeaway

If students leave with one thing from this session, let it be this: God's disposition toward His children is unchangingly good. Trials do not change it. Our failures do not change it. Our doubts do not change it. Every good and perfect gift comes from Him, and He Himself, of His own will, has brought us forth by His Word. That is the ground on which the rest of our lives as Christians is lived.

For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- **Romans 5:1-5.** Paul's parallel teaching on suffering producing endurance and character. Read alongside James 1:2-4.
- **1 Peter 1:3-9.** Peter's parallel teaching on trials testing the genuineness of faith. All three apostles — James, Paul, Peter — teach the same essential truth about trials.
- **Matthew 5-7.** The Sermon on the Mount. James's opening beatitude-like structure echoes Jesus' teaching, and reading the Sermon alongside James reveals how deeply James has absorbed his Brother's teaching.
- **Proverbs 2:1-11.** The Old Testament background for James's teaching on asking God for wisdom.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- **Small Catechism, Sixth Petition.** Luther's explanation of "Lead us not into temptation" is essentially a commentary on James 1:13.
- **Small Catechism, Baptism, Part Four.** The daily dying and rising of the baptized — essential for understanding the ongoing life that flows from the new birth of James 1:18.
- **Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article II.** On original sin. Grounds James's teaching on desire and temptation in the broader Lutheran understanding of fallen humanity.

Commentaries

- **Curtis Giese, Concordia Commentary: James.** Giese handles verses 16-18 with particular care, drawing out the theology of regeneration through the Word.
- **Douglas Moo, The Letter of James.** Moo is especially strong on the literary and lexical details — the shift in *peirasmos*, the meaning of *dipsuchos*, and so on.

A Final Word

This session covers a lot of ground, but its heart is simple: the Gospel comes first. Before James asks anything of his readers, he reminds them of everything God has already done. That order — gift before demand, indicative before imperative, Gospel before Law — is the order of the whole Christian life, and it is the order you should preserve in your teaching.

Students who leave this session should feel, above all, the goodness of the Father of lights. If they leave weighed down by James's exhortations without being buoyed by his proclamation, you have inverted the passage. Teach the Gospel as the foundation, and the ethical instruction will fall into its proper place.

Next week the passage turns to what it looks like to live in the light of the new birth — to be doers of the Word, not hearers only. But doing flows from being, and being flows from the prior gift. Keep that frame visible, and James will begin to come into focus for your class not as a moralist but as the pastor he truly is.

May the Lord bless your teaching and preserve you and your students in the new life He has given through His Word.



Soli Deo Gloria

The Epistle of James

Teacher's Guide

Session Three

Hearers and Doers of the Word

James 1:19-27

A free companion to the Bible study

Larry Herzog Jr.

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Three. This week's passage contains some of the most quoted verses in James — be doers of the Word and not hearers only, the image of the mirror, the definition of pure religion. Familiarity is actually the challenge here. Your students have heard these verses in fragments their whole Christian lives, and the danger is that they will nod in agreement and miss what James is actually saying.

The pastoral center of this session is the relationship between the Word and the Christian life. James is not pivoting from theology to ethics. He is continuing the theology of the Word that began in verse eighteen. The Word that gave us new birth is the Word that continues to shape us. Every imperative in this passage is directed to people who have already been given new life by the Word. This is not a recipe for manufacturing Christianity; it is a portrait of Christianity alive.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

The same Word that gave us new birth continues to form us — and genuine reception of the Word is always accompanied by the life the Word produces. Hearing without doing is not a partial Christianity; it is self-deception.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- Read Session Three of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- Read James 1:19-27 multiple times. Notice how it connects back to verse 18 — the implanted Word of verse 21 is the same Word that gave new birth in verse 18.
- Review Luther's Small Catechism Part Four on Baptism, especially the section on what Baptism indicates for daily living. The daily dying and rising there is essentially what James describes here as the ongoing life of the Word-shaped Christian.
- Review the Formula of Concord, Article VI (on the Third Use of the Law) if you have access. It is directly relevant to James's "law of liberty" language.
- Pray.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three doctrines come into view in this passage:

- **The means of grace.** The Word is not just a source of information; it is the instrument by which God saves. James calls it the implanted Word that is able to save your souls. This is Lutheran ground.
- **The third use of the Law.** For the baptized Christian, the Law is not only an accuser but also a guide — showing the shape of the new obedience that flows from faith. James's "law of liberty" points directly to this.
- **The inseparability of faith and fruit.** Previewing what we will see more fully in Session Five, James is already teaching that genuine faith produces doing — not as a supplement to faith, but as faith's natural and inevitable evidence.

A Word on the Third Use of the Law

Formula of Concord, Article VI, teaches that the Law has three uses: (1) as a curb on outward wickedness in society; (2) as a mirror showing us our sin and driving us to Christ; and (3) as a guide for the new obedience of the

baptized. James 1:25 is one of the clearest New Testament texts supporting the third use. Be ready to name this briefly in class if a student asks why we are calling the Law a source of liberty.

Suggested Time Plan

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and brief review of Session Two
0:05–0:18	Quick to hear, slow to speak (vv. 19-21)
0:18–0:35	Doers of the Word and the mirror (vv. 22-25)
0:35–0:52	Pure and undefiled religion (vv. 26-27)
0:52–0:58	Discussion (choose 2 questions)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and next-week assignment



Where to Slow Down

The mirror image in verses 22-25 is the heart of this session, and it rewards careful treatment. If time gets tight, trim the opening section rather than the mirror. The "law of liberty" phrase in particular is one that your Lutheran students may have never had carefully explained.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Verses 19-21: The Posture of the Hearer

Open by reading the full passage aloud. Then work carefully through the opening counsel. James's "quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger" is not just practical wisdom; it is theological posture. We listen first because we have a God who has spoken. The Christian's first movement is reception.

Anger That Does Not Produce Righteousness

Be careful here pastorally. James is not condemning all anger. Scripture knows a holy anger at injustice and at sin. What James condemns is the quick, reactive anger of the flesh — the anger that shapes our speech before reason and faith have had their say. If a student asks about righteous anger, affirm it (with reference to Jesus in the temple, or Paul's "be angry and do not sin" in Ephesians 4:26). Then redirect: James is addressing the anger we actually deal with most, which is almost never righteous.

The Implanted Word

This phrase is pure gold for a Lutheran teacher. The Word is not a book we manage; it is a seed God plants. Notice two things in how James describes it:

- The Word is implanted (planted in us) — a past action of God's that continues to work.
- The Word is able to save your souls — present, ongoing power. The same Word that gave new birth continues to save.

Make the connection to the means of grace explicit. The reason we gather around the Word in preaching, hear it in Baptism, receive it in the Supper, and read it in our homes is that this is how God continues to save us. The Word is not a reminder of grace that happens elsewhere. The Word is where grace happens.

Why This Matters for Lutherans

Many students come from traditions (or from unchurched backgrounds)

where the Word is treated primarily as information. They have heard phrases like "just read your Bible" as if the Bible were a self-help manual. James teaches something much deeper: the Word itself saves. It is the instrument of God's ongoing work in us. This is not a Lutheran distinctive we have to argue for against Scripture; it is Scripture's own teaching.

Verses 22-25: Doers of the Word

The Structure of James's Argument

Help your class see that James is not contrasting hearing with doing, as if they were two separate activities we must both perform. He is contrasting two kinds of hearers: the one who hears and does (genuine hearing, which always produces fruit) and the one who hears and does not do (false hearing, which is self-deception).

This is crucial. If we let students walk away thinking that James requires hearing plus doing as the formula for Christian authenticity, we have put them back under the Law as a ladder. What James actually teaches is that genuine hearing already contains the seed of doing. When the Word is truly received, it produces. When no production follows, the reception was not what it appeared to be.

The Mirror

The mirror image is one of the most vivid in the New Testament, and it rewards slow treatment. Paint the picture for the class. A man gets up, glances in the mirror, sees his face, and walks away — and within moments has forgotten what he saw. He did not use the mirror. The mirror did its job (it showed him to himself), but he treated the image as if it were information about someone else.

The Christian equivalent: the Word has shown us something real. It has shown us our sin, our Savior, the shape of the new life. But we walk away and forget. We hear the sermon and do not let it land. We read the passage and close the Bible and reenter our lives unchanged. James calls this self-deception, which is a strong word. The merely-hearing Christian is not just failing; he is deceived.

A Gentle Application

For your class, the application is not "try harder to remember." It is "return to the Word daily." The remedy for forgetting is not more effort in the moment; it is more frequent exposure to the Word that does the work. This is why daily Scripture reading, regular corporate worship, and frequent communion matter. We are forgetful creatures, and God has given us the means of grace because He knows it.

The Law of Liberty

This is the phrase most likely to puzzle Lutheran students. We are used to hearing the Law described in its accusing function — killing us and driving us to Christ. How can the Law be a law of liberty?

The answer is that for the baptized Christian, the Law functions in more than one way. The Second Use (mirror-of-sin, killing) remains; we need it every day, because the old Adam in us never stops trying to resurrect itself. But for the Christian who has been set free by the Gospel, the Law also functions as a Third Use — a guide showing the shape of the new obedience the Spirit is producing in us. In its third use, the Law is no longer the handwriting of condemnation (Christ has nailed that handwriting to His cross). It is the contour of the life we, as new creatures, actually want to live.

The Psalmist knew this. Psalm 1, Psalm 19, Psalm 119 — these are love songs to the Law. The Christian can speak this language because the curse has been lifted and the Law now points to the life of love the new heart desires.

Verses 26-27: Pure and undefiled Religion

What James Is and Is Not Doing

Before treating the three marks, frame them properly. James is not defining the whole of Christianity here. He is not reducing Christianity to ethics. He is giving three vivid examples of what it looks like when the implanted Word is actually being lived out. These are marks, not manufacturing instructions.

Why these three? Because each one cuts against a common counterfeit. A person may have an impressive-looking religion and still have an unbridled tongue. A person may attend worship faithfully and be entirely indifferent to those in

affliction. A person may profess Christ and be indistinguishable from the surrounding culture in every value and aspiration. James names these three because they are the places where religion most often falls short — the symptoms that reveal a faith that has not, in fact, been fully alive.

The Tongue

James will return to the tongue at length in chapter three. For now, he simply names it as the first test. Note the starkness of his language: a person who considers himself religious but does not bridle his tongue has a religion that is "worthless." This is not hyperbole for effect. James means it. Whatever else is going on, the Word that bridles the tongue has not taken hold.

Orphans and Widows

Spend time here. The biblical pattern of care for the vulnerable is one of the clearest marks of covenantal faithfulness in both Testaments, and it has been under sustained neglect in much of modern Western Christianity. For your class, ask the question concretely: who in our community fits the profile of the orphan and widow? The shut-in, the recently bereaved, the single mother, the homeless, the elderly in nursing care, the imprisoned. The list will vary by congregation, but the question is the same.

Note James's specific word: to visit. Not to send, not to support from a distance, but to go. This is hands-on mercy. The Christian is called not only to give but to go. For your class, this is worth pressing gently. What would it look like for this congregation to actually go, not just send?

Unstained from the World

Define "the world" carefully. In New Testament vocabulary, the world is not creation (which is good) and not the neighbors we are called to love (who are made in God's image). The world is the fallen human order in rebellion against God — its values, priorities, and idolatries.

For a rural Midwestern audience, the pull of the world may look different than it does in an urban coastal one, but it is no less real. The idolatry of success, the worship of comfort, the grip of consumer culture, the temptation to take our identity from our work or our wealth or our status — all of these are "the world"

in James's sense. The Christian is not to withdraw from the world in the sense of abandoning vocation; we are to resist being shaped by the world in our values.

A Thought for Rural Congregations

Your class may push back on the "unstained from the world" language, assuming it applies mostly to urban centers with their more visible cultural decay. Gently correct this. Rural communities have their own idolatries: land, family name, work ethic as identity, political tribalism, a particular kind of self-reliance that can cross into pride. The world is not just out there. It is in every place where fallen human values replace Christ's values — which is every place.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

"Isn't James just contradicting Paul here? Paul says we are saved by faith, but James says we have to do works."

Good question, but James is not contradicting Paul. Paul and James are answering different questions. Paul asks how a sinner is declared righteous before God, and answers: by faith alone, apart from works. James asks what genuine, saving faith actually looks like in a life, and answers: it shows itself in doing. They are complementary, not competing. We will spend an entire session on this question when we reach James 2:14-26. For now, notice that James is not telling his readers to add works to their faith in order to be saved; he is telling them that faith that does not produce doing was never saving faith in the first place.

"What about a Christian who really is a hearer but cannot yet do — someone new to the faith, or someone recovering from a deep wound?"

James is not setting a timer on sanctification. He is describing the pattern of the Christian life, not demanding immediate perfection. A new Christian, or a deeply wounded one, may be doing more than we see — simply remaining in the Word when everything in them wants to flee, for example, is itself a doing. What James warns against is the person who settles into hearing without doing as a permanent posture, who thinks that intellectual agreement with the Gospel is all that is required. That is the self-deception. The struggling Christian who is growing slowly, even imperceptibly, is not the person James is warning about.

"How can I know if I am just a hearer or a genuine doer?"

This question often comes from scrupulous Christians who are hard on themselves. Be pastorally careful. The answer is not to turn inward in endless self-examination; the answer is to turn to Christ and to return to the Word. If the Word is doing its work, we will see evidence — not perfect evidence, but real evidence — of the life it produces. Look for growth, not perfection. Look for the direction of your life,

not the purity of it. And remember that the same Word James describes as a mirror is also the Word that justifies the ungodly. If you find yourself lacking, the answer is not more self-accusation but more reception of the Word, more confession of sin, more trust in Christ.

"My pastor only preaches the Second Use of the Law. Is that a problem?"

This is a delicate pastoral question. The Lutheran tradition teaches both the Second Use (killing the old Adam) and the Third Use (guiding the new Adam) of the Law. Both are necessary. A ministry that only ever accuses leaves no room for the guidance the baptized Christian actually needs. A ministry that only ever guides without accusing produces moralism. Without getting into personality politics, a good Lutheran pulpit will do both. If a student has concerns about the preaching in their congregation, the right counsel is usually to speak with the pastor directly, respectfully and in good faith.

"How literal is James being about visiting orphans and widows? Isn't giving money the same thing?"

James's specific word is visiting — going to, being with. Money is not the same thing. It may be part of the picture (sometimes what is most needed is financial), but giving alone is not what James describes. Pure religion, as James sees it, involves presence, not just support. For modern Christians, this is often a harder call than writing a check. It requires time, emotional investment, and the willingness to be affected by the affliction of another. But this is precisely what James is calling for.

"Does being unstained from the world mean I should not watch certain movies, go to certain places, etc.?"

James is making a theological point, not writing a rulebook. Different Christians will make different judgments about specific cultural engagements, and that is fine. The test is not external conformity to a list but internal resistance to being shaped by the world's false values. A Christian who watches almost nothing but whose value system is thoroughly worldly has missed James's point. A Christian who engages the culture critically, discerningly, and with their values firmly rooted in

Christ is closer to what James describes. Encourage your students to cultivate discernment rather than simple abstinence, while acknowledging that for some Christians, simple abstinence from particular things is the honest path of discernment.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. Pick two that suit your class. Some notes on each:

Question 1 — Quick to hear, slow to speak

A good opening question. Accessible to everyone. Almost every student will have examples of times they failed at one or more of these. Keep the tone confessional rather than accusatory — let people speak about their own patterns rather than about others'.

Question 2 — The mirror and forgetting

A deeper question that works well for classes willing to be honest about self-examination. Be ready for students to go quiet; this question can be convicting. If the class is hesitant to share, offer an example from your own life to open the door.

Question 3 — The Law of Liberty

The theologically richest question. Good for classes that enjoy doctrine. For classes less interested in doctrine, this question may fall flat; choose accordingly.

Question 4 — Orphans and widows in our community

The most practical question, and potentially the most fruitful. This question can lead to real action in your congregation if pursued. Be ready for the Spirit to prompt something concrete; leave space for that.

Question 5 — Unstained from the world

This question can go in many directions — political, cultural, economic. Be aware of your class's sensitivities. It works best when students are invited to examine their own patterns rather than to critique others' (especially across political lines).

Question 6 — Worthless religion

A sobering question. Works well for mature classes willing to sit with James's hard language. Less well for classes with many fragile or new Christians, who may hear condemnation rather than invitation.

Managing Self-Accusation

This session's content can land heavily on conscientious students. Someone in your class may leave feeling like a merely-hearing Christian with a worthless religion. Be ready to speak Gospel directly into this. The solution to James's warning is not more Law but more Gospel — more return to the Word that implants itself and saves our souls. Do not close the session with Law alone.

For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- **Psalm 1, Psalm 19, Psalm 119.** The Old Testament love songs to God's Law. Reading these alongside James helps students understand how a faithful believer can speak of the Law as a source of liberty.
- **Deuteronomy 10:17-19.** The Old Testament foundation for care of the orphan, widow, and sojourner. James is drawing on this deep tradition.
- **Matthew 7:24-27.** Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish builders, which says essentially what James 1:22-25 says. James has absorbed his Brother's teaching thoroughly.
- **1 John 3:17-18.** John's parallel teaching on the inseparability of love of God and love of neighbor-in-need.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- **Formula of Concord, Article VI.** On the Third Use of the Law. Directly relevant to James's "law of liberty."
- **Small Catechism, Baptism, Part Four.** Luther's teaching on the daily dying of the old Adam and rising of the new — essentially the ongoing rhythm James describes as looking into the mirror of the Word.
- **Luther's Preface to Romans.** The famous "faith is a living, busy, active thing" passage is essentially Luther saying what James says in this chapter.

Commentaries

- **Curtis Giese, Concordia Commentary: James.** Giese is particularly good on the connection between verse 18 and verse 21 — the implanted Word as the Word that both gave new birth and continues to save.
- **Douglas Moo, The Letter of James.** Strong lexical work on the Greek of verses 22-25 (the mirror passage).

A Final Word

This session can land heavily if taught carelessly. James's language is sharp — self-deception, worthless religion — and students who are already hard on themselves can leave feeling condemned rather than invited. Your job is to hold James's sharpness alongside the Gospel ground on which he stands. The Word that accuses in the mirror is the same Word that implants itself in us and saves our souls.

Teach confidently. James is not a moralist. He is a pastor describing what the living Word does in the lives of the baptized. Frame the session within that larger theology, and the hard edges of the passage will do their proper work without crushing the students who most need the Word's comfort.

Next week we move into chapter two and one of the most painful examples James offers — the sin of favoritism in the assembly. It is a passage that goes straight to the heart of congregational life, and it rewards careful, pastoral treatment.

May the Lord bless your teaching, and may the implanted Word continue its saving work in you and in those you teach.



Soli Deo Gloria

The Epistle of James — Teacher's Guide, Session Four

The Epistle of James

Teacher's Guide

Session Four

The Royal Law and the Sin of Partiality

James 2:1-13

A free companion to the Bible study

Larry Herzog Jr.

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Four. This week's passage contains some of the most concrete and uncomfortable teaching in the letter. James paints a scene — a rich man and a poor man entering the assembly — and he exposes the sin of favoritism in the congregation. But he does not leave us there. He widens the lens to the royal law of loving the neighbor, connects the apparent small sin to the whole of God's Law, and closes with one of the sweetest Gospel notes in the letter: mercy triumphs over judgment.

The pastoral opportunity in this session is significant. Every congregation struggles, in its own way, with favoritism. The particular forms vary — wealth, education, family name, political alignment, physical attractiveness, social ease — but the underlying sin is universal. Your students will recognize themselves in this passage if they are honest, and recognize their congregation too. Handle this recognition with care, and let James's closing word of mercy be the note on which the session ends.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

Favoritism is not a minor social failing but a transgression of the royal law, rooted in the fallen heart and cured only by the mercy that has triumphed for us in Christ — a mercy that is meant to flow through us toward all who enter our fellowship.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- Read Session Four of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- Read James 2:1-13 multiple times. Let the scene in verses 2-3 actually form in your imagination.
- Read Leviticus 19 in full. The royal law (Lev. 19:18) sits in the middle of a chapter that is saturated with instructions about just dealing with the poor, the stranger, and the vulnerable. James's citation is not a proof-text but a deep drawing on the Old Testament's ethical tradition.
- Review Luther's Small Catechism on the Eighth Commandment ("You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor"). The positive requirement there — to defend our neighbor, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything — is a direct parallel to James's concern.
- If you have the Book of Concord at hand, skim the Large Catechism's treatment of the Fifth, Seventh, and Eighth Commandments, which all involve positive duties toward the neighbor that James is here bringing forward.
- Pray. And pray specifically for the humility to let this passage work on you before it works on your students.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three theological points come into view in this passage:

- **The unity of God's Law.** Verse 10 teaches that breaking the Law at one point makes us guilty of the whole. This is not legalism; it is a profound theological claim about the singularity of God and the unity of His will.
- **The royal law of love of neighbor.** James locates love of neighbor at the center of the Law, in line with Jesus' own teaching (Matt. 22:39) and Paul's (Rom. 13:9-10).
- **The Gospel logic of mercy.** Verse 13 reveals the Christian ethical posture: because we have received mercy in Christ, we extend mercy. We do not extend mercy to earn mercy; we extend it because we have received it, and the mercy we have received cannot be contained in us.

A Word About Self-Indictment

Every teacher of this passage will be tempted to sidestep the way it indicts us personally. Do not sidestep. Let the passage work on you first. Ask yourself honestly: who does my congregation welcome, and who does it merely tolerate? Who would I be tempted to elevate, and whom to overlook? A teacher who has been honestly convicted by this passage will teach it with a tenderness that one who has kept it at arm's length cannot.

Suggested Time Plan

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and brief review of Session Three
0:05–0:18	The scene in the assembly (vv. 1-4)
0:18–0:32	God's choice of the poor (vv. 5-7)
0:32–0:45	The royal law and the unity of the Law (vv. 8-11)
0:45–0:52	Mercy triumphs over judgment (vv. 12-13)
0:52–0:57	Discussion (choose 2 questions)
0:57–1:00	Closing prayer and Session Five preview



Where to Slow Down

Verse 13 is the Gospel moment in this passage, and it is easy to rush past it on the way to closing. Do not. If time is tight, shorten the discussion rather than the treatment of "mercy triumphs over judgment." This sentence needs to land. It is what keeps the session from crushing rather than blessing your students.

Preview for Session Five

End the session by telling your class explicitly that next week's passage (2:14-26) is the most important single session in the series for understanding the Lutheran reading of James. Encourage them to read it multiple times during the week. Tell them plainly: this is the passage Luther struggled with, and we are going to take our time with it. Build anticipation rather than anxiety.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Verses 1-4: The Scene in the Assembly

Read the passage aloud in full before beginning to teach. The scene lands better when it is heard than when it is paraphrased.

The Lord of Glory

Spend a moment on the title in verse 1. The phrase is striking. James is naming the Christ whom the assembly worships with the most exalted language possible — and then immediately pointing out that the assembly's behavior is inconsistent with that Christ. This rhetorical move matters. The sin of favoritism is not a violation of abstract ethics; it is a contradiction of the specific Lord we claim to serve. The Lord of glory humbled Himself to identify with the poor. An assembly that elevates the rich and shames the poor has lost contact with the character of its own Lord.

Picturing the Scene

Help your class see the scene. The gold ring is a status marker — in the Roman world, gold rings distinguished free citizens of rank from freedmen and slaves. The bright, expensive clothing announces wealth from across the room. The poor man's shabby clothing is not merely cheap; the word suggests filthy, the clothing of someone who has no alternative. The contrast is visible, deliberate, and recognizable to James's readers.

Then help them picture the modern equivalents. This is not just ancient. The visitor in a suit versus the visitor in work clothes. The confident visitor versus the awkward one. The visitor who clearly belongs to our demographic versus the one who clearly does not. Ask the class, gently, to picture this in their own congregation. What happens? Who gets greeted, and who gets politely ignored? Who gets invited to coffee, and who gets forgotten by Tuesday?

A Pastoral Caution

Do not let this exercise turn into accusation of specific members or criticism

of the pastor. The sin James describes is a congregational pattern, not usually a deliberate act by any one person. Keep the conversation at the level of pattern and habit, not personal fault-finding. The Spirit can convict where conviction is needed without the teacher playing prosecutor.

"Judges with Evil Thoughts"

James's language in verse 4 is sharp. The assembly has not merely acted thoughtlessly; they have become judges — arbiters of worth — and they are doing so on the basis of evil thoughts. Why such severe diagnosis?

Because what looks like a small act reveals a large captivity. The assembly has absorbed the world's valuation of persons. They are seeing the way the world sees. And this is exactly what the baptized are not to do. The whole of the Christian life, as James has been teaching, is about being shaped by the Word rather than by the world. Partiality is the world's value system appearing in the assembly that was supposed to be its visible contradiction.

Verses 5-7: God's Choice of the Poor

James widens the lens from the specific scene to the pattern of God's own dealings throughout history. Help your class see this pattern:

- Abraham — a nomadic herdsman
- Moses — a fugitive shepherd
- David — the forgotten youngest son
- The prophets — outsiders to the centers of power
- The disciples — fishermen and tax collectors
- Jesus — born in a borrowed barn, raised in a despised village, died on a cross

The pattern is too consistent to be accidental. God, in His sovereignty, has chosen to make His kingdom visible disproportionately among the humble. This is not because poverty is spiritually meritorious — the Bible contains no such teaching. But it is because God's kingdom proceeds by a logic opposite to the world's, and this logic is visible in His choice of the humble for His great purposes.

Wealth and Faith

Be careful to guard against a false reading. James is not saying that wealth disqualifies, or that poverty automatically qualifies. Scripture is full of faithful wealthy believers — Abraham, Job, Joseph of Arimathea, Lydia. And poverty carries its own temptations; every pastor knows this. What James is saying is that the congregation's instinct to elevate the wealthy and shame the poor runs directly against the pattern of God's own dealings with His people. The assembly should, of all places, reflect God's valuation, not the world's.

The Rich Who Oppress

James's sharp observation in verses 6-7 is that the congregation is honoring the very class that, in their historical experience, has persecuted them. Wealthy landowners dragging poor laborers into court. Merchants using Roman law to secure their own advantage. Blaspheming the honorable name — the name of Christ placed on the believers in Baptism.

For modern application, the specific historical situation has shifted, but the principle remains. Whenever the assembly lets worldly stratifications dictate its internal ordering, it is partnering with the very values that run counter to the Gospel it proclaims.

Verses 8-11: The Royal Law and the Unity of the Law

The Royal Law

The phrase *nomos basilikos* — royal law or kingly law — locates love of neighbor at the center of God's moral will. James is quoting Leviticus 19:18, the verse Jesus identified as the second greatest commandment (Matt. 22:39). Note for the class that this commandment, in its original context in Leviticus 19, appears in the midst of instructions specifically about not showing partiality in judgment and not oppressing the poor. James's citation is thematic, not merely verbal. The Old Testament already integrates love of neighbor with refusing partiality; James is continuing that tradition.

Breaking One, Breaking All

The teaching in verse 10 — that breaking the Law at one point makes us guilty of the whole — is often misunderstood. Two common misreadings:

- "Every sin is equally serious." James is not teaching this. He is not saying that a stolen pencil and a committed murder have the same worldly consequences or merit the same temporal punishment. The Lutheran tradition has always distinguished between venial and mortal sins in terms of their effects, even while holding that every sin is sin against God.
- "The Law is a legalistic game." James is not teaching this either. He is not saying God keeps a ledger and we must balance it. He is saying something deeper.

What James is teaching is the unity of the Law as the expression of the singular will of one God. The Law is not a collection of independent prescriptions we may treat like a menu. It is the will of the Lawgiver, expressed in specific commandments. To violate any one is to defy the Lawgiver Himself. This is what makes us lawbreakers before God — not the failure to accumulate enough compliance, but the single act of rebellion against the God whose Law it is.

Why This Matters for the Gospel

The unity-of-the-Law teaching is essential to the Lutheran understanding of why we need Christ. We cannot balance our ledger by compliance in other areas. Every sin puts us fully under judgment, and therefore only the righteousness of Christ — who kept the whole Law — can save us. Without this teaching, the Gospel becomes merely supplemental help for people who are basically managing. With it, the Gospel is revealed as the only hope for sinners who have already, at every point, declared independence from God. Name this explicitly in class.

Verses 12-13: Mercy Triumphs Over Judgment

This is the Gospel moment in the passage, and it deserves real emphasis. James has drawn the Law as tightly as he can. A reader might expect condemnation. But James pivots to the Christian's Gospel posture.

Speaking and Acting Under the Law of Liberty

The phrase "law of liberty" returns from 1:25. The Christian is one who lives under the Law as a law of liberty — not crushed by it, but guided by it into the life of love that the Gospel has made possible. This posture is what James is calling for as the remedy to favoritism.

Mercy Triumphs Over Judgment

Dwell on this sentence. Let it do its work. James is not saying that extending mercy earns mercy for us — that would be a legalistic reading. He is saying that the Christian, having received mercy in Christ, now lives in the mode of mercy. The mercy that saved us cannot be contained in us. It flows out toward others. And the one in whom this flow is happening need not fear judgment, because the same mercy that flowed in flows out and triumphs over the judgment we deserved.

Conversely, the person who has received the Gospel and then refused mercy to others gives evidence that the Gospel has not, in fact, taken hold. Like the unforgiving servant in Jesus' parable, they are forgiven an enormous debt and then refuse a small one to a fellow servant. Such a response calls down judgment — not because mercy was earned and then withdrawn, but because the hardness of heart reveals that mercy was never truly received.

The Gospel Logic

Make this pattern explicit: we do not extend mercy to earn mercy. We extend mercy because we have received mercy, and the mercy we have received cannot be kept. The Christian's ethics are reflexive — what has been done for us flows through us to others. This is the Lutheran understanding of how the Gospel shapes the Christian life, and James 2:13 is one of the clearest New Testament statements of it.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

"Isn't James being too hard on rich people here?"

James is not condemning wealth per se. Scripture contains many examples of faithful wealthy believers. What James is condemning is the assembly's instinct to honor wealth as wealth — to treat the wealthy as more valuable than the poor by virtue of their wealth. This is different. A wealthy believer can be warmly welcomed, loved, and served by the congregation without the congregation treating his wealth as the basis of his welcome. The test is whether the welcome would be the same if the wealth were not.

"Does verse 10 mean every sin is equally bad?"

No. James is not flattening moral distinctions. He is teaching the unity of the Law — that breaking any commandment is, in essence, defiance of the one God whose Law it is. This makes us lawbreakers. But James is not saying that all sins have the same worldly consequences or merit the same temporal discipline. The Lutheran tradition distinguishes between venial and mortal sins in terms of their effects, even while affirming that every sin is sin against God and renders us guilty before Him. The theological point — that we cannot balance our compliance against our violations — drives us to Christ, who kept the whole Law in our place.

"If God chose the poor, should we be suspicious of wealth or success in the Christian life?"

No. God does not hate wealth, and He uses wealthy believers for great purposes in every generation. But the pattern of God's dealings does warn us against idolizing wealth or success. The Christian who is wealthy should wear that wealth lightly, use it generously, and guard his heart against the subtle assumption that his wealth is a mark of divine favor. The Christian who is poor should not imagine that his poverty is itself a spiritual credential, but he may take real comfort that God's kingdom has been built, disproportionately, through the humble. Both the wealthy

and the poor Christian need the same Gospel, and in that Gospel they stand on perfectly level ground.

"How do we welcome the poor in our congregation without making them feel condescended to?"

Excellent and pastorally important question. The key is genuine relationship rather than programmatic charity. A poor visitor does not want to be the object of a ministry; they want to be received as a brother or sister. The posture James commends is one of natural, unhurried welcome — the same welcome extended to anyone else. When we make a special production of welcoming the poor, we sometimes reveal how exceptional the welcome actually is. The aim is a congregation in which no special production is needed, because the welcome of all is the normal thing.

"Isn't 'mercy triumphs over judgment' teaching a kind of works-righteousness? If I show mercy, I'll be spared judgment?"

Not at all. James is not teaching that we earn mercy by showing mercy. He is teaching that genuine reception of the Gospel produces a life of mercy, and that the person in whom this life is flowing has nothing to fear from judgment — not because their mercy has balanced their sins, but because the mercy of Christ is flowing through them, proving the reality of the faith that receives Christ. The unforgiving servant in Jesus' parable is not condemned because his refusal of mercy outweighed his sins; he is condemned because his refusal of mercy reveals that he never truly received the mercy of the king. James is saying the same thing from the positive side.

"My congregation is pretty homogeneous. What does this passage have to say to us?"

Every congregation has its internal stratifications, even when they are not visible across social class. Favoritism appears in many forms: favoritism toward the well-connected family, the long-tenured member, the socially confident, the politically aligned. If your congregation is demographically homogeneous, the specific form of James's scene may not play out — but the underlying sin is still present, taking other forms. A good exercise for a homogeneous congregation is to ask: who,

among the people we already have, is most easily overlooked? Who is at the edges? That is where James's warning applies.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. Pick two that suit your class.

Question 1 — Recalling partiality in the assembly

A strong opening question. Most students can name examples, though they may not want to name them out loud. Be ready for the conversation to be cautious at first; open the door by offering a generic example (not from your own congregation) and letting students add to it.

Question 2 — God's choice of the poor

A theological question that works well for classes that enjoy biblical-theological reflection. It can also open space for students to examine their own instincts about wealth and status.

Question 3 — The royal law at the center

This question can surface interesting tensions. Many Christians, when asked what the central Christian obligation is, would say something like belief, or worship, or personal holiness — not love of neighbor. Let the question work, but do not let love of neighbor be set against these other things. All belong together; love of neighbor is the visible form that faith and worship take.

Question 4 — Breaking one, breaking all

A potentially convicting question. Handle gently. The right answer is that this teaching should drive us to Christ — not to despair, and not to self-righteousness, but to the One who kept the whole Law in our place. If a student seems burdened by this teaching, use it as an occasion to speak the Gospel.

Question 5 — Mercy triumphs over judgment

The best question for ending the session on a Gospel note. Students who have received mercy in tangible ways often have powerful stories. Let them be told. And let the answer to the question be the session's takeaway.

Question 6 — Who is overlooked in our congregation?

The most practical question, and potentially the most fruitful. If pursued seriously, it can lead to concrete action. Be aware: this question can turn into critique of the pastor or of long-tenured members. Keep it constructive. The aim is not to blame but to see.

Ending the Session

This session, more than most, needs to end with Gospel. Students who have been genuinely convicted by the passage need to hear, clearly and firmly, that the remedy is not harder trying but fresh reception of mercy. The mercy we extend to the poor comes from the mercy we have received in Christ. The pattern is always Gospel first, ethics flowing from it — not ethics first, Gospel as motivation.

For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- **Leviticus 19.** The chapter containing the royal law. Reading it in full reveals how deeply love of neighbor is integrated with refusing partiality, protecting the vulnerable, and just dealing with the stranger.
- **Deuteronomy 10:17-19.** God Himself shows no partiality, and He executes justice for the orphan and widow. The basis for the human ethical pattern is the divine character.
- **Matthew 18:23-35.** Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant. Directly illuminates James 2:13 and the Gospel logic of mercy flowing through us.
- **1 Corinthians 1:26-31.** Paul's parallel teaching on God's choice of the lowly and foolish to shame the wise.
- **Luke 14:12-14.** Jesus on whom to invite to dinner — the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind. A direct parallel to James's concern.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- **Small Catechism, Eighth Commandment.** The positive requirement — to defend the neighbor, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything — is a direct parallel to James's concern for how we treat those in our assembly.
- **Large Catechism, Fifth, Seventh, and Eighth Commandments.** Luther's expansive treatment of the positive duties we owe our neighbor.
- **Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV (Love).** Melancthon on the relationship between faith and love in the Christian life.

Commentaries

- **Curtis Giese, Concordia Commentary: James.** Strong on the social and theological dimensions of James's scene, and on the "law of liberty" as a Third Use passage.
- **Douglas Moo, The Letter of James.** Helpful on the Leviticus background and on the unity-of-the-Law teaching in verse 10.

A Final Word

This session requires pastoral sensitivity. James's scene is close to home for every congregation, and students who take it seriously will feel the conviction. Your job is to let that conviction do its proper work — which is to drive us to Christ, not to leave us in despair — and then to end the session with the sweet Gospel word: mercy triumphs over judgment.

Do not rush past verse 13. It is the reason the session can bless rather than crush. The mercy we have received in Christ is the mercy that flows through us toward the poor, the stranger, the overlooked in the assembly. The Christian life is not Law-driven effort but mercy-driven life. Make sure your students leave knowing this.

Next week we arrive at the theological crux of the entire study. James 2:14-26 is the most famous passage in James and the most important for understanding the Lutheran reading of the letter. Prepare carefully. Read the Formula of Concord, Article IV. Read Luther's Preface to Romans. And pray for clarity, courage, and pastoral wisdom, because the session you are about to teach will shape how your students read James, and perhaps Paul, for the rest of their lives.

May the Lord bless your teaching, and may the mercy that triumphed for you in Christ flow through you to all whom you teach.



Soli Deo Gloria

The Epistle of James

Teacher's Guide

Session Five

Faith and Works — The Lutheran Cruc

James 2:14-26

A free companion to the Bible study

Larry Herzog Jr.

A Note to the Teacher

This is the session. Of all the hours you will teach across this study, this is the one that will most shape how your students read James — and perhaps how they read Paul, and how they understand their own salvation. Teach it carefully.

Five hundred years of theological controversy have swirled around this passage. Luther struggled with it. Rome used it against the Reformation. The Formula of Concord addressed it at length. Generations of Lutherans have felt the apparent tension between James and Paul and have sometimes concluded, wrongly, that James must be wrong or that Paul was too extreme. Your job today is to show that there is no contradiction, that James and Paul are speaking the same Gospel from complementary angles, and that the Lutheran Church has always read them in harmony.

Two pieces of practical advice before you start. First, prepare more than usual. Read the Formula of Concord, Article IV, in full. Read Luther's Preface to Romans, at least the "Faith is a living, busy, active thing" section. Read the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV, if you can — it is long but it is the Lutheran Reformation's fullest treatment of justification, and Melancthon addresses James directly. Second, be prepared for this session to run long. If the class is engaged, a single good question can easily eat fifteen minutes. Build in the flexibility to let that happen, or consider planning to split this session across two weeks.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

Paul and James are not contradicting each other; they are answering different questions about the one Gospel. Paul asks how a sinner is declared righteous before God (answer: faith alone). James asks what kind of faith actually saves (answer: faith that shows itself in works). We are justified by faith alone, but saving faith is never alone.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In — The Essentials

- Read Session Five of the student book carefully, at least three times. This session demands real familiarity with the material.
- Read James 2:14-26 multiple times. Read it slowly. Let it work on you.
- Read Romans 4 and Galatians 3 — Paul's treatment of Abraham as justified by faith. You cannot teach the harmony of Paul and James unless you know what Paul actually says.
- Read Genesis 15 and Genesis 22 — the two Abraham passages James and Paul each appeal to. Understanding the decades between the two moments is crucial to the resolution.
- Read the Formula of Concord, Article IV (Epitome and ideally Solid Declaration). This is the single most important Lutheran confessional document on the question.
- Read Luther's Preface to Romans, especially the section on what faith is. The "living, busy, active thing" passage is essential.
- Pray, and pray again. This session needs the Spirit's wisdom more than any other.

Optional Additional Preparation

- Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV. Long but foundational. Melancthon addresses James directly and resolves the apparent tension with great care.
- Curtis Giese's Concordia Commentary on James, section on 2:14-26. The most thorough confessional Lutheran treatment available.
- If you have time, Luther's 1522 Preface to James — not to argue against James, but to see what Luther actually said and did not say. Students may bring this up.

Core Theological Points

Four theological points must be held clearly in the teacher's mind before walking in:

- **Paul and James use "justified" differently.** Paul uses it forensically — declared righteous in the court of God. James uses it demonstratively — shown to be righteous, vindicated as righteous. These are different senses of the same Greek word (*dikaioo*), and the context tells us which is which.
- **The faith James rejects is not what Paul means by faith.** James explicitly identifies the faith he criticizes as the faith of demons — bare cognitive assent without trust. This is not what Paul calls saving faith. Paul also would reject demonic assent as insufficient for salvation. Paul and James are agreed about what does not save.
- **The Lutheran tradition distinguishes three dimensions of faith.** *Notitia* (knowledge), *assensus* (assent), and *fiducia* (trust). Saving faith has all three. The demons have the first two but not the third. This is the classical way Lutheran theologians have described what James is talking about.
- **Abraham's justification in Genesis 15 preceded his testing in Genesis 22 by decades.** Paul cites Genesis 15 (the justifying moment); James cites Genesis 22 (the vindicating moment). There is no contradiction — Abraham was justified by faith alone at the first moment, and that same faith was demonstrated by works at the second.

The Most Important Preparation of All

Ask yourself honestly: do I, as the teacher, believe these things? Not just assent to them, but trust them? This session will teach itself if you are teaching out of your own assurance in the Gospel. It will go poorly if you are teaching defensively, worried about what the class might bring up. Spend time this week letting the Gospel work on you personally. Your own confidence in Christ's sufficiency will communicate itself to your students far more than any polished argumentation.

Suggested Time Plan

This session is packed. The time plan below assumes a single 60-minute session, but you should seriously consider splitting the material across two weeks if your class's schedule permits. Some congregations find it helpful to dedicate two Sunday mornings to this passage and to frame it explicitly as the theological center of the series.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and brief framing
0:05–0:15	The question James is asking (vv. 14-17)
0:15–0:25	The faith of demons (vv. 18-19)
0:25–0:40	Abraham and Rahab (vv. 20-26)
0:40–0:52	The Lutheran resolution (FC IV, Luther on faith)
0:52–0:58	Discussion (choose 1-2 questions)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and Session Six assignment



If You Split the Session Across Two Weeks

Week 1 ("The Question James Is Asking"):

- 0:00-0:05 — Opening prayer, framing the session
- 0:05-0:20 — The question James asks (vv. 14-17), with concrete examples
- 0:20-0:35 — The faith of demons (vv. 18-19) and the three dimensions of faith
- 0:35-0:50 — Introduction to the Paul-James tension; preview of next week
- 0:50-0:58 — Discussion: What does your own faith look like? Where does it show itself?
- 0:58-1:00 — Closing prayer and assignment to read Romans 4 for next week

Week 2 ("The Lutheran Resolution"):

- 0:00-0:05 — Opening prayer and recap of last week
- 0:05-0:20 — Abraham: Genesis 15 and Genesis 22 together
- 0:20-0:30 — Rahab as the unexpected witness
- 0:30-0:45 — FC IV and Luther's Preface to Romans
- 0:45-0:55 — Discussion and application
- 0:55-1:00 — Closing prayer and next-passage assignment

If Time Gets Tight

If you must cut material from a single-session approach, here is the priority order. Keep: the core question James asks, the demons' faith, the Formula of Concord's resolution, and Luther's "faith is a living thing" passage. These are non-negotiable. Trim: extended treatment of Rahab (Abraham alone makes the point), the full three dimensions of faith (you can mention *notitia/assensus/fiducia* briefly), and extended discussion time. If you must choose between finishing the teaching and finishing the discussion, finish the teaching. Students can discuss the Gospel at home. They cannot reconstruct the Lutheran resolution on their own.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Opening Framing

Open by telling the class plainly what this session is. It is the most important session in the series. It is the theological heart of the whole study. It is the passage around which five hundred years of controversy have swirled. And it is the passage that, rightly taught, puts James and Paul in harmony once and for all.

Do not be defensive. Do not treat the Luther question as something you wish would not come up. Name it directly. Luther had concerns about this passage. The Roman Catholic Church has used it against the Reformation. The Lutheran Confessions address it at length. You are about to walk the class through the resolution. Say all of this up front, because naming the stakes at the beginning frees everyone to engage the material without anxiety.

A Useful Opening Line

"Today we arrive at the passage Luther worried about. We are going to deal with it head-on. I am going to show you, by the end of this hour, that James and Paul are in perfect harmony, that the Lutheran Church has always taught this, and that this passage is actually one of the great Gospel texts in the New Testament — not an embarrassment to the Reformation, but a confirmation of everything the Reformers recovered."

Verses 14-17: The Question James Is Asking

This is the crucial interpretive move of the whole session. If the class grasps what question James is asking, the rest falls into place. If they miss it, no amount of subsequent teaching will land.

Read Verse 14 Slowly

Read verse 14 aloud, then read it again. Point out what James actually asks. He does not ask, "Does faith save?" He does not ask, "Do works save?" He asks, "If someone says he has faith but does not have works, can that faith save him?" The

demonstrative pronoun is the key — that kind of faith. James is asking about a specific kind of faith claim, one that is unaccompanied by any corresponding life.

Distinguishing the Question

Name for the class, in the clearest possible terms, the two different questions Paul and James are answering:

- Paul asks: How is a sinner declared righteous before God? Answer: By faith alone, apart from works of the Law, on account of Christ. This is the question of justification — the courtroom question.
- James asks: What kind of faith actually saves? Answer: Living faith that shows itself in works. Dead faith — faith that is merely claimed but never lived — does not save because it is not the kind of faith that saves.

These are different questions. Both are legitimate. Both have biblical answers. And the two apostles are not in conflict; they are addressing different concerns.

The Concrete Example

James's illustration of the hungry brother is devastating in its simplicity. Work through it carefully with the class. If someone says to a person in need, "Be warmed and filled," but does nothing, the words are empty — no matter how pious they sound. Just so, James argues, if someone claims to have faith but shows no corresponding life, the claim is empty — no matter how orthodox the profession sounds. Dead faith is to the spiritual life what pious wishes are to the hungry stomach: the right shape of the thing without any of its substance.

Verses 18-19: A Faith That Even Demons Have

This is the most important diagnostic moment in the passage. James explicitly names the kind of faith he is rejecting: the faith of demons.

The Demons Believe

Point out to the class what James says. The demons believe that God is one. They hold correct theological opinions. The Gospels record that they recognized Jesus more readily than many humans did — "I know who you are, the Holy One of God." They have passed a test of cognitive orthodoxy that many humans would fail. And they shudder — the word suggests literal bodily trembling — in the presence of divine truth. They feel something. They know something.

And yet they are not saved. What they have is not saving faith.

This is decisive for understanding James. The faith James is rejecting in this whole passage is not the faith Paul celebrates. It is the faith of bare cognitive assent without trust. James and Paul are agreed that such a faith does not save. When James says "faith without works is dead," he is not saying something that Paul would disagree with. Paul also would say that a faith that produces no fruit is not saving faith.

The Three Dimensions

Introduce the Lutheran distinction carefully. Use the Latin terms if your class can handle them; otherwise use English:

- **Notitia (knowledge):** knowing the content of the Gospel. Who Christ is, what He has done, what the Gospel proclaims.
- **Assensus (assent):** agreeing that what the Gospel proclaims is true. Judging it to be so.
- **Fiducia (trust):** throwing oneself upon Christ, clinging, resting, casting oneself on the Savior the Gospel proclaims. Personal reliance.

The demons have notitia. The demons have assensus. What they do not have, and cannot have, is fiducia — personal trust, clinging, reliance. Their knowing and agreeing are not saving faith because the third and most important dimension is missing. And James's entire point in this passage is that a faith without fiducia will never produce works, because fiducia transforms the heart, and only a transformed heart produces a transformed life.

This Is the Hinge

If students understand this one point — that the faith James rejects is bare cognitive assent (notitia + assensus without fiducia), and that this is not what Paul calls saving faith either — then the whole passage opens up. Spend whatever time is needed to make sure this lands.

Verses 20-26: Abraham and Rahab

James now brings forward two Old Testament examples to illustrate his point. Abraham is the central figure, and Rahab is a reinforcement.

Two Moments in Abraham's Life

This is the exegetical key to the whole passage. Help the class see the two different Abraham moments that Paul and James each appeal to:

- **Genesis 15:6** — God promises Abraham a son and countless descendants. Abraham believes God, and his faith is counted to him as righteousness. This is the moment Paul appeals to in Romans 4 and Galatians 3. Abraham is justified by faith at this moment, with no works to speak of. This is the forensic, courtroom-declaration sense of justification.
- **Genesis 22** — Decades later, God tests Abraham by commanding him to offer Isaac on the altar. Abraham obeys. At this moment, Abraham's already-existing faith is demonstrated, vindicated, shown to be real. This is the moment James appeals to. Abraham is justified by works at this moment — in the sense of shown-to-be-righteous, vindicated as righteous.

The two moments are separated by decades. Abraham was justified by faith long before Isaac was even born. What happened at the altar was not the beginning of Abraham's standing with God. It was the demonstration of the faith that had long since given him that standing.

The Word "Justified" Has More Than One Sense

The Greek word *dikaioo* can mean "declared righteous" (forensic) or "shown to be righteous" (demonstrative). English has the same ambiguity — when someone says "I was justified in my decision," they usually mean vindicated by events, not declared innocent in a courtroom. Paul and James are using the same word in different senses, and context determines which is which. This is not a contrivance to save a theological position; it is how language actually works, and the contexts of Paul and James each make their meaning clear.

Rahab

Treat Rahab more briefly than Abraham, but do not skip her. James's choice of Rahab alongside Abraham is deliberate and striking. Abraham is the patriarch, the friend of God, the father of the faithful. Rahab is a pagan prostitute. The two could not be more different. And yet both illustrate the same truth: faith that is genuine shows itself in action. Rahab's faith in the God of Israel — the God of the spies she received — was shown by her willingness to risk her life protecting them.

The point James is making with the two examples together: this principle applies universally. The greatest figure of Old Testament faith and the most unlikely pagan convert both illustrate the same truth. Wherever there is genuine faith, there will be visible fruit. This is true for the spiritually great and for the spiritually unlikely alike.

The Lutheran Resolution

Now bring it home. Walk the class through the confessional Lutheran position.

What FC IV Actually Says

The Formula of Concord, Article IV, addresses this question directly. You do not need to read the whole article in class, but you should be ready to summarize its key points:

- We are justified before God — declared righteous, received into His favor, granted eternal life — by faith alone, on account of Christ alone, by grace alone. Works contribute nothing to our justification. This is Paul's teaching and the Lutheran Church's teaching.
- Good works certainly and without doubt follow true faith — if it is not a dead but a living faith — as fruits of a good tree. True saving faith is never alone. It always produces its fruit. This is James's teaching and the Lutheran Church's teaching.
- These two truths do not contradict. They belong together. We are saved by faith alone, but saving faith is never alone.

If you have physical copies of the Book of Concord available, consider having one open on the table during this part of the class. The physical presence of the confessional document signals that you are teaching under the Confessions, not improvising a clever harmonization of your own.

Luther's Preface to Romans

Read Luther's "faith is a living, busy, active thing" passage aloud. It is short. It is powerful. And it is in Luther's own voice — the same Luther who had concerns about James. When Luther describes what faith is, he describes exactly what James describes. The apparent tension between Luther and James dissolves when we hear Luther actually speaking about the nature of faith.

A Memorable Closing Point

Tell the class: "The Luther who wrote 'epistle of straw' in 1522 also wrote 'faith is a living, busy, active thing' in the same year. Same Luther, same year, two writings. Read them together, and you will see that Luther, despite his reservations about James's rhetorical style, taught exactly what James taught about the nature of saving faith. The 'epistle of straw' line has become famous. Luther's description of faith is less famous, but it is the theological payoff."

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

This session will generate more questions than any other in the series. Be ready for these specifically:

"But verse 24 says 'justified by works and not by faith alone.' How is that not a contradiction of justification by faith alone?"

This is the question. When it comes up — and it will — take your time. The answer has two parts.

First, James is using "justified" in the demonstrative sense, not the forensic sense. He is talking about how faith is vindicated, shown to be real, demonstrated. Paul uses the same word in the forensic sense — declared righteous in God's courtroom. The same Greek word can mean both things, and context determines the meaning.

Second, the kind of "faith alone" James is rejecting is explicitly named in verse 19 — the faith of demons. Bare cognitive assent without trust. This is not what Paul means by faith alone either. Paul would also reject demonic assent as insufficient for salvation. When Paul says "faith alone," he means saving faith — faith with trust, faith that clings to Christ, faith that always produces fruit. James is not contradicting this at all. He is saying that faith without fruit is not the kind of faith Paul is talking about.

"So do I have to have works to be saved?"

No. You must have the kind of faith that produces works, but the works themselves do not save you. The works are evidence, not the cause. Think of fruit on a tree. The fruit does not make the tree a fruit tree; the tree produces the fruit because of what the tree is. In the same way, works do not make a person saved; the saved person produces works because of what they have become through the Gospel. You do not add works to faith to reach salvation. You receive salvation by faith alone, and the reality of that salvation shows itself in the works that follow.

"What if I don't see many works in my life? Am I not saved?"

This is a pastoral question more than a theological one, and it deserves a pastoral answer. Do not panic. Saving faith can be small, struggling, newly planted, or temporarily obscured by difficult circumstances. James is not setting a threshold of works that you must cross; he is describing a pattern over time. The remedy for doubt about your faith is not harder effort to produce works; it is fresh reception of the Gospel. Return to Christ. Hear the Word preached. Remember your Baptism. Come to the Supper. The same Gospel that planted faith in you is the Gospel that makes it grow. Your assurance rests on Christ's finished work, not on your inventory of deeds.

"Is James saying that Roman Catholics are right about justification?"

No. Rome teaches that we are justified partly by faith and partly by works of our own, and that this justification can be increased or lost based on our performance. That is not what James teaches, and that is not what the Lutheran Confessions find in James. James teaches that saving faith always produces works, but he does not teach that works contribute to our justification before God. The difference is crucial. In the Lutheran reading of James, works are the evidence of justifying faith, not an ingredient of justifying faith. In the Roman reading, works are made into a cause of justification alongside faith. James supports the Lutheran reading, not the Roman one.

"Luther called James an 'epistle of straw.' Doesn't that mean Lutherans don't really accept James as Scripture?"

Luther made that remark in his 1522 Preface. He was frustrated by Roman Catholic misuse of James 2 against the Gospel, and his sharp language reflects the pastoral stakes of the moment. But Luther never removed James from his Bible. He translated it, published it, and included it in every edition of his German Bible. The Lutheran Confessions quote James as Scripture. The Formula of Concord, Article IV, works out the harmony between James and Paul at length. Confessional Lutherans receive James as canonical Scripture and read him in harmony with the rest of the New Testament. Luther's remark was a pastoral judgment about how directly the epistle preaches Christ, not a canonical verdict.

"What about the thief on the cross? He did no works before dying. Was he saved?"

Wonderful question, and a beautiful example. Yes, the thief was saved. Jesus Himself declared it: "Today you will be with me in Paradise." The thief had no time to produce a life of visible works. And yet the works he did have in that moment — his defense of Jesus against the other criminal's mockery, his confession of his own guilt, his plea for mercy from a crucified king — were evidence that his faith was real. Even in his final hour, faith showed itself in the few actions available to him. But more importantly, James is not saying that without a certain quantity of works over a certain period of time, no one can be saved. He is describing the general pattern. The dying believer, the infant, the severely disabled Christian — all may be saved by faith alone with no visible opportunity to produce works. God knows the heart. James's warning is against those who claim faith while living a life that demonstrates the absence of any such faith. That is different from the case of those who have faith but no opportunity.

"What about infants? They can't produce works. Can they have saving faith?"

Yes — and this is precisely why the Lutheran Church baptizes infants. God creates faith in infants through the Word joined to water in Baptism. The infant cannot articulate his faith, cannot do works, cannot pass a theological examination. But God works where the means of grace are applied, and the infant has fiducia in its elemental form — clinging to the Father, trusting by the Spirit's work. James's warning is not a threshold test that would exclude infants. James is writing to adults who are in a position to live out their faith and are not doing so.

"How do I know if I have fiducia? How do I tell genuine trust from mere assent?"

Be pastorally careful here. The question can come from scrupulous Christians who are already hard on themselves. The answer is not to turn inward in endless self-examination. The answer is to turn outward — to Christ, to the Word, to the promises of the Gospel. If you find yourself asking the question, that very asking is often evidence that the trust is real. The demons do not ask whether they trust Christ; they know they do not. The believer who worries about whether his trust is

real is often a believer whose trust is real but newly tested. Point your students to the means of grace. Fiducia is strengthened by hearing the Word, by receiving absolution, by coming to the Supper — not by navel-gazing.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. For this session, pick just one or two. The teaching content is dense, and you need to protect time for the actual teaching. Some notes on each question:

Question 1 — The apparent tension between Paul and James

A good opening question. Lets students name what they came in wondering. Works well as a brief round-the-room before you dig into the teaching, or as a reflective closing after the teaching.

Question 2 — Why the demons' faith does not save

A question that gets at the heart of the passage. Best for classes that can handle theological precision. The answer — fiducia is missing — is the key to the whole session.

Question 3 — Notitia, assensus, fiducia in your own life

The most personally searching question. Use carefully. It can bring conviction or confusion depending on the student. A pastoral hand is needed to keep the conversation in Gospel territory rather than letting it spiral into anxiety.

Question 4 — Abraham and Rahab

A question that rewards good biblical literacy. Best for classes that know their Old Testament. The payoff is seeing that saving faith is not limited to spiritual elites.

Question 5 — The summary sentence

The memory question. If students can explain "saving faith is alone in justifying us, but it is never alone in the life of the Christian" in their own words, they have the session's core theological point. This is the best assessment question.

Question 6 — Where do you go for assurance?

The pastoral payoff question. A good closing for the session, because it points students away from self-examination and back to Christ. Use this if the session has been heavy and students seem burdened.

The Most Important Pastoral Note

This session can produce anxiety in conscientious students who start wondering whether their faith is "real." Watch for this. If you see it, address it directly before the session ends. Remind the class that the remedy for doubt about faith is not harder trying but fresh reception of the Gospel. We do not look at our works to know we are saved; we look at Christ. The works, when they appear, are confirmation. They are not the ground. The ground is the finished work of Christ, received in Word and Sacrament. End the session on this note, not on the note of self-examination.

For Further Study

The Essential Confessional Documents

- **Formula of Concord, Article IV (Epitome and Solid Declaration).** The single most important Lutheran confessional document on James 2. Essential teacher preparation.
- **Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV.** Melancthon's extended treatment of justification, including direct engagement with James. Long but foundational.
- **Luther's Preface to Romans (Luther's Works, Vol. 35).** The "faith is a living, busy, active thing" passage. Short, memorable, and directly relevant.

For Deeper Biblical Context

- **Romans 4.** Paul's extended argument that Abraham was justified by faith. Read alongside James 2 to see the two apostles engaging the same Abraham from different angles.
- **Galatians 3.** Paul's second major treatment of Abraham. Reinforces the Romans 4 argument.
- **Genesis 15.** The moment Paul cites — Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.
- **Genesis 22.** The moment James cites — Abraham offered Isaac on the altar. Decades after Genesis 15.
- **Joshua 2 and Joshua 6.** Rahab's story, for the second example James uses.
- **Hebrews 11.** The great chapter on faith. Abraham and Rahab both appear. The author of Hebrews teaches the same Pauline-James harmony — faith that trusts God and is demonstrated in action.

Commentaries

- **Curtis Giese, Concordia Commentary: James, on 2:14-26.** Essential. The most thorough confessional Lutheran treatment available.
- **Douglas Moo, The Letter of James.** Moo is Reformed, so his framework is not Lutheran, but his exegesis is consistently strong and his handling of the Paul-James question is charitable and rigorous.

- **David Scaer, James the Apostle of Faith.** A confessional Lutheran treatment that is sometimes overlooked. Worth finding.

Luther's Own Writings

- **Preface to James and Jude (Luther's Works, Vol. 35).** Read the actual text rather than relying on summaries. Luther's tone is more nuanced than the famous "epistle of straw" quote alone suggests.
- **The Freedom of a Christian (1520).** Luther's great early treatise on the Christian life. The famous paradox — "a Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none; a Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all" — captures in two sentences what James 2 is arguing.

A Final Word

You have just prepared to teach the most important session in the series. Take a breath. You are ready. The content is solid. The Lutheran tradition has been working on this passage for five hundred years, and the resolution it has reached is clear, biblical, and pastorally life-giving. Your job is to pass it on, not to invent it.

A few final encouragements. Teach with confidence. The Gospel is worth defending, and James is the Gospel's witness, not its problem. Teach with gentleness. Students who come with scars from legalistic teaching, or with confusion from poor catechesis, need to be led carefully. Teach with joy. This passage, rightly understood, is not a problem text but a treasure — a New Testament witness that saving faith is powerful, active, living, and evident. Let your own delight in that truth be visible to your students.

And when the session is over, let your students go with the confidence that they have received the Gospel, that their faith rests on Christ alone, that the Lutheran Church has always read James in harmony with Paul, and that the works they will produce are the fruit, not the root, of their salvation. That is the truth of this passage. That is the truth that sets God's people free.

Next week, the tongue. James 3:1-12. The passage is searching and the application is practical. After the theological weight of Session Five, James moves back to the concrete life of the congregation — and we will hear one of the sharpest diagnoses of human speech in all of Scripture.

May the Lord bless your teaching, and may the same Gospel that has saved you continue to save through your words.



Soli Deo Gloria

The Epistle of James

Teacher's Guide

Session Six

Taming the Tongue

James 3:1-12

A free companion to the Bible study

Larry Herzog Jr.

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Six. After the theological weight of last week, this session brings you back to concrete pastoral ground. But do not mistake the shift in register for a shift in seriousness. James 3:1-12 is one of the most searching passages in the letter. By the time you finish teaching it, every honest student in your class will have been convicted — including you.

The pastoral temptation in this passage is twofold. The first temptation is to treat the passage as a list of tips for better speech, turning it into a self-improvement seminar. Do not. James is not offering technique; he is diagnosing incapacity. The second temptation is to leave the class crushed under the diagnosis without pointing clearly to the Gospel remedy. Do not do that either. The diagnosis is severe because the remedy is sufficient. Hold both together.

One more note. This session applies to you, the teacher, in a particular way. James opens with a warning specifically to teachers: we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. You are stepping up to teach about the tongue. James's warning lands on you first. Teach this session with the humility of someone who has felt the conviction before passing it along.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

The tongue reveals the heart, and the heart is beyond our own mastery — which is why the remedy is not better technique but ongoing reception of the Word that transforms the spring from which our words flow.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- Read Session Six of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- Read James 3:1-12 multiple times, paying attention to how the images stack.
- Review the Eighth Commandment in Luther's Small Catechism. Luther's positive requirement — to defend the neighbor, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything — is the positive counterpart to James's negative diagnosis.
- Read Matthew 12:33-37. Jesus' teaching that the mouth speaks from what fills the heart is the foundation on which James is building.
- Read Ephesians 4:25-32 and Colossians 3:8-10. Paul's parallel teaching on Christian speech. Helpful for showing that James is not idiosyncratic but in the mainstream of New Testament ethics.
- Examine your own speech this week before you walk in. Not as a penitential exercise but as honesty. What patterns have you noticed? Where have you fallen? Confess specifically before teaching specifically.
- Pray.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three theological points come into view in this passage:

- **The tongue speaks from the heart.** This is the foundational premise James is working from, and it is Jesus' own teaching (Matt. 12:34). The tongue is not an external organ that can be managed from the outside. It is the visible end of the invisible heart, and it reveals what is really inside us.
- **The Law drives us to the Gospel.** James 3 is a Law text. Its severe diagnosis — no human being can tame the tongue — is not a promise of technique but an exposure of incapacity. Like all Law, it drives us to Christ, who alone can transform the heart from which our speech flows.
- **Simul iustus et peccator.** The Christian's divided speech (blessing and cursing from the same mouth) is a vivid illustration of the Lutheran doctrine that we are simultaneously justified and sinner. The old Adam

does not disappear in this life. The new creature grows. Both sources continue to operate until glory.

A Personal Caution

This session can be taught with polish and even wit. The images are vivid and lend themselves to a lively classroom. But if you teach it with too much polish, you will create distance from the material. The best teachers of James 3 are those who have just been convicted by it themselves. Let the conviction show. Do not pretend to have mastered what the passage says no one can master.

Suggested Time Plan

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and brief review of Session Five
0:05–0:12	The warning to teachers and universal stumbling (vv. 1-2)
0:12–0:28	Three images: bit, rudder, fire (vv. 3-6)
0:28–0:40	The untamable tongue (vv. 7-8)
0:40–0:50	Blessing and cursing / the divided source (vv. 9-12)
0:50–0:57	Discussion (choose 1-2 questions)
0:57–1:00	Closing prayer and next-week assignment



Where to Slow Down

The danger in this session is rushing the images in order to reach the application. Do not. The images are the teaching. Let each of them land — the bit, the rudder, and especially the fire. Students remember images long after they have forgotten abstract principles. A class that leaves remembering "the tongue is a fire" has received most of what this session offers.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Verses 1-2: The Warning to Teachers and Universal Stumbling

Read the full passage aloud before teaching. Then return to verse 1.

The Warning to Teachers

Begin by acknowledging, honestly, that this warning applies to you. You are teaching a Sunday school class about the tongue. James is warning you, and warning himself, about the weight of the teaching vocation. This is not false modesty; it is accuracy. Model the humility the passage calls for.

Note for the class that James is not prohibiting the teaching vocation. He is warning against entering it lightly. The Lutheran Church honors the teaching office highly — pastors, Sunday school teachers, professors of theology, catechists — but the honor comes with accountability. Teachers shape the faith of others, and careless teaching causes real harm. This is why the Lutheran tradition has historically required careful preparation, examination, and ordination for the pastoral office, and why lay teachers (including Sunday school teachers) should also prepare seriously.

Universal Stumbling

But James does not let anyone else off the hook. Verse 2 widens the warning to everyone. We all stumble in many ways. The problem of speech is not limited to teachers; it is the universal human problem. Teachers face stricter judgment, but every Christian faces the judgment of the Lord on their speech.

Note James's striking hypothetical: if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man. James is not promising such a man exists. He is describing what such a man would be — able to control his whole body. This is an idealization, not a promise. No such man walks the earth in this life. The best we can hope for, this side of glory, is the slow progress of the baptized toward less stumbling, not an elimination of stumbling altogether.

A Psalm Worth Quoting

Psalm 141:3 is worth having in the back pocket: "Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips." This prayer, prayed by a man after God's own heart, acknowledges that even David needed God's help to control his speech. If David prayed this, so should we. The prayer is itself the Christian's posture: asking God to do what we cannot.

Verses 3-6: Three Images of Disproportionate Power

These images are the heart of the passage. Take your time. Paint them vividly. Let them land.

The Bit

Help your class picture the bit. A horse weighs half a ton or more. A horse, left to itself, is uncontrollable by any human. And yet a small metal bar in the horse's mouth, connected to reins, directs the entire animal. The smallness of the instrument and the largeness of the creature are the point.

Apply the image. The tongue is small. But it directs the whole life. What we say shapes what we do, what becomes of us, what becomes of our relationships, what becomes of the souls we influence. A single word, rightly or wrongly placed, can determine the direction of weeks, months, years.

The Rudder

Extend the image to the rudder of a ship. Ships are driven by forces far beyond the pilot's control — winds, waves, currents, storms. The rudder does not control any of these. And yet the small rudder, turned by the pilot's hand, steers the ship through all of those forces to its destination.

Apply the image. The Christian does not control the circumstances of life. We do not choose our trials, our health, the actions of others, the events of the world. But we do have a rudder. The words we speak to others, to ourselves, to God — these are how we steer our lives through circumstances we cannot otherwise shape. The Christian who has learned to speak rightly has learned to sail through storms. The Christian whose tongue is unbridled is, quite simply, out of control.

The Fire

This is the sharpest of the three images, and James does not leave it as a neutral comparison. He extends it into an indictment: the tongue is a world of unrighteousness, set on fire by hell itself.

Paint the picture. A small spark in dry grass, left unattended, can become a catastrophic wildfire in hours. For a rural Midwestern audience, this is not hypothetical. Combine harvester sparks, downed power lines, unattended brush piles — every farmer knows how quickly a small fire becomes an inferno that destroys everything in its path. That is what James says the tongue is like. A small spark that can, once loose, consume relationships, reputations, marriages, careers, congregations.

Do not soften James's language about hell. The tongue's destructive use, he says, is set on fire by hell itself. This is demonic imagery, and James means it. When we use our speech destructively — when we slander, gossip, curse, speak cruelly — we are participating in the chaos the enemy of our souls delights in. This is not hyperbole. It is diagnosis.

A Modern Application

Online speech is worth naming specifically. Social media, comments sections, group text chains — these are all the tongue in a different medium. The wildfire that a single cruel post can ignite is often faster and more total than anything spoken in person. For your students, especially younger ones or those active online, this is not ancient ethics; it is Tuesday afternoon on their phone. Help them see that James 3 speaks directly to the life they actually live.

Verses 7-8: The Untamable Tongue

James now drives home the conclusion his images have been building toward. Every kind of creature can be tamed by humanity. No human being can tame the tongue.

Why Not?

Explain to the class why the tongue is different from external creatures. A lion is outside us. We can approach a lion from the outside, with superior technology, and bring it under our control. But the tongue is not outside us. It speaks from the heart. To tame the tongue, we would have to tame the heart, and the heart is the very thing that sin has corrupted and that we cannot fix by our own effort.

This is where the Lutheran doctrine of the bondage of the will becomes pastorally useful. The human will, apart from Christ, cannot save itself. The human heart, apart from Christ, cannot clean itself. The human tongue, apart from Christ, cannot tame itself. All of these failures are the same failure in different forms. We are bent in on ourselves. Our efforts to reform ourselves, even in something as apparently simple as our speech, run into the fundamental problem that the self doing the reforming is the self that needs reformation.

This Is a Law Text

Be explicit with your class about what James is doing. He is not offering seven tips for better speech. He is diagnosing our incapacity. The purpose of Law is not to equip us to succeed but to crush our pretension of self-sufficiency and drive us to Christ. If your class leaves with a plan to try harder, you have not taught the passage rightly. The right response to James 3 is not harder trying but honest confession and fresh reception of the Gospel.

Verses 9-12: The Divided Source

James closes the passage by observing something strange and troubling about the Christian: we bless God and curse those made in His image, from the same mouth.

The Observation

Paint this for the class concretely. A man worships on Sunday morning — sings, confesses, prays, praises God — and by Sunday afternoon has spoken unkindly about a fellow member in the fellowship hall. A woman prays a beautiful bedtime prayer with her children and speaks sharply to her husband ten minutes later. A Christian types a warm thankful post on social media in the morning and an angry, dismissive reply to a stranger in the evening. The same mouth. The same vocal

ords. The same tongue. Producing blessing and cursing within hours or minutes of each other.

James names this as an impossible contradiction. These things ought not to be so. The integrity of our speech is the integrity of our faith made audible. When our speech is radically divided — when we bless the Creator and curse His image — something is revealed about the state of our hearts that we would rather not see.

The Image of the Divided Source

James drives the point home with his final images. A spring cannot produce both fresh and salt water. A fig tree cannot bear olives. A salt pond cannot produce fresh water. The source determines what is produced. And the Christian who blesses and curses from the same mouth has a divided source — the new creature in Christ who blesses, and the old Adam who still curses.

This is where the Lutheran doctrine of *simul iustus et peccator* — simultaneously justified and sinner — becomes essential. James is not teaching perfectionism. He is not saying that a Christian should never curse. He is describing the divided state of the baptized, whose old Adam has not yet been fully put to death. Both sources continue to operate in this life. And the evidence of both sources appears in our speech.

This framing actually rescues the passage from despair. If James were demanding an undivided tongue in this life, no Christian could hope. But he is not demanding the impossible. He is exposing the division so that we will not pretend it away, so that we will continue to return to Christ for fresh mercy, and so that we will trust the slow work by which the Word is gradually cleansing the spring from which our words come.

Connecting to the Small Catechism

The Eighth Commandment in Luther's Small Catechism is a natural close to this section. Luther's positive requirement — "We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything" — is the positive counterpart to James's negative diagnosis. It also gives your class something actionable. Confession

is backward-looking; Luther's positive formulation is forward-looking.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

"If we can't tame the tongue, what's the point of trying?"

This is the wrong framing, but it will come up, and it deserves a careful answer. The point is not that we shouldn't try to speak well. We should. The point is that trying harder is not the remedy for a sinful tongue. The remedy is a transformed heart, and the transformed heart is God's work in us through the Word. What we do, as Christians, is confess specifically, return to the Word, receive forgiveness, and trust the slow work of sanctification. Over time, the heart is cleansed, and the speech that flows from it becomes increasingly (though never perfectly) blessing rather than cursing. This is not passive; it is active reception of the means of grace, not active self-reformation by willpower.

"What about righteous anger? Is all strong speech wrong?"

No. Scripture knows a holy anger at injustice and at sin. Jesus drove the money changers from the temple with strong words. Paul rebuked Peter to his face when Peter was compromising the Gospel. The prophets spoke searing words against idolatry and oppression. James is not condemning all strong speech. He is condemning the quick, reactive, self-serving speech of the old Adam — the speech that curses those made in God's image, that gossips, that slanders, that tears down without building up. Strong words in defense of truth or in opposition to evil are not the tongue James condemns; they are, in fact, one of the good uses of speech.

"What's the difference between gossip and sharing a concern with someone who can help?"

An excellent pastoral question. The test is not usually in the content but in the purpose. Sharing a concern with someone who can actually help — a pastor, a trusted friend with wisdom, a family member in a position to act — in order to seek godly counsel or intervention, is not gossip. Passing along information about someone's faults to people who cannot help, for the purposes of social connection, entertainment, or your own sense of superiority, is gossip. The same words can be

either one depending on why they are being said and to whom. Ask yourself: Am I seeking help for this situation, or am I enjoying the telling? Am I talking to someone who can do something constructive, or am I talking because I want a listener? The honest answer usually tells you which category you are in.

"Does this passage apply to online speech?"

Absolutely. The tongue, in James's usage, is not literally the tongue as a physical organ; it is speech in all its forms. Writing, typing, posting, texting — all of these are speech in the theological sense. James's warnings apply with particular force to digital speech, actually, because digital speech lasts longer, travels farther, and is harder to retract than spoken words. The permanent screenshot, the saved post, the archived comment — these are fires that do not burn out quickly. A Christian who is careful with spoken words but careless with digital ones has not understood James.

"What if my job involves speaking a lot — teaching, preaching, counseling, sales? Does that put me at special risk?"

Yes, and James opens the passage by naming this specifically. Teachers will be judged with greater strictness. The more you speak, the more accountability you carry for your speech. This is not a reason to avoid the vocation — God calls people to teaching, preaching, counseling, and all sorts of speaking work. But it is a reason to take those vocations seriously, to prepare carefully, to pray before speaking, and to receive correction gracefully when it comes. A preacher who assumes his words carry no weight is a dangerous preacher. A teacher who believes he can speak carelessly because teaching is familiar to him has forgotten the gravity of the vocation.

"My pastor says things I think are unwise. What do I do?"

A delicate question. Three principles. First, the Eighth Commandment applies here. Do not gossip about your pastor. Do not speak ill of him in the parking lot or over dinner. If you have a concern, take it to him directly, respectfully, and in private, per Matthew 18. Second, consider whether the concern is a matter of wisdom (where reasonable Christians may disagree) or a matter of doctrine or clear Scripture (where the concern is more serious). Third, if the concern is significant

and you have spoken to him privately without resolution, the proper next step in most Lutheran polity is to speak with the elders or congregational leadership, not to air the concern publicly. Public airing of grievances against pastors is almost always sinful, even when the underlying concern is real.

"I have a family member or coworker whose speech is genuinely cruel. How does this passage help me?"

First, the passage is primarily for your own self-examination, not a weapon against others. Second, dealing with someone else's cruel speech is a real pastoral question, and it calls for wisdom. Sometimes the right response is silence — not retaliation, not escalation, just absorbing the blow and entrusting yourself to God, per 1 Peter 2:23. Sometimes it is direct confrontation, done in love and with specific examples. Sometimes it requires involving others — a pastor, a counselor, in severe cases the authorities. The Christian is not called to endure abuse in silence, but neither is the Christian called to match cruelty with cruelty. If this is a live situation for a student, consider offering pastoral conversation after class rather than attempting to solve it in public.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. Pick one or two. Some notes on each:

Question 1 — The weight of teaching

A good opening question that doesn't require students to confess their own speech sins immediately. Works well for creating a sense that we are all approaching this passage with appropriate humility.

Question 2 — Which image most arrests you

An accessible question. Everyone can answer it, and the answers reveal interesting differences among students. Some are most struck by the bit (the idea of being steered), some by the rudder (the idea of direction through chaos), some by the fire (the idea of destructive power).

Question 3 — The diagnosis of incapacity

A deeper question. Be ready for students to push back — some will insist they have tamed their tongues to some degree, or that James is being hyperbolic. Gently redirect. James's point is not that improvement is impossible but that we cannot achieve it by our own effort. The remedy is Christ, not willpower.

Question 4 — Specific speech sins of the week

The most searching question. Use with care, but do not avoid. Students who can name specific instances of their own speech failures are students who are prepared to receive the Gospel. Students who stay in generalities have not yet been convicted. Model this by offering an example from your own week, if you can do so without self-aggrandizement.

Question 5 — Transforming the source

The most theologically fruitful question. Good for classes that enjoy doctrine. The answer points students away from technique and toward the means of grace.

Question 6 — Digital speech

A timely question. Nearly every class will have students whose phones and social media are primary venues of speech. This question works especially well with younger students or with classes where online engagement is part of daily life.

The Gospel Ending

This session, more than most, needs to end on the Gospel note. Students who have been honestly convicted by James 3 are students who need to hear, clearly, that the remedy is not harder trying but confession, forgiveness, and ongoing reception of the Word. Do not end the session with a list of tips. End it by pointing to Christ, to the Word, to absolution, to the Supper. These are where the tongue will be slowly healed, over a lifetime. The technique approach crashes and burns. The means of grace approach actually works, because it is God's work, not ours.

For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- **Matthew 12:33-37.** Jesus' teaching that the mouth speaks from what fills the heart. The foundation for what James is doing.
- **Matthew 15:10-20.** Jesus on what defiles a person — what comes out of the mouth, which comes from the heart.
- **Ephesians 4:25-32.** Paul's parallel teaching on Christian speech, including the famous verse: "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up."
- **Colossians 3:8-10.** Paul's listing of speech sins — anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk. Read alongside James 3.
- **Proverbs 10:19, 15:1-4, 18:21, 21:23.** A sampling of Proverbs on the tongue. James has absorbed the Old Testament wisdom tradition deeply, and these parallels show it.
- **Psalms 141:3.** The psalmist's prayer for a guarded mouth. A good text to commit to memory.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- **Small Catechism, Eighth Commandment.** Luther's positive requirement — defending the neighbor, speaking well of him, putting the best construction on everything — is the practical counterpart to James's diagnosis.
- **Large Catechism, Eighth Commandment.** Luther's expansive treatment. Especially relevant for pastoral application.
- **Small Catechism, Baptism, Part Four.** Luther on the daily dying of the old Adam and rising of the new. The theological foundation for why our speech improves slowly — the old Adam is being drowned, and the new creature is rising, day by day.

Commentaries

- **Curtis Giese, Concordia Commentary: James.** Strong on the Old Testament background and the Law-Gospel structure of the passage.

- **Douglas Moo, The Letter of James.** Helpful on the classical and Hellenistic parallels to James's images — the bit, the rudder, and the fire.

A Final Word

This session will reach your students where they live. The tongue is a universal struggle, and James's images are unforgettable. Teach them vividly. Let them cut. And then point, clearly and firmly, to the Gospel remedy. Confess specifically. Receive forgiveness specifically. Return to the Word. Trust the slow work.

And remember that you, as the teacher, are the first object of James's warning. Teach with the humility of someone who has just been convicted by the same passage. Your students will learn more from your honest acknowledgment of your own struggle than from any polished exposition of the images.

Next week we continue in chapter three, moving from the tongue itself to the deeper question of what kind of wisdom is actually shaping our speech and our lives. James 3:13-18 contrasts two kinds of wisdom in one of the most beautiful passages in the letter, and it rewards careful preparation.

May the Lord bless your teaching, guard your own tongue, and cleanse the springs from which your words flow.



Soli Deo Gloria

The Epistle of James

Teacher's Guide

Session Seven

Two Kinds of Wisdom

James 3:13-18

A free companion to the Bible study

Larry Herzog Jr.

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Seven. Your passage this week is brief — only six verses — but it is one of the most theologically rich passages in the entire letter. James draws a line down the middle of reality and describes two kinds of wisdom. Everything else in life falls on one side or the other.

The great opportunity in this session is to introduce your students, if they have not met him before, to Luther's theology of the cross. The mapping between James's two wisdoms and Luther's two theologies is nearly exact, and the combination gives your students a powerful framework for reading the rest of Scripture, the rest of life, and the rest of their own hearts. If they leave this session with the distinction between the theology of glory and the theology of the cross lodged in their minds, you will have given them something that will serve them for decades.

The pastoral temptation in this passage is to treat the seven marks of the wisdom from above as a checklist for self-improvement. Resist. These marks are not a program. They are a portrait — specifically, a portrait of Christ — and our job is not to manufacture the portrait in ourselves but to let the Word continue its transforming work in us, slowly conforming us to the image of the Son.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

There are only two kinds of wisdom — earthly wisdom marked by bitter jealousy and selfish ambition, and the wisdom from above that looks like Christ Himself; and the Christian life is the slow displacement of the first by the second, through the Word's ongoing work in us.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- Read Session Seven of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- Read James 3:13-18 multiple times, and read it alongside James 1 to see how the themes connect — wisdom from God (1:5), double-mindedness (1:8), meekness (1:21). James is coming back to threads he introduced at the beginning.
- Read Luther's Heidelberg Disputation (1518), especially theses 19-21 on the theologian of the cross. This is the single most important background reading for this session.
- Read Philippians 2:1-11, which describes the mind of Christ in terms that match James's wisdom from above closely. Paul and James are teaching the same picture of Christian humility.
- Read Proverbs 8 and 9, for the Old Testament wisdom tradition that is the background to James's language. James's wisdom from above is a New Testament reframing of Lady Wisdom calling in the streets.
- Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, Paul's most famous treatment of the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world. Paul's argument is essentially James's argument.
- Pray.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Three theological points come into view in this passage:

- **The theology of the cross.** Luther's 1518 distinction maps directly onto James's two wisdoms. The theology of glory seeks God in works of power and majesty. The theology of the cross receives God in weakness and hiddenness, supremely in Christ crucified. James's wisdom from above is the wisdom of the theologian of the cross.
- **The character of Christ.** The seven marks of the wisdom from above — pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, sincere — read as a portrait of Christ. This matters because it tells us that the wisdom from above is not a set of abstract virtues but the concrete shape of the life of the Son.

- **Sanctification as conformation to Christ.** Growing in the wisdom from above is not acquiring a skill set; it is being slowly conformed to Christ's image through the Word and Spirit. This is the Lutheran doctrine of sanctification, and it keeps this passage from becoming moralism.

A Word About the Heidelberg Disputation

If you can get a copy of the Heidelberg Disputation (it is in Luther's Works Vol. 31, or available free online), read theses 19-21 aloud in class if time permits. Thesis 21 is especially pointed: "A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it is." This is one of the most memorable lines in all of Luther's writing, and it lands hard in the context of James 3.

Suggested Time Plan

This passage is short, which gives you time to treat the theology of the cross carefully. Do not fill the extra time by rushing to application; use it to let the theological framework land.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and brief review of Session Six
0:05–0:15	Who is wise among you? (v. 13)
0:15–0:28	Earthly wisdom and its fruit (vv. 14-16)
0:28–0:45	The seven marks of the wisdom from above (v. 17)
0:45–0:52	Theology of the cross and harvest of peace (v. 18)
0:52–0:58	Discussion (choose 1-2 questions)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and next-week assignment



Where to Slow Down

The seven marks in verse 17 reward slow treatment. Consider spending roughly two minutes on each one — pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, sincere. This is about fifteen minutes total, but it is the heart of the session. Each mark connects to something concrete in the Christian life, and students will remember this passage by recalling the portrait of the wise person it paints.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Verse 13: Who Is Wise Among You?

Read the full passage aloud. Then return to verse 13 and work carefully.

Wisdom in the Ancient World

Briefly sketch for your class what wisdom meant in the ancient world. The wise man was a figure of authority, honor, and influence. Kings sought out wise men. Communities looked to them. To be called wise was a mark of status. This matters because James's answer to the question "who is wise among you" inverts the cultural expectation — the wise person is known by good conduct and meekness, not by eminence or eloquence.

Meekness

Spend time on this word. Modern English has largely lost the biblical sense. Meekness is not weakness. It is strength under control — power that has been tamed by love. Moses was called the meekest man on earth, and he led a nation out of Egypt. Christ called Himself gentle and lowly in heart, and He is the one through whom all things were made.

Give your class a working definition: meekness is the disposition of someone who knows who they are before God and therefore has nothing to prove before others. The meek do not need to dominate, to win every argument, to have the last word. Their standing is already given. From that place of secure identity in Christ, they can be gentle, patient, open to others, willing to serve.

A Practical Observation

Ask your class: can you think of someone in your life — past or present — whom you would describe as meek in this biblical sense? Almost every student can name at least one person. Getting a concrete picture of meekness in a real person helps the abstract definition become tangible. Often it is a grandparent, a long-tenured pastor, or a faithful teacher who comes to mind.

That picture will stay with students longer than any definition you give them.

Verses 14-16: Earthly Wisdom

James is unsparing in his diagnosis. Bitter jealousy and selfish ambition are the marks of earthly wisdom. The three descriptors — earthly, unspiritual, demonic — escalate, and the progression tells us where this kind of wisdom leads if left unchecked.

Bitter Jealousy

The word bitter matters. James is not talking about the momentary jealousy that flickers through and passes. He is talking about jealousy that has settled in — the resentment that lives in the background of a life, shaping every response to others' success. This is the jealousy that cannot rejoice when a rival flourishes, that secretly wishes others would fail, that finds another's gain a reminder of one's own lack.

This is a diagnostic question for your class (and for you): is there someone whose success you cannot celebrate without feeling a sting? That is bitter jealousy at work. It is a spiritual disease, and it is a mark that earthly wisdom is shaping you in that area of your life.

Selfish Ambition

The Greek word *eritheia* originally described the motive of one who sought political office for personal gain. Selfish ambition is the drive to be on top, to be noticed, to build one's own platform at the expense of the common good. What makes it insidious is that it often disguises itself as virtue. The ambitious person tells himself he is pursuing excellence, serving the mission, using his gifts for good. Sometimes these things are true in part. But the tell is in the response to others' success in the same field. The selfish person cannot celebrate rivals. He needs to be the one who succeeded.

A Pastoral Observation

Bitter jealousy and selfish ambition are particularly insidious in church contexts, because they can hide under the cover of spiritual concern. The pastor who can't celebrate another pastor's growing church, the Sunday school teacher who can't rejoice when a newer teacher is praised, the musician who needs to be the one on the platform — these are common manifestations of the flesh disguised as ministry. Name this honestly in class. Students who have seen it will recognize it. Students who have not may need the warning.

Earthly, Unspiritual, Demonic

Walk your class through the three descriptors in order:

- **Earthly:** belonging to this fallen order of things, unable to see beyond what it can measure, limited to the horizon of the natural.
- **Unspiritual** (also translated soulish or natural): not merely limited but resistant, operating by principles that are set against the Spirit.
- **Demonic:** actively aligned with the enemy of souls. The demons have a kind of wisdom too, and its fruit is chaos, division, destruction.

The progression matters. Earthly wisdom, left unchecked, does not remain merely earthly. It slides toward active service of the enemy. There is no neutral ground.

Disorder and Every Vile Practice

The social fruit of earthly wisdom is disorder (akatastasia) — instability, confusion, disturbance — and every vile practice. Where earthly wisdom rules in a community, peace does not take root. This is true of families, workplaces, and especially congregations. The congregation where earthly wisdom has a foothold in the leadership or the membership will be in perpetual low-grade disturbance, because the underlying logic of the self at the center produces that disturbance as surely as fire produces smoke.

Verse 17: The Seven Marks of the Wisdom From Above

This is the heart of the session. Treat each mark carefully. You do not need to say much about each, but you should not skip any.

First, Pure

Note the word first. Purity is foundational. It is the undivided heart, the single focus. Without purity, the other virtues become instruments of the self. With purity, they become instruments of God. Connect this to the double-minded person James warned against in chapter one.

Peaceable

Not passive, not cowardly, not afraid of necessary conflict. Rather, a disposition that does not stir up strife for its own sake, that takes up the necessary fight reluctantly and lays it down as soon as truth allows.

Gentle

Strength tamed by love for the other. Visible especially in how one treats those who are weaker — the young, the struggling, the offender who has realized their fault. Christ called Himself gentle and lowly in heart.

Open to Reason

The Greek *eupithes* means willing to be persuaded, teachable, open to good counsel. Not spinelessness — the wisdom from above holds truth firmly — but not threatened by new information or reasonable critique. Especially countercultural in our own moment, when rigid tribal loyalty is sometimes mistaken for courage.

Full of Mercy and Good Fruits

Mercy not as sentiment but as practice. This connects directly to James 1:27 and the definition of pure religion. The wisdom from above bears fruit in the neighbor's life.

Impartial

The connection to James 2 and the sin of partiality is direct. The wisdom from above treats rich and poor, friend and stranger, by the same standard.

Sincere

The inside matches the outside. No performance for different audiences. Not because the wise person has nothing to hide — every Christian has remaining sin — but because the wise person does not pretend otherwise.

An Important Framing

Remind your class: these seven marks are not a checklist for self-improvement. They are a portrait of the life that the Word produces in the baptized. Our job is not to manufacture them by willpower but to continue receiving the Word that slowly produces them in us. The temptation of this passage is to turn it into moralism — seven steps to being a wise person. Resist that framing clearly and early.

The Theology of the Cross

Now is the moment to introduce or reinforce Luther's distinction. Walk through it carefully.

The Two Theologies

Luther, in the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518, contrasted two ways of approaching God:

- **The theologian of glory** wants to know God through His works of power, beauty, and majesty. He wants a wisdom that is visibly strong, visibly successful, visibly impressive. He wants to climb up to God through the visible things of the world. And he cannot recognize God when God comes in weakness.
- **The theologian of the cross** knows God through His suffering and weakness, supremely in Christ crucified. He receives God as God comes — in the humble form of a Galilean carpenter, in the shame of a Roman execution, in the foolishness of the preached Gospel, in the simple water of Baptism, in the ordinary bread and wine of the Supper. He calls the thing what it is.

The Mapping to James

James's earthly wisdom is the wisdom of the theologian of glory. It wants to climb, to win, to dominate, to be recognized. It is impatient with humility, suspicious of gentleness, hostile to peaceableness. It is the wisdom of the self at the center, and its fruit is disorder.

James's wisdom from above is the wisdom of the theologian of the cross. It looks, from the outside, like weakness. It is quieter, humbler, more patient, more

willing to serve. But it is the wisdom of Christ crucified, and it bears the fruit that only the cross can produce — a harvest of righteousness, sown in peace.

Luther's Memorable Line

If you have time, quote thesis 21 of the Heidelberg Disputation: "A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it is." This line is one of the most quoted in Luther's corpus, and it applies directly to James's concern. Earthly wisdom rebrands its evils as goods — calling bitter jealousy "holy zeal," calling selfish ambition "excellence," calling disorder "passion for the truth." The wisdom from above calls the thing what it is. Including when the thing is our own sin.

Verse 18: A Harvest of Righteousness

Close with the agricultural image. Righteousness is a crop. It is sown in peace by those who make peace. The Christian does not force the harvest; the Christian sows in peace and trusts the Lord of the harvest to produce the crop in His time.

This is a deeply hopeful word for Christians who are tempted to think that gentleness and peaceableness will be exploited. It will not be — not in the long run. The one who sows in peace reaps righteousness. The one who sows in strife reaps only more strife. The patient witness of the wisdom from above is the witness that, in God's time, bears the harvest.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

"Doesn't 'open to reason' mean I have to accept whatever anyone says?"

No. Being open to reason does not mean abandoning conviction. The wisdom from above holds truth firmly. What it refuses is rigidity — the stance that cannot even consider a thoughtful question, that mistakes every challenge for an attack, that treats every difference as betrayal. Being open to reason means you can listen carefully, weigh what is said on its merits, and adjust when the evidence warrants. You are still free to reject bad arguments. You are not free to refuse to hear them.

"What's the difference between peaceable and being a doormat?"

The peaceable person is not afraid of necessary conflict. Jesus was peaceable and also drove money changers from the temple with a whip. Paul was peaceable and also rebuked Peter to his face. The peaceable person takes up the necessary fight when it comes, but does not enjoy the fight, does not go looking for it, and lays it down as soon as truth allows. The doormat, by contrast, cannot resist anything. The peaceable person can resist when resistance is called for; they simply do not need resistance in order to feel alive.

"Isn't ambition good? The Bible commends working hard."

Absolutely. James is not condemning diligent work, the pursuit of excellence, or the use of our gifts for the kingdom. He is condemning selfish ambition — the drive that uses others as means to one's own ends, that cannot celebrate rivals, that needs to be the one who succeeds. Diligent work in the service of the mission, the neighbor, and the glory of God is good. Diligent work in the service of self is what James condemns. The difference is not in the energy; it is in the aim.

"The 'wisdom from above' qualities sound impossible. How can a normal person hope to have all seven?"

You are right that they sound impossible, and in one sense they are — they are the qualities of Christ Himself, not qualities we manufacture by willpower. But here is the good news: the Christian is not alone in this. The Word and Spirit are at work in us, slowly conforming us to the image of Christ. We do not acquire these qualities by trying harder. We receive them, slowly and unevenly, as the Word does its transforming work over a lifetime. Progress is real. Perfection waits for glory. Your task is not to produce the seven marks on your own but to keep returning to the means of grace, trusting the Lord to produce what only He can.

"What if I recognize bitter jealousy or selfish ambition in myself?"

Good. That recognition is already the wisdom from above at work. The theologian of the cross calls the thing what it is, including when the thing is our own sin. The response to recognized sin is always the same: confess it specifically, receive forgiveness specifically, and return to the Word that is gradually transforming you. Do not panic. Do not try harder. Do not despair. The same Gospel that saved you is the Gospel that is sanctifying you, and the recognition of earthly wisdom in your own heart is itself evidence that the wisdom from above has begun to do its work.

"Who is this passage for? Is it really for me, or is it for pastors and leaders?"

It is for every baptized Christian. The question James opens with — who is wise among you — is addressed to the whole congregation. Every Christian has a kind of wisdom shaping them daily, in conversations with family, coworkers, neighbors, fellow members. The question is not whether you have wisdom but which wisdom you are operating from. This passage applies to the pastor preparing his sermon and to the grandmother at the grocery store. It applies to the executive in the boardroom and to the child in the schoolyard. There is no corner of the Christian life where the question of which wisdom is not relevant.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. Pick one or two. Some notes on each:

Question 1 — A genuinely wise person you have known

A beautiful opening question. Nearly every student can name someone, and the discussion becomes a kind of testimony to the Lord's work in ordinary lives. Often it is a grandparent, a teacher, a long-tenured saint. Students who share their picture of wisdom in a concrete person will remember that picture long after the session ends.

Question 2 — Bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in yourself

A searching question that requires trust in the group. Best for mature classes. For newer groups, consider framing it as personal reflection rather than group sharing.

Question 3 — Which mark is most natural, which most foreign

Good self-examination question without requiring public confession. Students can answer about themselves without naming specific sins. Often reveals interesting self-knowledge.

Question 4 — Theology of glory versus theology of the cross

The theologically richest question. Best for classes that enjoy doctrine. It invites students to see their own temptations toward the theology of glory, which is where most Christians need the most help.

Question 5 — Sowing in peace

The most concrete application question. Good for ending the session on a hopeful note. Students often have specific relationships or situations where this applies, and the hope of a harvest they cannot yet see is a genuinely Gospel-shaped hope.

Question 6 — Open to reason in our cultural moment

A timely question that connects the passage to contemporary life. Works well in groups that are engaged with the broader culture. Handle carefully if the class has strong political divisions; this question can easily tip into political content.

A Concluding Thought

End the session by connecting the two wisdoms back to the Christian's daily life. We are not asked to become wise by an act of will. We are asked to keep returning to the Word, to the sacraments, to confession and absolution. These are where the wisdom from above is slowly formed in us, as the Lord continues the work He began at our Baptism. The patient, unspectacular rhythm of the Christian life is how this wisdom grows — not in dramatic breakthroughs but in the slow accumulation of ordinary grace.

For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- **Philippians 2:1-11.** Paul's description of the mind of Christ, which matches James's wisdom from above closely. The ultimate biblical portrait of what James is describing.
- **1 Corinthians 1:18-31.** Paul's most famous treatment of the wisdom of God versus the wisdom of the world. Reinforces James's framework.
- **Proverbs 8 and 9.** The Old Testament wisdom tradition — Lady Wisdom calling in the streets. James is drawing on this tradition.
- **Matthew 11:28-30.** Christ's self-description as gentle and lowly in heart. Directly connects to James's gentle and meekness.
- **Galatians 5:19-23.** Paul's contrast between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. A close parallel to James's two kinds of wisdom.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- **Luther's Heidelberg Disputation (1518).** Essential preparation. Especially theses 19-21 on the theologian of the cross. Available in Luther's Works Vol. 31 or free online.
- **Gerhard Forde, On Being a Theologian of the Cross.** Modern confessional Lutheran treatment of Luther's distinction. Accessible and pastorally shaped.
- **Luther's Sermon on the Sum of the Christian Life.** Luther's reflection on what it means to live as a Christian day by day. Echoes many of the themes in James 3.

Commentaries

- **Curtis Giese, Concordia Commentary: James.** Strong on the Old Testament wisdom tradition and the Christological shape of verse 17.
- **Douglas Moo, The Letter of James.** Helpful lexical work on the seven marks in verse 17, and on the Greco-Roman parallels to James's contrast.

A Final Word

You are three sessions from the end of the study. Your students are developing a framework for reading the whole of the Christian life. This session gives them one of the most important pieces of that framework: the distinction between earthly wisdom and the wisdom from above, which is essentially the distinction between the theology of glory and the theology of the cross.

If your class leaves with that framework securely in hand, they will have received a gift that will shape their reading of Scripture, their understanding of their own hearts, and their perception of the world around them for years to come. Teach it clearly. Teach it with gentleness, which is itself a mark of the wisdom you are describing. And teach it with the confidence that the Word you are expounding is the Word that slowly produces in all of us the very wisdom it commends.

Next week we move into chapter four. The passage is searching — James will diagnose the sources of our quarrels, name our spiritual adultery with the world, and then deliver one of the most stunning Gospel statements in the letter. He gives more grace. Read the passage carefully. It rewards it.

May the Lord bless your teaching, and may the wisdom from above continue to grow in you and in those you teach.



Soli Deo Gloria

The Epistle of James

Teacher's Guide

Session Eight

Friendship with the World and the God Who Gives More Grace

James 4:1-12

A free companion to the Bible study

Larry Herzog Jr.

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Eight. This is one of the most theologically significant passages in James, and one of the clearest demonstrations of Law and Gospel structure in the entire letter. Your job this week is to let the passage do what it is designed to do: press the diagnosis as sharply as James does, and then let the Gospel pivot land with its full force.

The key to this session is verse 6, and specifically the three words: But He gives more grace. Everything in the passage leads up to that sentence, and everything after it flows from it. If you teach this session well, those three words will be what your students remember. They will carry them home. They will think of them the next time they confront their own sin. And they will be better equipped to face the rest of the Christian life because they have seen, in this one passage, how the Gospel always overcomes the Law's verdict on us.

This session has a particular pastoral opportunity. After weeks of teaching about what James expects of the baptized life, your students may be tired, convicted, or feeling their failure. This passage gives you the occasion to lift them up. The Law is severe here, but the Gospel is more severe still in its sufficiency. Teach it as Gospel, not as Law alone, and your students will leave encouraged rather than crushed.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

Our quarrels arise from the divided hearts within us that have made friendship with the world into enmity with God — but He gives more grace than all our failing, and He gives it freely to the humble who come empty-handed to receive it.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- Read Session Eight of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- Read James 4:1-12 multiple times, letting the pivot in verse 6 land with its full force each time. Read the whole passage aloud and see if it doesn't turn at "But He gives more grace."
- Read 1 Peter 5:5-11, which contains the same Proverbs citation (God opposes the proud) and the same exhortations to humble yourselves. Peter and James are teaching the same thing.
- Read Luke 18:9-14, Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. This parable is the narrative version of what James is teaching here — God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble.
- Review Luther's Small Catechism, Part Four on Baptism. The daily dying of the old Adam and rising of the new maps directly onto the sequence of verbs in James 4:7-10.
- Examine your own heart honestly before teaching this. Where have you been a friend of the world? Where have you prayed wrongly, for your own passions rather than God's will? The teacher who has felt the conviction of this passage teaches it differently than the teacher who has kept it at arm's length.
- Pray.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- **The Lutheran understanding of sin as a disposition of the heart.** James 4:1-3 teaches that sin begins not with outward acts but with disordered desires within. Every outward conflict traces back to inward passion. This is classical Lutheran anthropology.
- **Friendship with the world as spiritual adultery.** The world here is not creation but the fallen human order in rebellion against God. Friendship with it is enmity with God — a binary, not a sliding scale.

- **The Gospel pivot of verse 6.** "But He gives more grace" is the theological center of the passage. More than our sin. More than our quarreling. More than our adultery. The Gospel always exceeds the diagnosis of the Law.
- **Daily repentance as the Christian's life.** The sequence of verbs in 4:7-10 (submit, resist, draw near, cleanse, purify, mourn, humble) describes not a one-time conversion but the daily rhythm of the baptized life. This is Luther's "daily dying and rising" applied concretely.

The Most Important Teaching Move

Do not race to verse 6. Let James's diagnosis in verses 1-5 do its work first. If you rush to the Gospel before the Law has done its work, the Gospel will not land with its proper force. The "But" of verse 6 is only as powerful as the severity of what precedes it. Trust James. Let the diagnosis be uncomfortable. Your students will feel the grace more deeply for having first felt the weight.

Suggested Time Plan

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and brief review of Session Seven
0:05–0:18	The source of conflict (vv. 1-3)
0:18–0:28	Friendship with the world (vv. 4-5)
0:28–0:40	But He gives more grace — the pivot (v. 6)
0:40–0:50	The shape of humble reception (vv. 7-10)
0:50–0:55	Do not judge one another (vv. 11-12)
0:55–0:58	Discussion (choose 1 question)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and next-week assignment



Where to Slow Down

Spend your best time on verse 6. Do not rush. When you read "But He gives more grace" aloud in class, pause. Let the words sit in the air. This is the Gospel moment of the session, and the silence around those words can be as pastoral as the words themselves. Students who encounter that sentence with its proper weight will carry it with them for years.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Verses 1-3: The Source of Conflict

Read the full passage aloud before beginning to teach. The structure matters — students who hear the whole arc from diagnosis to grace to response will receive the teaching differently than those who hear it piece by piece.

Where Do the Conflicts Come From?

James does not ask his question rhetorically. He wants an answer, and the answer is uncomfortable. The conflicts in the congregation come from within — from the passions at war within us. This diagnosis places responsibility squarely on the fighters. The easier framing would have been to blame external circumstances; James refuses that framing.

For your class, this is an opportunity for honest self-examination. Ask them to think of a recent conflict — in their family, at work, in the church. Help them trace it back. What desire of their own was driving them? What were they wanting that they were not getting? Almost always, honest reflection reveals that our external conflicts have internal roots. The diagnosis fits.

The Escalating Language

James's escalating language — desire, covet, murder, fight, quarrel — mirrors Jesus' Sermon on the Mount teaching that anger shares a spiritual DNA with murder. James is not saying every quarrel is a murder. He is saying the internal passions that produce our quarrels are of the same kind as those that, unchecked, produce far worse evils. This is the Lutheran doctrine of sin taken seriously — sin as disposition, not just as act.

You Do Not Ask; You Ask Wrongly

The middle of verse 3 is pastorally searching. Some of the things we are fighting over, we have never actually asked God for. We have assumed we must seize them, scheme for them, manipulate others for them. The simple path of asking our Father has not occurred to us.

But James goes further. When we do ask, we often ask wrongly. We ask in order to spend the answer on our own passions. This is prayer turned into an instrument of the self — prayer as negotiation rather than as submission, prayer as manipulation rather than as trust. Be honest about how common this is in your own prayer life and in your students'. The prayer that says, "Give me this because I want it," without any deep concern for God's will or our neighbor's good, is a form of the disordered prayer James is describing.

Verses 4-5: Friendship with the World

James now turns up the severity. The word adulterous is deliberately shocking. He is not accusing his readers of the outward act. He is drawing on the Old Testament prophets, who routinely called Israel adulterous when they went after other gods. Spiritual adultery is unfaithfulness to the Lord whom we have married, and James says friendship with the world is exactly this unfaithfulness.

Defining the World

Be careful here. The word world (kosmos) in the New Testament has multiple senses. Work through this for your class:

- Creation (world as made by God): good, to be stewarded, not to be rejected.
- Humanity (world as the people God loves): the object of God's love in John 3:16.
- The fallen human order (world as system of rebellion against God): this is what James has in mind.

The world James condemns is the third sense — the fallen human order with its values, priorities, idolatries, and allegiances that run counter to Christ. The Christian is not called to flee creation or to hate fellow human beings; we are called to resist being shaped by the fallen logic of self-centered existence.

A Useful Application

For your class, ask concretely: what are the values of the world (in this third sense) that most tempt you? The idolatry of money? Of status? Of political tribe? Of comfort? Of self-expression? Of being thought well of? Each of these is a functional god that competes for our allegiance. The adultery

James warns about is the steady drift of our hearts toward these gods, even while we continue to attend worship and call ourselves Christian.

The Binary

James does not soften the either/or. Friendship with the world is enmity with God. Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. This is a binary, not a sliding scale. You cannot, at the level of deep allegiance, be friends with both.

Jesus taught the same thing: no one can serve two masters. John taught the same thing: if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. The Scriptures speak with one voice. The attempt to hold both — to be a comfortable citizen of both the kingdom and the fallen order — will, in the end, cost us the one that matters.

Verse 6: The Gospel Pivot

This is the heart of the session. Slow down. This is where the whole passage turns.

The Grammar of the Pivot

The Greek word translated "but" at the start of verse 6 is a strong adversative. It marks a sharp contrast against everything that has just been said. James has just laid out the worst diagnosis we could face — we are adulterers, enemies of God, quarreling from our disordered passions. And then: But. But He gives more grace.

Read these words aloud in class. Then pause. Let them sit. The pause is part of the teaching. If you rush past these three words to the next point, you will have missed the passage's pivot. If you let them land, your class will feel the Gospel in them.

More Grace Than What?

Help your class see what "more" means here. More than our adultery. More than our enmity. More than our quarreling. More than the disordered passions we have just been forced to see in ourselves. Whatever the true extent of our sin is — and James has pressed it as severely as any New Testament writer — the grace of God in Christ is more.

This is not grace that matches our sin point for point, as if the divine mercy were a careful ledger offsetting our debits with precise credits. This is grace that exceeds. Grace that overflows. Grace that does not merely cover our failure but swallows it up in something larger. This is the classical Lutheran understanding of the Gospel. Christ's righteousness, given to us as a gift, is always more than sufficient for our sin.

A Memorable Framing

You might say something like: "The Law has just pressed as hard on us as it can. We are adulterers. We are enemies of God. We are driven by passions we cannot control. And in the face of all of that, the next word is 'But.' Everything the Law has just said is true about us. And then: But He gives more grace. The Gospel is always the 'but' after the Law. Never imagine the Gospel as a minimization of the Law. Imagine it as the greater word that speaks against the Law's verdict and overrules it for all who come empty-handed to Christ."

Opposes the Proud, Gives Grace to the Humble

James supports the claim with a citation from Proverbs 3:34, which is also quoted in 1 Peter 5:5. This is a deep theme in Scripture. The proud find themselves opposed by God. The humble find themselves flooded with grace.

The pride James is naming here is not merely arrogance as a personality trait. It is the pride that insists on its own righteousness, that defends itself against the diagnosis, that refuses to come empty-handed. The humility James is commending is not a feeling of worthlessness. It is the honest acknowledgment of what we are — sinners who need a grace we cannot earn. The proud hand is closed; it cannot receive. The humble hand is open; it is the hand the Father fills.

Verses 7-10: The Shape of Humble Reception

James now describes what humble reception of grace actually looks like. The sequence of verbs reads almost like a compact liturgy of repentance: submit, resist, draw near, cleanse, purify, mourn, humble.

Submit, Resist, Draw Near

These three belong together. Submit to God is the opposite of the friendship with the world that has been rebuked. Resist the devil is the refusal of the seductions that would pull us back. Draw near to God is the closing of the distance our sin has created.

Notice the extraordinary promise attached to drawing near: He will draw near to you. This is a God who is not reluctant, not distant, not hard to reach. He moves toward the one who moves toward Him. The distance between us and the Father, which seemed so great under the diagnosis, closes from both sides the moment we take a step.

Cleanse Your Hands, Purify Your Hearts

The imagery is Old Testament ritual purification, but James is using it for inward reality. Cleansing the hands = dealing honestly with what we have done. Purifying the heart = dealing honestly with what we have wanted. The double-minded person of chapter one returns here. James is calling the divided heart to become single-minded, the split allegiance to resolve into wholehearted devotion to Christ.

Be Wretched and Mourn

This is the most uncomfortable part of the sequence. James is not commending general misery. He is describing contrition — true sorrow for sin, not merely regret for consequences. The Christian who sees his sin for what it is does not shrug it off; he mourns it. This is not a permanent posture; the same James calls his readers to count trials as joy elsewhere in the letter. But in the moment of facing sin honestly, the right response is grief, not lightness.

Connecting to the Catechism

Luther's Small Catechism on Baptism (Part Four) describes the Christian life as daily contrition and repentance, in which the old Adam should be drowned and a new man daily come forth and arise. This is precisely what James is describing in these verses. The sequence — submit, resist, draw near, cleanse, purify, mourn, humble — is the daily pattern of the baptized Christian, not a one-time conversion exercise.

He Will Exalt You

The sequence ends with a promise. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you. We cannot exalt ourselves. Every attempt to lift ourselves up drives us further from God. But when we humble ourselves, the Lord Himself lifts us up — not because our humility has earned anything, but because humility is the posture in which we can receive what only He can give. This is the Gospel pattern. The Father who opposed us in our pride now exalts us in our humility.

Verses 11-12: Do Not Judge One Another

This closing exhortation is not an unrelated addition. It flows directly from what James has been saying. The Christian who has received grace does not climb into the seat of the Judge. The seat of the Judge belongs to the Lord.

When we speak evil of a brother, when we pronounce judgment on a fellow member, we have taken a seat that is not ours. There is one Lawgiver and Judge. We are not Him. And the position of anyone who has received mercy is not to become a judge of others but to extend to others the same mercy that has been extended to us.

Connect this back to James 2:13 — mercy triumphs over judgment. The one who has received mercy does not stand in judgment over his brother. The one who persists in judging others reveals that he has not yet understood his own need for grace. This is one of the most practical tests of the Gospel's work in a Christian's life: how do we treat fellow sinners?

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

"If friendship with the world is enmity with God, does that mean I can't have non-Christian friends?"

No. The New Testament does not condemn relationships with non-Christians; such relationships are often occasions for witness and love. Paul writes that he has become all things to all people that by all means he might save some. What James condemns is friendship with the fallen value system — loving what the world loves at the level of ultimate allegiance. You can have warm, genuine, loving friendships with non-Christian neighbors, coworkers, and family members while still having your deepest allegiance set on Christ rather than on the world's values. The question is not who your friends are but what your heart is set on.

"What's the difference between asking God for something I want and asking wrongly?"

A good heart question. Not every specific desire for something is wrong. God invites us to bring our needs and desires to Him. The question is what motivates the asking and whether we are asking as children submitted to the Father's will or as consumers seeking to maximize our own satisfaction. A useful test: am I ready to accept no as the answer? If I am genuinely ready for God to say no because He knows best, my asking is in a healthy posture. If I am only ready for yes, and a no would shake my faith, my asking may be more demand than submission.

"Verse 5 is confusing — who is the 'spirit' that dwells in us that yearns jealously?"

This is one of the most debated verses in the letter. Two main readings: (1) The human spirit within us yearns jealously — our fallen spirit is by nature covetous, a diagnosis of our inward state. (2) The Holy Spirit whom God has made to dwell in us yearns jealously for us, unwilling to share us with idols. Both readings are defensible. The Lutheran Study Bible tends toward the second (God's Spirit yearning jealously over us, as a husband over an unfaithful wife). Either way, the

point is the same: God is not indifferent to our wandering hearts. Do not let this verse's ambiguity distract from the passage's thrust. Name the uncertainty, give your preferred reading, and move on.

"How do I tell whether I'm befriending the world or simply engaging faithfully in my vocation?"

Vocation is good. God calls us to work, to civic life, to family, to the ordinary tasks of existence. These are not the world James condemns. The test is internal, not external. Does this engagement shape my heart, or does my heart shape it? Does my job own me, or does Christ own me in my job? Do my cultural consumptions form my values, or do my values form my consumptions? Christians can work in businesses, serve in government, enjoy culture, participate in politics, and play sports without befriending the world. What makes it adultery is when these things become functional gods — things we serve rather than things we enjoy as gifts from God.

"Does 'He gives more grace' mean I can keep sinning because grace covers it?"

No. Paul answers this question directly in Romans 6: shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means. But the reason is not that grace is limited. Grace is always more than our sin. The reason is that the grace we have received changes us. The baptized Christian is not a forgiven person who stays where they were; the baptized Christian is being transformed. If grace has not begun to work in our lives at all — if we can continue in deliberate sin with no struggle, no sorrow, no movement — it is reasonable to ask whether we have received grace at all. The grace that is more is also the grace that transforms. We do not use it as license; we receive it with tears and rise, slowly, into a new kind of life.

"What if I have been friends with the world for years and don't know how to change?"

This is the pastoral heart of the passage. The answer is exactly what James gives. Submit. Resist. Draw near. Cleanse. Purify. Mourn. Humble yourself. None of these is a one-time act; all are daily rhythms. Start where you are. Name your friendship with the world honestly. Come to Christ empty-handed. Receive the

grace that is more than your years of wandering. Return tomorrow and the next day. The Lord who gives grace to the humble gives it daily, and He gives it especially to those who think they have been at it too long. You are not beyond His mercy. You are exactly where His mercy is most eager to meet you.

"James says 'do not judge one another,' but doesn't he do a lot of judging in this letter?"

A perceptive question. James names sins clearly throughout the letter. The distinction is between the judgment that belongs to God alone (pronouncing a person condemned or saved, which is the Judge's seat) and the discernment that belongs to all Christians (recognizing sin as sin, calling a brother to repentance, exercising pastoral care). Matthew 18 describes a process of confronting sin in a fellow believer — this is not forbidden by James. What is forbidden is the speech that speaks evil of another, that tears down rather than builds up, that places us in the seat of the Judge rather than alongside the brother as a fellow sinner. Confronting sin with love is not the same as judging. Speaking evil of a brother is.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. Pick one. This session has a lot of teaching content, and the pivot in verse 6 deserves adequate air time. Favor a single deep question over multiple rushed ones. Some notes on each:

Question 1 — Tracing conflict to internal desires

A searching opening question. Works especially well for mature groups where students can be honest about their own patterns. For newer groups, consider framing as personal reflection rather than public sharing.

Question 2 — Prayer that is absent or disordered

A pastorally rich question. Nearly every Christian has examples. The question can open honest conversation about prayer life without requiring students to share their specific prayer content.

Question 3 — Friendship with the world in your own life

A concrete application question. Can get political if not handled carefully. For classes with strong political divisions, consider framing as "values you find yourself drawn to that run against Christ's values" rather than letting it become a political discussion.

Question 4 — How 'But He gives more grace' lands

The best question for this session. It invites students to reflect on the Gospel pivot itself. Students who have felt the weight of the diagnosis will often speak movingly about how the Gospel meets them there. This question can produce some of the most meaningful discussion of the whole series.

Question 5 — Which verb is easiest, which most difficult

A self-examination question that does not require specific confession. Students can answer honestly about the shape of their own struggles without naming particular sins.

Question 6 — Resisting the urge to judge a brother

A practical question. Works well for classes where congregational dynamics may be strained. Can open conversation about how the congregation treats its own members.

The Pastoral Ending

End the session by returning to verse 6. Say the words aloud one more time: "But He gives more grace." Let the class hear them in your voice, spoken directly to them. Then close with prayer that takes the shape of the sequence — submitting, resisting, drawing near, cleansing, purifying, mourning, humbling — and landing on the promise that He will lift us up. This kind of ending turns the session from theological exposition into pastoral formation.

For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- **1 Peter 5:5-11.** The same Proverbs citation, the same exhortations to humble yourselves. Peter and James are teaching the same thing.
- **Luke 18:9-14.** The Pharisee and the tax collector. The narrative version of James 4:6.
- **Matthew 5:21-30.** Jesus' teaching that anger shares a spiritual kinship with murder, and that lust shares it with adultery. James 4:1-3 is in the same theological tradition.
- **1 John 2:15-17.** John's parallel teaching on the love of the world versus the love of the Father. Reinforces the binary James presents.
- **Hosea 2, Jeremiah 3, Ezekiel 16.** Old Testament prophetic background for the language of spiritual adultery. James is drawing deeply on this tradition.
- **Romans 6.** Paul's answer to "shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" — directly relevant to the anticipated question about misusing James 4:6.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- **Small Catechism, Baptism, Part Four.** Luther on the daily dying of the old Adam and rising of the new. Essentially what James 4:7-10 describes.
- **Large Catechism, Confession.** Luther's treatment of contrition and confession. Helps explain why the "be wretched and mourn" passage is not commendation of misery but of true sorrow for sin.
- **Luther's Sermon on Two Kinds of Righteousness (1519).** Luther on the alien righteousness of Christ that is given to the humble. The theological foundation for understanding verse 6.

Commentaries

- **Curtis Giese, Concordia Commentary: James.** Strong on the Old Testament prophetic background for spiritual adultery and on the Law-Gospel structure of the passage.

- **Douglas Moo, The Letter of James.** Careful treatment of the difficult verse 5 and of the sequence of imperatives in 7-10.

A Final Word

You have the opportunity this week to preach the Gospel through the teaching of a passage. Do not miss it. This session's pivot at verse 6 is one of the clearest Law-to-Gospel moments in the entire letter, and maybe in the New Testament. Your students need to hear this. They need to feel the weight of the diagnosis, and then they need to feel the greater weight of the grace. Give them both.

A final word of encouragement. You, the teacher, are in the same place as your students. You are a sinner whose own heart has harbored disordered desires, whose own loyalties have wandered from Christ, whose own speech has judged brothers you should have served. And you are also a Christian to whom the same sentence applies: But He gives more grace. Teach from that place. Not from above your students looking down, but from beside them, receiving the same mercy, pointing together to the Christ who meets us all where we most need Him.

Next week we continue into chapter five. James will speak about planning without reference to God, about the judgment coming on oppressive wealth, and about the patience of the farmer waiting for the harvest. All three are about living rightly in the time before the Lord's return, and the image of the farmer waiting for the early and late rains will land well for a rural audience.

May the Lord bless your teaching, and may the grace that is more than all our sin be especially near to you and to those you teach this week.



Soli Deo Gloria

The Epistle of James — Teacher's Guide, Session Nine

The Epistle of James

Teacher's Guide

Session Nine

Presumption, Patience, and Plain Speech

James 4:13-5:12

A free companion to the Bible study

Larry Herzog Jr.

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to Session Nine. Your passage this week is longer than most — covering the final verses of chapter four through the first twelve verses of chapter five. At first reading, the passage can feel scattered, jumping from business planning to woe-against-the-rich to patience to oaths. Your job as teacher is to help your students see the unifying thread: this is all about how the Christian lives in the meantime, between the Lord's first coming and His second.

This is eschatological ethics — the shape of life when we actually believe the Lord is coming back. Every section of the passage is an application of that fundamental orientation to a specific area: our planning, our wealth, our endurance, our speech. Hold the theme of "the meantime" firmly throughout, and the passage reads as a coherent whole rather than a scattered collection of rebukes.

For your Valley City context, this passage has particular resonance. The farming imagery in James 5:7 is not abstract — your students likely know what it is to wait for rain, to watch a crop stand through July, to trust the cycle of seedtime and harvest. Lean into this. The image of the farmer's patience is one of the most beautiful pastoral pictures in the whole letter, and it will land harder for a rural audience than for almost anyone else.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

The Christian lives in the meantime — between the Lord's first and second comings — and our planning, our wealth, our endurance, and our speech should all be shaped by the sure knowledge that the Judge is standing at the door.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- Read Session Nine of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- Read James 4:13-5:12 in one sitting, noticing how the four topics connect through the theme of living in the meantime.
- Read Matthew 5:33-37, Jesus' teaching on oaths. James is echoing his Brother almost word for word.
- Read Job — or at least Job 1-2, 23, 38-42. James names Job as the example of steadfastness, and the class will benefit if you have a fresh sense of what Job's story actually contains.
- Read Amos 5 and 8, Isaiah 3, Jeremiah 22 — the prophetic denunciations of oppressive wealth. James's woe-to-the-rich passage stands firmly in this tradition.
- Review the Lutheran doctrine of vocation. Luther's treatment in his treatises on the three estates, or in the Small Catechism's Table of Duties, will help frame the teaching on wealth as a matter of rightly serving our neighbor through our station.
- Pray.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- **Providence and human planning.** The Lutheran doctrine of providence teaches that God orders all things, and yet human responsibility for planning and work is real. James 4:13-17 does not forbid planning; it forbids planning that fails to acknowledge the Lord under whose hand all plans unfold.
- **Vocation and the use of wealth.** The Lutheran doctrine of vocation frames wealth not as a possession but as a stewardship. The wealthy Christian is called to serve his neighbor through the right use of what he has been given. James 5:1-6 warns what happens when wealth is used for self-indulgence at the expense of the neighbor.

- **Eschatological hope.** The Christian's patience is not stoic endurance but hopeful waiting. We know how the story ends. The Lord is coming. The Judge is standing at the door. This changes how we endure everything.
- **Integrity of speech.** The Eighth Commandment and its positive requirement (to defend the neighbor and put the best construction on everything) apply here. James and Jesus both call for plain speech whose reliability does not depend on oaths.

A Useful Framing

Tell your class explicitly at the start: "This passage seems to cover four different topics, but it's actually one passage about one thing. It's about how we live in the meantime — between the Lord's first coming and His second. Watch for that thread." Giving students the unifying lens up front will help them see the connections as you teach them.

Suggested Time Plan

This is a longer passage than most in the study, and you will need to be deliberate about pacing. The four sections can easily run long if you let them. Here is one way to structure the hour:

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and framing the unifying theme
0:05–0:18	Presumptuous planning (4:13-17)
0:18–0:32	Woe to the rich (5:1-6)
0:32–0:45	The farmer's patience (5:7-11)
0:45–0:52	Plain speech (5:12)
0:52–0:58	Discussion (choose 1 question)
0:58–1:00	Closing prayer and final-session preview



Where to Slow Down

The farmer image in 5:7 is the pastoral heart of this session, especially for a rural audience. Spend real time on it. Let the class sit with the image of a farmer waiting for the rains. For Valley City, this is not an abstract metaphor; it is Tuesday afternoon in August. If time gets tight, trim the oaths section (which is short and relatively straightforward), not the farmer section.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Opening Framing

Begin by reading the full passage aloud — all of 4:13 through 5:12. Then tell the class plainly what holds it together. This is eschatological ethics. How we plan, how we handle wealth, how we endure, how we speak — all of these take their shape from our answer to one question: do we actually believe the Lord is coming back?

If we do, everything changes. If we do not, we live like people who have nothing but this world, and we will treat our plans, our money, our suffering, and our words accordingly. James is writing to people who are struggling to remember that the Lord is coming back, and he is showing them what faithful life in the meantime looks like in four specific areas.

Verses 4:13-17: Presumptuous Planning

The Picture

Help your class see the scene. A businessman or trader confidently laying out a plan for the coming year — today or tomorrow, this town, this length of time, this profit. The speech is confident, specific, and utterly devoid of reference to God. This is the kind of speech James condemns, not because planning is wrong but because planning as if we were sovereign is wrong.

The Mist Image

The image of life as a mist is worth pausing on. A mist is visible, real, present for a moment, and then gone. Every one of us has known this in our own families. The person who was healthy and then was not. The plan that was certain and then was shattered. The life that seemed secure and then was taken. James's image is not hyperbole; it is how life actually is for creatures like us.

Not a Prohibition of Planning

Be careful to make this point clearly. James is not telling Christians not to plan. The Christian life is not a life of drift. We have vocations. Farmers plant. Teachers prepare. Business owners build. Pastors study. All of this requires planning. What James condemns is the planning that speaks with certainty about a future we do not control, that fails to acknowledge the God under whose hand our plans unfold.

"If the Lord Wills"

The phrase "if the Lord wills" (Latin: *Deo volente*, often abbreviated D.V.) has a long Christian history. The early Christians used it. The Puritans used it. Your grandmother probably used it. It is not a magical formula, and James is not requiring it as a verbal tag on every sentence. What matters is the posture: we plan, we work, we act — but always under God. We hold our plans loosely. We acknowledge that their fulfillment is His gift.

A Practical Suggestion

Ask your class this week to try saying "if the Lord wills" — aloud, at least once — when they talk about a plan for next week. See what it does to their sense of what they are saying. The phrase, taken seriously, can reshape how we speak about the future. Even just practicing it a few times a week will land differently than reading about it in a book.

Sins of Omission (4:17)

This short verse is easy to miss. James connects presumptuous planning to sins of omission — the good we know to do but fail to do because we are busy with our own projects. The person who plans his life around his own agenda will inevitably fail to do the good God has set before him. Note this for your class. The doctrine of sins of omission is often overlooked, and this verse is one of the clearest New Testament statements of it.

Verses 5:1-6: Woe to the Rich

This is one of the sharpest passages in the New Testament, and it makes many readers uncomfortable. Teach it faithfully. Do not soften it. But also do not let it become a political rant.

Who Is Being Addressed?

Commentators debate whether James is addressing Christians with wealth or prophetically denouncing unbelieving rich oppressors for the comfort of his suffering Christian readers. A strong case can be made for the latter — the severity of the language, the absence of any call to repentance, the prophetic form echoing Amos and Isaiah all point that direction. Explain this interpretive question briefly in class, but do not let it distract from the warning's application to any Christian who has wealth.

The American Christian and Wealth

This is the uncomfortable application. By the standards of James's original audience, by global standards, and by historical standards, most American Christians are rich. Even those of us who do not feel rich have access to resources, comforts, and opportunities that most humans across history and around the world have never had.

The question for your class is not whether we are rich but whether we hold our wealth rightly. James names three specific sins: wealth accumulated without reference to God (vv. 2-3), workers exploited and wages withheld (v. 4), and luxury indulged without regard for others (vv. 5-6). Each of these should be examined honestly. Do we use our wealth as if it were ours or as if it were God's? Do we deal justly with those who work for us? Do we indulge in luxury at the expense of others?

A Political Caution

This passage is easily conscripted into political causes. Resist the conscription. James is issuing a prophetic warning, not proposing a policy. The application is pastoral and personal: do not be among those James is warning. Use what you have with an awareness of who gave it, how your neighbor is affected, and to whom you will give account. This applies across political convictions and every economic system. A class that leaves arguing about tax policy has missed the point. A class that leaves examining its own use of resources has received it.

The Cries That Reach the Lord

Verse 4 is profoundly comforting for the oppressed, even as it is deeply threatening to the oppressor. The cries of the harvesters — the wages withheld by fraud — have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. God hears. He is not blind to economic injustice. He is not indifferent to the dealings of the powerful. For Christians in situations of real economic oppression, this is a word of profound comfort. Your cry is not lost.

Verses 5:7-11: The Farmer's Patience

This is the heart of the session, especially for a rural audience. The image rewards careful treatment.

The Farming Image

Paint the picture for your class. The farmer plants the seed. He does not stand over the field demanding that the crop grow faster. He does not dig up the seed to check on its progress. He waits — for the early rains of autumn to germinate the seed, for the late rains of spring to bring it to maturity. Between the early and late rains, there is a long stretch of waiting. The farmer works — weeding, watching, protecting — but the ultimate outcome is not in his hands.

For your Valley City audience, this is not a metaphor they need explained. They have lived it. Many of them have watched fields of corn or wheat stand quiet through July, waiting for the August rains. Many have known the long patience of farming through seasons that cannot be rushed. Lean into this. Ask the class what it is like to wait for a harvest — the patience required, the trust, the knowledge that worrying does not bring rain any faster.

A Reflection Worth Offering

For a rural audience: "You know this patience. You have practiced it for a lifetime. James is telling you that your life in Christ works the same way. You were planted in the Gospel at your Baptism. The early rains have already come. The late rains are still ahead. And between the two, you wait — not as one who has given up, but as one who knows the Lord of the harvest is faithful. Every summer you live when you farm is a rehearsal for the patience that belongs to your Christian life." This kind of framing will

land deeply.

Not Stoic Endurance

Make clear what Christian patience is not. It is not stoic endurance, where we simply steel ourselves against whatever comes. It is not fatalistic resignation, where we give up on any better outcome. It is hopeful patience — patience grounded in the sure knowledge that the Lord is coming, that His coming is drawing near, and that everything we endure will be weighed and resolved at His appearing.

Establish Your Hearts

The command to establish the heart means to strengthen, to fix firmly, to make stable. This is the opposite of being tossed about by every shift of circumstance. The patient Christian is the Christian whose heart is fixed on the coming of the Lord, not on the immediate winds of present trial.

Do Not Grumble Against One Another

This warning is worth lingering on. Under pressure, we often turn not against our actual oppressors but against our fellow sufferers. The Christian who is exploited by his employer snaps at his wife. The widow who has been ignored complains about her neighbor at church. Name this pattern for your class. It is almost universal, and it is one of the particular dangers of the patient life.

Job as Example

Spend time on Job. He is the most surprising example of steadfastness James could have chosen, because Job's "steadfastness" was not quiet acceptance. Job argued with God. Job demanded. Job cried out in raw complaint. And yet the Lord commended him, and James holds him up as the example.

This is enormously freeing for Christians who are suffering and who feel that their prayers are too raw, their questions too sharp, their complaints too loud to be acceptable before God. Job's prayers were very raw. Job's complaints were very loud. And yet the Lord did not reject him. Tell your class: the patience James commends is not polished. It is the patience of those who remain — who cling to

the Lord through the night, who do not abandon Him even in their grief, who wait for the morning however long the night is.

Verse 5:12: Plain Speech

This verse can feel like an abrupt shift, but it belongs. The time of the meantime is a time of many pressures, and one of them is the pressure to shade the truth in our speaking. James wants Christians to be people whose speech is plain, whose yes is reliable, whose no is firm.

The Culture of Oaths

Briefly sketch the ancient culture of oaths. People swore by all sorts of things — by heaven, by earth, by the temple, by the altar. The Pharisees had developed elaborate distinctions about which oaths were binding and which were not. This culture of graded oaths became a culture of evasion, in which people used specific oaths to appear committed while escaping the actual commitment.

The Deeper Application

This is not primarily about whether a Christian can take a civil oath in court. Lutherans have generally permitted this. The deeper application is about ordinary speech. We do not need verbal reinforcements — "I swear," "honestly," "to tell you the truth" — because these imply, without them, we might be less than truthful. The Christian's plain yes should be yes. The Christian's plain no should be no.

In our age of devalued words, this is deeply countercultural. Almost every Christian uses verbal crutches at some point. The teacher who says "honestly" before making a point reveals, perhaps unconsciously, that his speech is not always honest. The friend who says "trust me" is not always trustworthy. James calls us to be the rare kind of person whose plain word does not require reinforcement because it has proven reliable over time.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

"Is James forbidding planning altogether? How am I supposed to run a business or plan for retirement?"

No, James is not forbidding planning. The Christian life is not a life of passive drift. God has given us vocations, and our vocations require planning — farming, business, education, family life, ministry, all require us to think ahead and make provisions. What James forbids is planning that speaks with certainty about a future we do not control, as if we were sovereign over our own lives. Plan honestly. Plan humbly. Plan with a regular acknowledgment that the Lord is the One under whose hand your plans unfold. Then hold those plans loosely when He directs otherwise.

"What about saving for the future, retirement, or an inheritance for my children?"

The Bible does not condemn saving. Proverbs commends the ant for her prudence. Paul expects Christians to provide for their own. What James condemns is hoarding — wealth piled up without reference to God, used for self-indulgence while the neighbor goes without. The Christian can save for retirement, leave an inheritance to his children, and still be faithful, as long as he holds these things rightly — as stewardships, not possessions; as tools for loving the neighbor across generations, not trophies of self-sufficiency. The test is not how much you have but what you do with it and what it does to you.

"Is the passage about the rich aimed at Christians or at unbelievers?"

Commentators are divided. The severity of the language and the absence of a call to repentance lean toward the view that James is prophetically denouncing unbelieving oppressors, for the comfort of his suffering Christian readers who were often victims of such oppression. But the warning also applies by extension to any Christian who has wealth or aspires to it. The trajectory James describes — wealth without God, workers exploited, luxury at the expense of others — is a trajectory

any human heart can fall into, Christian or not. Take the warning seriously regardless of how you resolve the interpretive question.

"If the Lord is coming soon, why did Jesus not return during the apostles' lifetime? Didn't they expect that?"

They did expect that possibility, and some did interpret "the Judge is standing at the door" and similar phrases as promising imminent return. But the New Testament itself addresses this — 2 Peter 3 teaches that the Lord is patient, not slow, and that with Him a thousand years is as a day. The Lord's coming is near in the sense that it is the next great event in the redemptive timeline, not necessarily in the sense of a specific calendar proximity. What matters for the Christian is not predicting the day but living every day as one who is ready for His coming. This is the posture James calls for, and it is the posture the Church has rightly practiced for two thousand years.

"Was Job really patient? He seems to argue with God a lot."

Exactly right, and this is the point. Job's "steadfastness" was not quiet acceptance. He argued. He demanded. He cried out in raw complaint. But he did not abandon God. He stayed in the relationship through the anguish, and at the end, the Lord commended him as having spoken rightly. The patience James commends is not polished. It is the patience of those who remain — who cling to the Lord through the night, who wait for the morning however long the night is. If you are suffering and your prayers feel too raw, your questions too sharp — Job tells you that the Lord receives these prayers. Pray honestly. Stay in the relationship. That is what Job did, and it is the patience James commends.

"Can a Christian take an oath in court? Join the military? Make a vow at a wedding?"

Christians have historically disagreed on this. Anabaptist traditions have generally refused all oaths, based on a strict reading of Jesus and James. Lutheran and Reformed traditions have generally permitted oaths in certain civil contexts (court testimony, military service, wedding vows), on the view that Jesus and James are condemning the evasive use of oaths in ordinary speech, not categorically forbidding all solemn declarations in legal contexts. Lutherans generally follow

the second view. Civil oaths that are solemn and truthful are not the oaths James condemns. What he condemns is the devaluation of ordinary speech through the casual multiplication of oaths.

"My workplace has real exploitation. Can this passage help me?"

Yes. James 5:4 is a real comfort for Christians facing economic injustice. The cries of those whose wages are withheld, whose work is exploited, whose labor is treated as less valuable than it is — these cries are heard by the Lord of hosts. You are not invisible. He is not indifferent. Judgment, though delayed, is certain. This does not necessarily mean specific vindication in this life (Job did not get his answer in the moment, nor have many Christians throughout history), but it does mean that your situation is known and will ultimately be put right. Endure with the farmer's patience. And if there are lawful steps you can take to address injustice — going to the authorities, seeking other employment, advocating through legal channels — take them. James's exhortation to patience is not a prohibition of pursuing justice; it is a reminder that ultimate vindication belongs to the Lord.

Leading the Discussion

The student chapter offers six discussion questions. Pick one. This session is packed, and one deep question is better than several rushed ones. Some notes on each:

Question 1 — Plans without reference to God

A searching opening question. Most students can name areas where they plan without deep awareness of God — career decisions, financial plans, family arrangements. Works well as personal reflection or small group sharing.

Question 2 — The American Christian and wealth

The most politically charged question, and also potentially the most fruitful. Handle with care. Frame it explicitly as personal examination rather than political debate. For classes with significant political division, consider reframing as "how do you think about your own use of resources" rather than asking about systems.

Question 3 — The farmer's patience

The best question for a rural audience. Students who have farmed, or whose families farmed, will have real experience with this kind of waiting. Works especially well for older students with long life perspective on patience.

Question 4 — Job and honest prayer

A pastorally rich question. Some students have been trained to believe that "good prayers" are polite and reverent, and that rawness in prayer is inappropriate. Job frees them from this. Let the discussion open up the possibility of honest lament in the Christian life.

Question 5 — Grumbling against one another

A convicting personal question. Works well for mature classes willing to be honest about this pattern. Most students can name an example from their own life.

Question 6 — Plain speech

A concrete question that invites practical self-examination. Students can honestly assess their own verbal crutches without naming specific failures. Good closing question.

Ending the Session

This is the second-to-last session. As you close, help your class see where they are in the journey. They have come through the diagnosis and the grace, the wisdom of two kinds, the tongue, the divided heart, and now the eschatological ethics of the meantime. Next week you will bring the whole letter to a close with the pastoral final word — prayer, anointing, confession, the care of the wandering. Tell them plainly that next week is the last, and that the letter ends beautifully, with the pastor entrusting his people to the Lord and to one another. Build anticipation for the close.

For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- **Matthew 5:33-37.** Jesus' teaching on oaths, which James echoes almost word for word.
- **Proverbs 27:1.** "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring." The Old Testament foundation for James 4:13-17.
- **Psalms 90.** Moses' great psalm on the brevity of human life. "Teach us to number our days." Directly relevant to James's "mist" image.
- **Amos 5 and 8, Isaiah 3, Jeremiah 22.** The prophetic denunciations of oppressive wealth. James 5:1-6 stands squarely in this tradition.
- **Job (entire book, or at least chapters 1-2, 23, 38-42).** James names Job as the example of steadfastness. The class will benefit if you have fresh familiarity with Job's actual story.
- **Luke 12:13-21.** Jesus' parable of the rich fool, who plans to build bigger barns without reference to God. An almost exact narrative parallel to James 4:13-17.
- **2 Peter 3.** On the apparent delay of the Lord's coming. Addresses the "why hasn't He returned yet" question that may come up in class.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- **Small Catechism, Table of Duties.** Luther's outline of the vocational responsibilities that flow from station. Relevant to the teaching on wealth and vocation.
- **Luther's Treatise on Christian Liberty (The Freedom of a Christian).** The foundation for Lutheran understanding of how the Christian serves the neighbor through vocation, including the use of wealth.
- **Luther's treatise Trade and Usury (1524).** Luther on economic ethics. Dated in specifics but theologically rich on the Christian's handling of money.
- **Small Catechism, Seventh Commandment.** Luther's explanation of "You shall not steal" — including the positive requirement to help our neighbor improve and protect his possessions. Directly relevant to James's treatment of wealth and workers.

Commentaries

- **Curtis Giese, Concordia Commentary: James.** Strong on the prophetic roots of the woe-to-the-rich passage and on the eschatological framing of the patience section.
- **Douglas Moo, The Letter of James.** Careful exegesis of the farming imagery and the connection to Jewish wisdom traditions.

A Final Word

You are now one session from the end of your study. Your students have walked a long road with you. They have sat under James's diagnoses, received his Gospel pivots, examined their tongues, faced the sin of partiality, and reckoned with what it means to be justified by faith. This session adds another layer to the picture — the shape of ordinary Christian life in the meantime, lived under the reality of the Lord who has come and is coming back.

The pastoral opportunity this week is to show your class that every part of their daily life — their work, their money, their endurance, their speech — is framed by their faith in the Lord's return. For those who have been drifting into living as if this world were all there is, this session can be a strong corrective. For those who have been losing heart in suffering, the farmer's patience is a deep comfort. Both kinds of students will be in your class. Teach for both.

Next week we come to the final session. The letter ends with a beautiful pastoral passage — prayer in suffering, song in gladness, anointing of the sick, confession of sins to one another, the reclaiming of the wandering brother. It is a fitting close for a letter that has pressed so hard on the practical life of the baptized. James ends as he began: not with abstract theology but with the concrete life of the congregation. Your final session will bring the whole series home.

May the Lord bless your teaching, and may the farmer's patience be yours as you wait for the harvest He is bringing in your students' lives.



Soli Deo Gloria

The Epistle of James

Teacher's Guide

Session Ten

The Prayer of Faith and the Care of Souls

James 5:13-20

A free companion to the Bible study

Larry Herzog Jr.

A Note to the Teacher

Welcome to the final session of the study. Ten weeks ago you walked into this study with questions about an epistle that has given the Church five hundred years of theological debate, and today you close it by preaching a passage that is, in its own way, as rich as any we have studied. This closing session brings together prayer, anointing, confession, the Office of the Keys, and the ministry of restoring the wandering brother — all condensed into eight verses that read like the pastor's final handing of his congregation to one another and to the Lord.

This session also offers you something the previous nine did not: the opportunity to look back across the whole letter. Your students have been formed by this study, whether they notice it or not. Their reading of Scripture has been shaped. Their theological vocabulary has grown. Their understanding of the Lutheran tradition has deepened. Your closing session is a chance to help them name what has happened, to see what they have received, and to close the study with gratitude and with vision for the life that comes next.

Do not rush this session. It is the finale. Give it the weight it deserves. And take a few minutes at the end — even if it means cutting other content — to look back over the ten weeks and to help your students see the shape of what they have received.

The Big Idea in One Sentence

James ends not with a theological flourish but with the pastor's heart, entrusting the congregation to one another through prayer, anointing, confession, and the ministry of bringing back the wandering — practices that mark the Christian life as the life of the baptized community under the Word.

Preparing to Teach This Session

Before You Walk In

- Read Session Ten of the student book carefully, at least twice.
- Read James 5:13-20 multiple times.
- Review Luther's Small Catechism on Confession and on the Office of the Keys. These are directly in view in verses 15-16.
- Review the Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article VIII, on Confession. Luther's treatment of private confession as a treasure the Church should not neglect is foundational for how Lutherans read verse 16.
- Read Matthew 16:13-20, Matthew 18:15-20, and John 20:19-23 for the Office of the Keys. These give the biblical grounding for what James assumes about forgiveness.
- Look back over your notes from the whole study. What has been the arc of the class? What moments have landed especially well? What questions have recurred? You will want to draw on this in the closing reflection.
- If your pastor is available and it is appropriate, consider inviting him to be present for the final session or at least for the closing. His benediction over the study can be a fitting conclusion.
- Pray, with extra time this week. The closing of a long study deserves careful preparation and a quiet heart.

Key Theological Points to Anchor

Four theological points come into view in this passage:

- **Prayer in every circumstance.** Suffering, joy, sickness — every condition of life has a prayer-shaped response. The Christian is never left alone; there is always a way to turn toward God.
- **Anointing as pastoral practice.** Lutheran teaching rejects making anointing a separate sacrament (against Rome) while affirming it as a valuable pastoral practice rooted in Scripture. The oil has no power apart from the prayer; the prayer in the name of the Lord is the instrument.
- **The Office of the Keys and private confession.** James 5:16 is the biblical foundation for the Lutheran practice of private confession and absolution.

Luther treasured this practice; most American Lutherans have lost it; it is worth recovering.

- **The ministry of restoration.** The wandering brother is not written off but pursued. The Christian community is oriented toward the lost as the Good Shepherd is, and the bringing-back is participation in Christ's own saving work.

A Pastoral Moment

You have walked with your students through ten weeks of challenging material. This final session is your opportunity to hand them well to the Lord and to one another. Consider what you want them to leave with — not just what they have learned, but what posture they should carry forward. Teach this session as a sending, not merely as a conclusion.

Suggested Time Plan

This session has more material than a typical session plus a closing reflection. Be willing to be selective. The time plan below is a suggestion; adjust for your class's rhythm and what you want to emphasize.

Time	Segment
0:00–0:05	Opening prayer and brief framing of the final session
0:05–0:15	Three conditions, three responses (vv. 13-14)
0:15–0:28	Anointing, prayer of faith, forgiveness (vv. 14-15)
0:28–0:40	Confess to one another, the Office of the Keys (v. 16)
0:40–0:47	Elijah and the prayer of the righteous (vv. 17-18)
0:47–0:55	The wandering brother (vv. 19-20)
0:55–0:58	Looking back across the whole study
0:58–1:00	Final benediction and closing



The Closing Reflection Deserves Protection

Even if you have to cut teaching content, preserve the closing reflection. Your students need to leave with a sense of the whole journey, not just of the final passage. Three minutes at the end, looking back over the ten weeks and naming what has been received, is worth ten minutes of additional exegesis. Your pastor or the class may also want to share specific takeaways — leave room for that.

Teaching Notes, Part by Part

Verses 13-14: Three Conditions, Three Responses

Read the full passage aloud before beginning to teach. The rhythm of the closing passage is part of its teaching, and your class should hear it in its entirety.

The Elegant Structure

Point out to the class the simple structural device James uses. Three conditions: suffering, cheerfulness, sickness. Three responses: prayer, song, the elders. The elegance of the structure is part of the teaching — every condition of life is brought under the ministry of prayer in one form or another.

For your class, this can be pastorally freeing. There is no situation in which the Christian has nothing to do. When we suffer, we are not reduced to stoic silence; we can pray. When we are cheerful, we are not reduced to private enjoyment; we can sing. When we are sick, we are not reduced to lonely endurance; we can call for the elders. The life of the congregation always has a response available, and the response is always, in one form or another, toward God.

Verses 14-15: Anointing and the Prayer of Faith

This is the portion of the passage most contested across church history, and it deserves careful handling. Work through it slowly.

The Lutheran Position

Explain to your class the Lutheran position clearly. We do not make anointing a separate sacrament as Rome has done. A sacrament, in the Lutheran understanding, requires a specific command of Christ, a promise of grace, and a visible element joined to the Word. Baptism has all three. The Lord's Supper has all three. Anointing in James 5 does not.

But Lutherans do not reject anointing. Many Lutheran hymnals contain rites for the anointing of the sick. Many Lutheran pastors use oil in prayer for the ill. Hospital chaplains frequently offer anointing. All of this is consistent with James

5 and with the Lutheran tradition. The oil is a sign that accompanies the prayer. The prayer, offered in the name of the Lord, is the instrument of grace.

A Pastoral Opportunity

If your congregation does not regularly practice anointing of the sick, this passage might be an occasion to mention the possibility. Some members may not realize that Lutheran pastors will come, pray, and anoint the sick when asked. If your pastor is present, this is a good moment for him to briefly affirm the practice. If he is not, you might simply note that Lutheran pastors are generally willing to come and pray for the sick, and members of the congregation should not hesitate to call.

The Prayer of Faith

The pastoral handling of "the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick" is delicate. Help your class hold both truths: the promise is real (God hears and acts for His people) and the promise is not a guarantee of physical healing in every case (Job was not healed; Paul's thorn remained).

The word save (sozo) can refer to physical healing but can also refer to eternal salvation. The word raise up (egeiro) can refer to raising from a sick bed or to the resurrection of the dead. James may well have both in view. The prayer of faith does save the sick — sometimes through physical healing in this life, always through the salvation that culminates in the resurrection. No prayer of faith is wasted. The Lord hears every one, even when the answer does not look like the one we wanted.

Forgiveness

Notice James's addition: "And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven." The prayer for the sick includes the prayer for forgiveness. This is not because every illness is tied to specific sin (Jesus explicitly rejected this view in the case of the man born blind) but because sickness and sin can be connected, and the ministry of prayer for the sick therefore includes the ministry of absolution. Many pastors report that dying saints often want to confess specific sins; the Christian's last hours are often marked by a final unburdening of conscience. James's teaching supports this pattern.

Verse 16: Confess Your Sins to One Another

This is the most important verse in the passage for Lutheran theology and practice. Give it the weight it deserves.

The Biblical Foundation for Private Confession

James 5:16 is the primary biblical warrant for the Lutheran practice of private confession and absolution. Work this out carefully for your class. The verse clearly directs Christians to confess their sins to one another — not merely silently to God, not merely in general confession in the assembly, but specifically to particular brothers and sisters. And the purpose is healing. The confession leads to prayer, and the prayer leads to healing.

In Lutheran practice, this confession takes two main forms:

- **Private confession to the pastor.** The pastor, by virtue of his ordination, bears the specific authority to pronounce Christ's forgiveness. He stands in Christ's place to speak the absolution. This is the formal exercise of the Office of the Keys.
- **Mutual confession among Christians.** When a burdened Christian confides in a trusted Christian friend and asks for prayer, and the friend responds by speaking the forgiveness of Christ and praying over the one who has confessed, real Christian ministry takes place. This is not the full exercise of the Office of the Keys, but it is a real ministry of mutual care.

The Loss of Private Confession

Be honest with your class about the state of this practice. Most Lutherans in America today have never used private confession. Some do not know it is available. Some suspect it of being too Catholic. But Luther himself loved this practice and defended it fiercely. The Reformation did not remove private confession; it reformed it, freeing it from Roman distortions. In the Smalcald Articles, Luther called it "the only medicine for troubled consciences," and he wanted it preserved.

If any of your students are carrying specific sins that continue to trouble them after general confession, this is the moment to tell them that private confession is available. Your pastor is (almost certainly) willing to hear a private confession and speak Christ's absolution over it. This is not a small pastoral resource. For some

students, hearing that it is available may be the most important thing that happens in this entire study.

A Specific Invitation

If your pastor is willing, consider inviting him to speak briefly at this point in the session. Even a one-minute word from him — "I am available to hear your private confession and speak Christ's absolution; please come see me if you ever want to use this practice" — can open a door for students that might not otherwise open. If your pastor is not present, you might say: "Pastor Norby is available for private confession. I encourage you to ask him about it if you have never used this practice."

The Prayer of a Righteous Person

James closes this section by citing Elijah as an example. Spend a moment on the phrase "a man with a nature like ours." Elijah was not a spiritual superhero. He fled from Jezebel in fear. He asked to die under a broom tree. He had to be fed by angels when he was spent. His nature was like ours. His prayers were answered not because he was different from us but because the God to whom he prayed is the God to whom we pray.

This is foundational for our own confidence in prayer. The "righteous person" whose prayer has great power is not the spiritual elite; it is the Christian clothed in Christ's righteousness by faith. That description fits every baptized believer. Make sure your class hears this. Your students' prayers are powerful, not because of them, but because of Christ in whom they pray.

Verses 19-20: The Wandering Brother

The letter closes with the ministry of restoration. This is a fitting ending, and it deserves careful treatment.

The Pursuit of the Wanderer

Notice what James does not say. He does not tell us to write off the wandering brother. He does not tell us to cut him off, to treat him as an outsider, to act as if he was never part of the family. He tells us to bring him back.

This is the heart of God for the lost. Jesus' parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son all point to the same concern. The shepherd goes after the one. The woman sweeps the whole house. The father runs to meet the son when he is still a long way off. The Christian community is called to share this heart. The congregation that has received mercy cannot be indifferent to those who are wandering.

For your class, this is a challenging word. Almost every Christian knows someone who has wandered — a family member, a former friend from church, a coworker who used to attend. The question is not whether we know such people. The question is what we are doing about them.

A Discussion Starter

Ask your class: "Who in your life has wandered from the faith? Have you given up on them, or are you still praying and reaching out?" This question often produces powerful sharing. Handle with care — some students may share painful situations, and they may need pastoral follow-up. But the question is worth asking. The congregation that leaves this session with a fresh commitment to pray for specific wandering people, and perhaps to reach out to them, has received what James intended.

Saving the Soul from Death

James's language here is large — "will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." Help your class hear this rightly. We do not save souls by our own effort; Christ saves souls. But when we participate in the restoration of a wandering brother, we are used by God in His saving work. Christ's saving is mediated through us as we pursue the lost in His name. This is a participation in the Good Shepherd's own ministry, and it is one of the highest callings of the Christian community.

Looking Back Across the Whole Study

After treating the final passage, take a few minutes to look back over the whole study. This can be handled in several ways depending on your class.

Option 1: Round the Room

Ask each student to share in one sentence: "What has been the most important thing you learned from this study?" Go around the room, letting each person share briefly. Do not let this take long — a minute per student at most — but the sharing itself is part of the closing. Students hearing what others have received reinforces what they themselves have received.

Option 2: Teacher Summary

If the class is large or time is short, summarize the arc yourself. Something like: "Ten weeks ago we started with Luther's question about James. We have seen that the answer is no, James is not an epistle of straw. We have seen how James and Paul agree on the Gospel. We have traced James's teaching on the Word, on the tongue, on the two wisdoms, on the grace that is more than our sin. We have learned to read James as Scripture in the full sense. We have been given a framework for the rest of the Christian life."

Option 3: Both

If time permits, do both. Give a brief teacher summary, then invite students to add their own reflections. This is often the richest option.

The Epistle of Straw Reconsidered

Return to the question you opened the study with. Is James an epistle of straw? Your students will be able to answer now, and the answer will be different from what some of them brought in. This is the payoff of the whole ten weeks. Let it land.

Anticipated Questions and Suggested Responses

"Should our congregation start practicing anointing of the sick?"

This is a good question, and the answer is essentially yes, if done rightly. Most Lutheran hymnals contain rites for the anointing of the sick; Lutheran Service Book has one. Your pastor can tell you whether your congregation currently offers this practice. If it is not currently offered, you could encourage its recovery. The key is that the oil is not magical; the prayer in the name of the Lord is the instrument. With that theological framing clear, anointing is a beautiful and biblical pastoral practice.

"What if my pastor does not offer private confession?"

Most Lutheran pastors are willing, even if they do not advertise it. If you ask your pastor directly whether he would hear your confession and speak Christ's absolution, the answer will almost certainly be yes. Some congregations offer scheduled times for private confession; most do not, but the pastor is available by appointment. Do not assume the absence of public scheduling means the absence of the practice. Ask.

"Is anything kept confidential in private confession?"

Yes. The seal of confession is historically inviolable in the Lutheran tradition. A pastor who hears a private confession does not share its content — not with elders, not with the congregation, not with other pastors. This is a solemn pastoral duty. Students who have been reluctant to use private confession because they fear their sins might become public may be reassured to know this.

"What if I confess something criminal? Is the pastor required to report it?"

This is a more complicated question, and the specifics vary by jurisdiction. In some states, clergy are mandatory reporters for certain categories of crime, particularly child abuse. Your pastor can tell you what the specific obligations are in North

Dakota. But this should not normally deter someone from seeking private confession for the full range of sins that burden a conscience. For the vast majority of confessions, the seal is absolute.

"What do I do if someone I love has wandered and seems beyond reach?"

This is a genuinely hard pastoral situation. A few principles. First, pray. Relentless prayer for the wandering has a track record across church history — Monica's prayers for Augustine are one example. Do not stop praying, even after years. Second, maintain relationship as far as possible without compromising truth. Being present, loving, and available without condoning the wandering is the hard middle path. Third, trust the Lord's timing. You are not the Savior; Christ is. Your job is faithfulness in the pursuit; the result is not yours to produce. Fourth, be willing to speak hard truth when the door opens, but do not fabricate opportunities that have not genuinely arisen.

"After ten weeks in James, what should I read next?"

A great question, and you will get it. A few suggestions: If your students want to continue in the General Epistles, 1 Peter is an excellent next study — it shares many themes with James and has its own pastoral richness. If they want to engage Paul on justification directly, Galatians or Romans 1-8 would be natural. If they want to go deep on the Lutheran Confessions, the Small Catechism is worth a careful re-reading, and the Book of Concord's Apology IV is where the Paul-James harmony is worked out at length. Your pastor or your congregation's education committee may have other suggestions suited to your particular group.

"Can we do a second study in this format?"

This is a wonderful question to be asked. If the class has been formed by ten weeks in James, they are ready for another sustained study. Consider what their appetite is — another epistle, a Gospel, a section of the Old Testament, a confessional document, a theological topic. The pattern of weekly sessions with careful teaching and open discussion can serve many kinds of material. Do not let the momentum die. Start planning the next study before this one ends.

Leading the Discussion

For this session, the discussion questions serve a slightly different function than in previous weeks. Several of them invite reflection on the whole study, not just the present passage. Pick questions that serve your class's needs.

Question 1 — James's pastoral closing

A good opening question that invites students to reflect on what James's ending reveals about him as a pastor. Warm, relational, sets a good tone for the closing session.

Question 2 — Anointing of the sick

A practical question that can open conversation about your congregation's practice. If members have been anointed, their experiences are worth hearing. If the practice is unfamiliar, this is a chance to demystify it.

Question 3 — Private confession

Potentially the most pastorally significant question of the session. Some students may share experiences; others may ask questions; some may be silently considering the possibility for the first time. Handle with grace. Do not press; do not shame; let the question do its work.

Question 4 — The wandering brother

A concrete application question. Often produces the most moving discussion, because nearly every student has someone in mind. Be prepared for students to share painful situations. This question can lead directly to specific prayer — consider ending this discussion by praying together for the specific wanderers named by the class.

Question 5 — What have you learned

The closing reflection question. If you do nothing else in the discussion, do this one. Let students name what has stuck with them. The naming itself reinforces the learning.

Question 6 — The epistle of straw reconsidered

The payoff question. Students who began the study with concerns about James will have an answer now. Students who began without concerns will have a deeper appreciation. Let them articulate it. This is the moment when the whole study comes into focus.

Ending the Discussion

Do not let the discussion run so long that you cannot close the session well. Protect the final five minutes for the closing benediction and any remarks you want to make. A good discussion that crowds out the closing is a discussion that has gone too long. Keep one eye on the clock.

For Further Study

For Deeper Biblical Context

- **Matthew 16:13-20, Matthew 18:15-20, John 20:19-23.** The biblical basis for the Office of the Keys. Essential for understanding what James 5:16 assumes.
- **Luke 15.** The three parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. The heart of God for the wandering, which James's closing echoes.
- **Galatians 6:1-2.** Paul's parallel teaching on restoring the one caught in sin. Bearing one another's burdens.
- **1 Kings 17-18.** The full Elijah narrative James references. His weakness as well as his faithfulness.

From the Lutheran Tradition

- **Small Catechism, Confession and the Office of the Keys.** Luther's catechetical treatment of private confession. Brief and accessible.
- **Large Catechism, A Brief Exhortation to Confession.** Luther's fuller treatment. Pastorally rich.
- **Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article VIII ("Of Confession").** Luther's strongest defense of private confession as a treasure of the Church.
- **Lutheran Service Book, Individual Confession and Absolution.** The liturgical form for private confession in contemporary Lutheran use.

Commentaries

- **Curtis Giese, Concordia Commentary: James.** Strong on the anointing passage's relationship to the Lutheran sacramental tradition.
- **Douglas Moo, The Letter of James.** Helpful on the complex translation questions around "save" and "raise up" in verse 15.

For the Whole Letter

- **Luther's Preface to James (Luther's Works Vol. 35).** Worth rereading at the end of the study. You will hear Luther's concerns differently after ten weeks in the letter.

- **Formula of Concord, Article IV.** The Lutheran confessional resolution of the Paul-James tension. Having worked through James, the article will land differently now.

A Final Word

You have completed the work. Ten weeks of preparation, ten sessions of teaching, ten opportunities to hand God's Word to His people in this one letter. The letter itself ends without a formal benediction, without a closing doxology, and your study may fittingly end the same way — simply, pastorally, with the handing of your class to the Lord and to one another.

A few thoughts as you step out of this study.

First, you have been shaped by what you have taught. Ten weeks in James changes the teacher as much as the student. The implanted Word has continued its work in you. Do not be surprised if, in the weeks and months ahead, you find yourself drawing on insights from this study that you had forgotten you gained. The Word stays with the one who has been in it.

Second, your students will remember things you cannot predict. Some will remember specific verses. Some will remember your handling of specific passages. Some will remember the prayer at the end of a particular session. Some will remember a moment when they understood the Gospel differently than before. You cannot control what sticks. Your job was to be faithful in the teaching; what the Lord does with the teaching is His business.

Third, do not let this be the last study. You have a class that has been formed. You have built relationships. You have established a rhythm. Start planning the next study before this one ends. If your students ask, as they probably will, "what should we do next?" — have an answer ready. A second Epistle. A Gospel. A confessional document. The momentum you have built is a gift; use it.

Fourth, thank your class. The work of a Bible study is mutual — the teacher teaches, but the class receives and responds and makes the whole thing alive. A word of genuine thanks at the end of the final session is not false modesty; it is honest acknowledgment of what has taken place. They have given you their time and attention for ten weeks. Thank them for it.

Fifth, thank your pastor, if he has not been teaching but has been supporting the study. His backing has made the study possible. His availability for questions has made it stronger. A word of thanks to him, publicly in the final session, is fitting.

And sixth, give thanks to the Lord, who has given you this letter, this class, this ministry, and these ten weeks. The Word has done its work. The Lord has blessed the teaching. Everything that has happened in this study has happened because He has been at work through His Word and His Spirit. *Soli Deo Gloria*. To God alone be the glory.

May the Lord bless you and those you have taught, and may the implanted Word continue its saving work in all of you, for as long as He gives you on this earth and into the life to come.



A Closing Benediction for the Teacher

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

(Ephesians 3:20-21)

Soli Deo Gloria