

Louder Than Words #1
Embracing Life's Trials

Word

Scripture Reference

James 1:1-11

Discussion Questions

1. How would you respond if someone says to you that something good can come from the suffering that you may be experiencing right now?
2. Actions that evidence your faith speak so much louder than your words. How do you live out a life evidencing your genuine faith? Read James 1:1-11. The Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were going through trials and persecution and were having second thoughts about living a life for Jesus Christ. They wanted to compromise their faith, and so James, the half-brother of Jesus who was a key leader of the church in Jerusalem and who had passionate faith in the Lord, wrote this letter to encourage them not to compromise their faith and not to go back to their worldly ways. He wanted to encourage these believers to give evidence to their real faith in Jesus Christ even in the midst of trials and difficulties. Discuss why it is a lot easier to show forth your faith when everything is going well? Why would living out your faith in the midst of trials speak louder to the people around you about your love for God?
3. James is encouraging his readers to show forth their faith to the world by embracing life's trials. First, he has written what should be a believer's attitude in times of trials (v. 2). What attitude did James tell you to demonstrate when you are facing trials? Discuss what kinds of trials every Christian could possibly face in his or her life. What does it mean to count it joy when you face trials? Did James mean that you should not feel bad when bad things happen? Share and discuss.
4. The product of trials is the perfecting of the person (v. 3-4). A Christian who went through a lot comes out as a complete and mature believer who knows what is important in life. His/her action of fortitude impresses and encourages others. What is produced when your faith is tried? Share how a trial has helped you to be more patient and helped

you develop endurance. Share about someone you know whose strong faith amidst trials and suffering has shown you what it means to trust God.

5. Our enablement through trial comes through praying for wisdom to understand the will of God and strength to endure those trials (v. 5-8). You can pray for God to change the situation, but what do you think would happen if your prayer were centered on the outcome instead of on your ability to endure it? Share how you can pray to help you to accept the things you cannot change.
6. Lastly, your actions speak louder than your words when you have the right perspective regarding trials. Both the rich and the poor have their own problems. Regardless of one's status, everyone goes through trials, and at the end of the day would have the same ending (v. 9-11). How can a person who chases wealth and riches be let down? Can rich people have a better life in heaven based on their status on earth? What would be the basis of heavenly treasure for everyone?

Walk

How you respond to trials is a big factor on how your life's testimony of faith becomes louder than words. In embracing life's many trials, a believer's attitude should be joyful; the product is his/her perfecting; he/she is enabled through prayer, and he/she views it from right perspective. How do you react to trials? How is your relationship with God transformed as you go through those hardships?

Worship & Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your Word that reminds me of Your love amidst the trials I experience. Thank You for being the Refiner who puts me through the fire to purify and make me into the best version of myself. Thank You because even through the many hardships You let me go through, You have never left me alone, but instead carried me through. So take my life, Lord; do with it according to Your will, and give me the strength to endure 'til the end. May my life shout loudly to the world that You are the good, good Father. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Louder Than Words #2
Rejecting Sin's Temptations

Word

Scripture Reference

James 1:12-18

Discussion Questions

1. What's a desire that you often find difficult to resist? How do you justify it in your mind, causing you to give in? Share with the group.
2. Oftentimes, we make choices that are bad for us instead of choosing what is good for us because we would rather feel a moment of satisfaction now and then suffer later than getting what is best now. This is also often true of our spiritual lives. In what area do you find yourself prone to give in to temptation?
3. ***The Ultimate Prize for Rejecting Temptation: Crown of Life (v. 12).*** There is blessing to those who do not yield to temptation. Rejecting temptation is a strong act that evidence one's love for God. To those who love God and do not give in to temptation, God in turn gives a reward, which is the Crown of Life. The Bible teaches us that at the end of life, those who will enter heaven will receive eternal rewards, which is based upon how we lived our lives here on earth. Some will have less while others have more spiritual rewards, which implies that others will enjoy the fullness of life in heaven more than others. Hence, as believers, we are to live our lives in anticipation to that which is eternal and better than this world has to offer by rejecting temptation. What things get in our way of having an eternal perspective? How does focusing on the "crown of life" help us persevere in our faith?
4. ***The Source of Temptation: Man's Sinful Desires (v. 13-15).*** James makes it clear that even though God may allow trials and temptations to come into our life, God is not the source of temptation. Rather, the very source of temptation is man's sinful desires (v. 14). When we fall into temptation, it is because we choose to follow and act upon our selfish desires. Desire in itself is not a bad thing, but when we allow our desires which are contrary to the will of God to linger in our minds long enough,

it leads us to act upon it; and sin leads to death. 1 John 5:16 warns us that God may prematurely take one's life in order to stop him/her from living in sin. The road to temptation is the road to death. Why do we often blame God for tempting us when we sin? What temptations do you need God's help to resist this week? How can we as a community help each other resist temptation?

5. ***The Contrast to Temptation: God's Goodness (v. 16-18).*** The contrast to the temptations from our own selfish desires, James tells us, is God's perfect goodness. God's goodness in dealing with His children does not differ in level. God does not play favoritism; everything that He desires for us is for our good. Moreover, verse 18 also tells us the reason God allows us to know and experience His goodness. As God has given us the best gift of all, providing us salvation through Jesus, who died on the our behalf for our good, our response then must be to excel and be the best types of people (first fruits) in living a life that rejects sin's temptations. What are some evidences of God's goodness in your life? How does remembering God's goodness break the chains of sin in our lives?

Walk

The choices you make speak volumes about your life. A life that is able to reject sin's temptations speaks louder than words to this world. If it does not, then it is a life not marked by any difference from this world. Therefore, in order to not yield to sin, you as a believer need to have an eternal perspective. Remember to guard your heart and mind from your sinful desires, and direct its focus in the goodness of God in your life. Examine yourself. Are you satisfied with the temporary pleasures of this world now, or would you rather experience the fullness of life in eternity? What can you do to stop an evil desire from becoming an evil act? How much do you value the goodness of God? Or put in another way, how much do you love God? Would you choose to live the better life and reject sin's temptation? It's a choice you need to make.

Worship & Prayer

Dear Lord, thank You for being a good God, who seek nothing but the best for us. Thank you for being extra gracious and merciful to us despite the many times that we have failed to reject sin's temptation. Lord, grant us the grace to persevere in our faith. Help us not lose sight of the eternal for the temporal. May Your Spirit fill us with desires that please and honor You, that we may not yield to the enticements of this world. Remind us that every good and perfect gift comes from You and may the overflow of Your goodness in our lives challenge us to live faithfully. May the lives we live be a strong testament of our love for You. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Louder Than Words #3
Doing What You Hear

Word

Scripture Reference

James 1:19-27

Discussion Questions

1. How do you feel when you see someone you respect doing what he or she tells others not to do?
2. There are Christians who are like patients that don't follow their doctors' orders to get well. They hear God's Word and understand its instructions, but don't follow through. When you as a follower of Jesus Christ do not do what you hear from the Word of God, your actions tell the world that you don't really believe that the Word of God is unerring and infallible. Thus, it is vital that as an evidence of your genuine faith, you do what you hear from the Word of God. Read James 1:19-27. This passage gives three charges on how a believer needs to do what he/she hears:
 - a. **First charge: Listen to God's Word (v. 19-21).** James clearly says that every man should be swift to hear, slow to speak and slow to get angry. What is the relationship between speaking, listening and anger? When the Word of God confronts you, do you justify your sin instead of carefully listening, not saying anything nor reacting? Discuss what verse 20 says about the connection between anger and righteous living. How can being swift to anger get you into trouble? Does the wrath of man produce the kind of righteousness you should have?
 - b. **Second charge: Do what is instructed in God's Word (v. 22-25).** As a follower of Christ, you are not only to read or listen to the Word of God, but you are also to listen with an expectation to do what you heard. If you don't, James tells us that you are deceiving yourself. The action of doing what you hear is an action that speaks louder than words about your authentic faith in Jesus Christ. Share how you have decided to change and get things right with God after hearing an instruction from the Word of God. How did your

transformation impact your Christian testimony? What good things happen to those who hear and take the challenge to apply what they hear (v. 25)?

- c. **Third charge: Show that you do what you hear (v. 26-27).** James did not only exhort you to do what you hear, but he wants you to *show* that you do what you hear. Followers of Christ should not live out their faith in secret nor brag about their religiosity or boast about their holiness. How is your speech related to the integrity of your faith (v. 26)? What specific actions described in verse 27 show your faith? In your community, who are the most uncared for groups or individuals to whom you should be showing your love and care? What are you doing about it?

Walk

As you live out your faith, you need to listen to God's Word, do what is instructed, and show that you are doing what you heard by serving others and by living a life that is different from the world. Reflect on what you may need to change in your actions to match your talk. Think of someone whom you should help this week in obedience to God's Word.

Worship & Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for Your Word that reminds me to be a doer of Your Word and not a hearer only. Forgive me for my disobedience, for the times I willfully choose not to follow Your Word, even though I know what You want me to do. Change my heart, Lord, that it may reflect Your own, that Your desire replace my own. May I have the courage to live out my knowledge of You, in telling others about Jesus and in serving them, especially outside the church where those who do not know You see the kind of God You are through me. In my speech, in my actions, may others know You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Louder Than Words #4 Ending Favoritism

Word

Scripture Reference

James 2:1-13

Discussion Questions

1. What reasons could there be for one to believe some people are more important than others?
2. Favoritism is the practice of favoring someone over another, resulting in unfair treatment on the basis of prejudice because of looks or economic status. Favoritism should have no place in Christian life because it is inconsistent with the message of the gospel. No one likes to be treated unfairly, and as a follower of Jesus Christ, you should especially not show preferential treatment to others. Read James 2:1-13. James said that favoritism is a reflection of evil thoughts (v. 1-4) and should not be practiced in the church. What true-to-life example did James use to point out how favoritism was demonstrated in the church? Why do a lot of people regard rich people as more significant than poor people?
3. James gives us three reasons why favoritism has no place in the church. First is because favoritism does not see as God sees (v. 5-7). Verse 5 states, *“God has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which He promised to those who love Him.”* Does it mean that it is wrong to be rich, or that one cannot be rich both materially and spiritually? How did rich people at that time treat people in the church (v. 6-7)? Discuss how even some Christians use physical appearance, job or economic status, power, and popularity to show favoritism in relation to people? God, on the other hand, looks at those less privileged differently. Why does God have a distinctive concern for the impoverished?
4. Secondly, favoritism is a sin (v. 8-11). Leviticus 19:15 says, *“You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor.”* Examine your heart. Do you expect to be treated with

favoritism/partiality? The Bible tells us that it is a sin. According to verses 10-11, what does a person need to do to be considered a lawbreaker? Discuss why we do not usually regard favoritism or prejudice as a sin?

5. Thirdly, favoritism is the very opposite of grace (v. 12-13). Verse 13 states, *“For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”* Grace is the granting of favor to the one who is truly undeserving. Favoritism is when you grant undeserved favors to those you think deserve it. Your responsibility as a believer is to show the grace of Christ through your equal treatment of others. You cannot justify the giving of favors as being “gracious.” What warning was rendered to those who judge with no mercy (v. 13)? Share how you have shown mercy to someone who had done something wrong to you instead of judging that person. On the other hand, how did God show His mercy to you in spite of your shortcomings?

Walk

God showed His love and impartiality when He sent His Son Jesus Christ to die for EACH AND EVERY ONE OF US. In response, you, being a Christian, and the church, being the body of Christ, should end favoritism because it is inconsistent with the Gospel Message. Showing favoritism is a sin, and it is the very opposite of grace. Why do you think God would judge you as an offender of the law if your sin was only as “insignificant” as prejudice? Is there someone from whom you need to ask forgiveness for showing partiality? In what way should you change the way you consider wealth or status so that you regard it as God does?

Worship & Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for the reminder that as a follower of Christ, I am held to a higher standard. Forgive me for my disregard of showing favoritism as sin, for thinking it’s “not as bad” as the other sins. I confess that I’m guilty of judging others based on status, culture, family background, etc., and that my behavior towards people tend to be based on my assumptions about them. Help me see people as You do, Father, that they are worth accepting because like me, they are undeserving sinners for whom Jesus Christ died. Help me show grace instead of partiality, so that when someone comes through the church doors, when I meet someone at the office/school/etc., they will see and wonder where such grace comes from. Grant me the opportunity, then, to tell them about the God who gave His life so that they may live. I pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Louder Than Words #5
Blending Faith with Action

Word

Scripture Reference

James 2:14-26

Discussion Questions

1. You have most likely known people who say they believe in one thing but act contrary to that belief. What are some biblical truths that Christians say they believe, but do not live out?
2. The moment you identify yourself as a follower of Jesus Christ, you put out a notice to the world who will be watching whether your faith is consistent with how you act. As an imperfect people, how can Christians blend their faith and their actions? Read James 2:14-26. A lot of people often misunderstand this passage and take it out of context to teach that salvation is both by faith and works. Taken in its proper context (James was writing to Christians), James in no way contradicts the apostles Paul and John who both teach that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ alone (Ephesians 2:8-9; John 3:16-17; John 14:6). Paul and John's emphasis is on the *basis* of one's salvation, while James' emphasis is on the *fruits* after salvation—what actions prove the genuineness of one's faith (v. 14). He describes four ways on how a believer's faith and actions interact. First is that your faith should naturally lead to action/works (v. 14-17). What example did James use to make it clear that real faith marks a person's actions (v. 15-17)? Discuss how James described faith that does not come with deeds (v.17). How has being a Christian transformed the way you live? Have you ever prayed for someone—someone in your church, office, school, or home who has a real need? Did you ever stop to think that perhaps God's answer to that person's prayer request is YOU?
3. Secondly, your faith is not proven solely by your actions (v. 18-19). There are many members of other religious groups that do a lot of good things for other people, sometimes even better than Christians, but they have the wrong faith. Action is not the basis of salvation, but is simply an *outflowing* of your genuine faith. Share how you could tell that a person has a genuine, living faith. Is it right to be compelled to do good things just so that you could go to heaven? Discuss how real faith could make you do something out of love.
4. Thirdly, your faith is made deeper by your actions (v. 20-23). James used Abraham in the Old Testament as an example of how a person who was declared righteous affirmed his genuine faith in God by his obedience to offer his son as a sacrifice. Abraham's faith was perfected and made stronger because of his

actions, to the point that God called Abraham His friend. Share the reasons why there are times that it is not easy to apply what you hear in church to your daily life. What biblical instructions do you find particularly difficult to live out? If God has already forgiven you and assured you of eternal life, what then inspires you to live in submission to Him? Share how your faith deepened because of your response to God in obedience.

5. Lastly, your faith is seen by the world through your actions (v. 24-26). The world cannot see what's inside your heart unless it is evidenced by your action. Rahab was another person from the Old Testament that James used as an example of someone whose faith in God was evidenced through actions. She was a Canaanite prostitute who hid two Israelite spies from her fellow Canaanites. Her action justified and saved her life. As verse 26 states, "faith without works is dead." The world will not really know God no matter how much we say that we love Him unless they could see it in our action. Your faith without action is useless. Discuss the ways that many Christians proclaim that they love God, but their actions do not demonstrate what they say. What areas of your life need to be conducted in a more Christian-like way?

Walk

The Word of God is very clear that a person is saved by faith, not by works. Nevertheless, your faith should naturally lead to action. It is not proven solely by actions, but is made deeper by it. God looks at the heart, yes, but the world will see your faith through your actions. That is the Christian life: faith and works standing side by side, blending together. Do you talk about your faith with others? In what ways do you demonstrate Christian love toward them? How can you show greater faith in God by what you do at home, at work or in school?

Worship & Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for the reminder that my actions will always speak louder than words to the world. It's so easy to say the right things—speaking "Christianese," saying "Praise the Lord!" all the time, telling someone, "I'll be praying for you," posting encouraging Bible verses on social media...but if I was really honest, half the things I say, I don't actually do. Forgive me, Lord. Through Christ I was forgiven and saved, and through Him I offer my grateful heart to You, ready to obey, to show the world that my God is mighty to save. Give me strength, Lord. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Louder Than Words #6
Controlling Your Tongue

Word

Scripture Reference

James 3:1-12

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think people gossip about others? Are you guilty of doing it as well?
2. People usually talk without thinking about the consequences of what they say. Anyone can say something and unknowingly hurt or cause pain and distress to others. Words have power, and so James dedicated an entire section to talk about the danger of one's words and the need to control one's tongue, because what comes out of your mouth when you speak says a lot about your relationship with Jesus Christ. Read James 3:1-12. James begins this section giving a warning to teachers. What distinctive responsibility does a teacher carry (v. 1)? Why will God judge teachers more sternly than others? What is the importance of the way you talk (v. 2)?
3. Spiritual discipline in how you live your life is very important; it authenticates your spiritual relationship with the Lord. Your tongue and the words that come out from your mouth serve as a yardstick for your self-discipline and spiritual life. James discusses three things about the tongue that believers need to be aware of:
 - a. The tongue is small but powerful (v. 3-5). Explain the purpose of a bit in the horse's mouth (v. 3), the purpose of the rudder of a ship (v. 4), and the damage that a little fire can do to a great forest (v. 5). Discuss how a person's tongue is similar to these three illustrations. Share the positive effects when you tell someone, "I love you." What are negative effects brought by the words "I hate you"? Why do the words you say to your family members, friends, or even strangers have the power to give life or death, to hurt or to encourage (Proverbs 18:20-21)?
 - b. The tongue is a source of evil and is often uncontrollable (v. 6-8). How did James describe the tongue in his two examples? How does the tongue affect the whole body? James charges the tongue as the source of sin and evil as it can be used wrongly in many ways. Discuss the many ways that even Christians use the tongue wrongly. Why is it so difficult to tame the tongue (v. 7-8)? When someone comes to you with a juicy piece of gossip (e.g. "I know something about so-and-so, but you have to promise not to tell anyone"), have you ever refused and said, "I'd rather you not tell me, because I can't control my tongue"? How come only few people can actually

say that? Discuss.

- c. The tongue is inconsistent and hypocritical (v. 9-12). James speaks of the inconsistent and hypocritical words of the tongue because with the same mouth we bless and sing praises to God, and with it we curse. What examples from nature did James use to express disapproval of cursing? Discuss why the mouth of a Christian cannot have words of blessings and words of curses come out of the same source. Why should it not be done at all? How can your tongue be used rightly for many purposes?

Walk

In communications, there are no do-overs, because once you say something, you cannot take it back. So before you say something to someone, ask THINK and ask these questions:

T - Is it TRUE? There are always two sides to a story. Ask yourself, how do I know that what I believe to be true is really true? How did I get the information? Was it first hand or second hand information?

H - Is it HELPFUL? Is it helpful to call that person a name or define his whole character by just one action?

I - Is it INSPIRING? If you want to inspire someone to change then will berating him or her be good?

N - Is it NECESSARY? Is it your responsibility to be the one to tell that person what you want to say?

K - Is it KIND?

Ask the Holy Spirit to control your tongue. Think of what you need to take out from your speech habits, and turn them into words that are more pleasing to God.

Worship & Prayer

Father God, thank You for the reminder that more than what I say, controlling my tongue speaks louder about my faith in Jesus Christ. While I sing praise and worship you with my mouth, complaining, gossip, hurtful words, discouragement--these come out of that same mouth. Forgive me, Father. With Your Spirit enable me to learn to control it, that with my words I may encourage instead of hurt, thank instead of complain, offer kindness instead of spreading gossip, give hope instead of causing despair. Hold me accountable not just with what I do, but with what I say, especially when I'm not in church, so that I may bring honor to Your name. In Christ's name, I pray. Amen.

Louder Than Words #7
Attitudes Accompanying Actions

Word

Scripture Reference

James 3:13-18

Discussion Questions

1. What New Year Resolution did you make this year? How likely do you think you will achieve it?
2. Every year, a lot of people make a New Year's wish or a resolution, but most of them find it difficult to stay resolute because the attitude that accompanies their actions do not match. Instead of cultivating perseverance and hard work, they view their resolution as a burden that causes them to fail. For a follower of Jesus Christ, it is important to make a spiritual resolution to be Christ-like, and to follow through with that resolution with attitudes and actions that help you achieve that goal. What are actions that tell the world that a person is truly a follower of Christ? Read James 3:13-18. This passage teaches us three important attitudes that project Christ in our life. The first attitude that must be seen in your actions is *humility* (v. 13). Humility is strength under control. When you act with humility, you show wisdom in your actions. Discuss how you can tell if a person is arrogant or wise. How is it possible to be wise and humble at the same time? How should the attitude of humility show in the way you present the gospel to others?
3. Secondly, as a follower of Christ, the attitude of *generosity* should be seen in your actions (v. 14-15). James grasped human nature at its core: people think that they also deserve what others have or experience. Everyone, including Christians, is self-seeking. What is wrong with the "wisdom" of a self-seeking, bitter and envious person? How does this self-absorbed attitude happen in the church? Discuss why a person with this kind of attitude will not last in ministry (serving the Lord and others)? In contrast, why is an attitude of generosity an antidote to a self-seeking one? Why would the world pay attention to a testimony of a Christian with a generous heart?

4. Lastly, the attitude of *loving peace* should be seen in the actions of a follower of Christ (v. 17-18). The wisdom that is from God is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits. Discuss how being so focused on your rights and wanting everything to be "fair" affect your attitude towards others? What does it mean to yield your rights as a genuine follower of Christ? Is it easy to do? What are the possible good fruits if you do?

Walk

Jesus Christ is the perfect example of Someone whose attitudes accompanied His actions. He is the example of humility, generosity, and peace when He exhibited them by giving His life in exchange for yours. What are the marks of humility that you would want to see in your life? How does belief in the the spiritual truth that "in Christ you have everything you need" stop you from fighting for the scrap of this world? What feasible and practical seeds of peace can you sow this year? How could the attitude of humility, generosity, and peace be integrated in your spiritual resolution for this year?

Worship & Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for reminding me that in bearing Your name, my actions should always be one of humility, generosity, and peace. I confess that I find it impossible to do on my own, because I am selfish and self-seeking. Forgive me, Father. I rest in the knowledge that through Jesus Christ's example I can see how these attitudes look like, and through the Holy Spirit I am enabled to cultivate those attitudes. Make my heart humble to receive correction, make me generous in putting others before myself, and make me be so satisfied in You that it doesn't matter if I don't get my way all the time. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Louder Than Words #8
The Struggle is Real

Word

Scripture Reference

James 4:1-10

Discussion Questions

1. What kind of struggle do you find difficult to deal with?
2. Everyone goes through struggles in their life. Sometimes those struggles are of the mundane—non-critical yet unwelcome situations, and sometimes they are a real struggles that alter our life. One struggle that is very real and affects people of every social and economic level and ethnicity is the struggle between love for the world and love for God. The Bible tells us that one cannot serve two masters. How you deal with this struggle speaks louder than words to an unbelieving world about your authentic faith in Jesus Christ. Read James 4:1-10. James addresses the issue of this real struggle between the world and Christ by giving two realities that Christians face:
 - a. *Reality #1: We pursue pleasure (v. 1-3).* According to James, where do wars and fights come from? What is pleasure? How far would people go in order to find satisfaction for their pleasure? Where does pursuing pleasure lead (v. 2-3)? Why does God not answer everything you pray for?
 - b. *Reality #2: Friendship with the world means you are an enemy of God (v. 4-6).* James was addressing believers, and he calls those Christians who pursue the world adulterers and adulteresses— those who cheat on and/or leave the one they are called to love. Discuss why a person who prioritizes worldly success cannot be a friend of God? How does God feel when you choose to be a friend of the world instead of Him (v. 5-6)? When is jealousy is right and acceptable? What does God do to His children whom He longs to love and are devoted to Him (v. 6)?
3. God's grace is sufficient enough to remind you that you can win over the struggle against pleasure and that you can choose to do what is right. The pleasure of this world cannot give you back what you invested in it, but what you put in the Lord will be given back to you. God gives us more grace even when we do not deserve it. James gives us in verses 7-10 four ways to fight the draw of worldly pleasure:
 - a. *Submit to God by resisting the Devil (v. 7).* As a follower of Christ, the first thing you need to do is to submit to God, which means you prioritize Him above all others. Resisting the Devil means to refuse to do the things he wants you to do that are not consistent or in agreement with the Word of God. What are the usual ways the Devil tempts you to go against the Word

of God? Share how you have been victorious in submitting to God by resisting the devil.

- b. *Draw near to God for purification of life (v. 8).* To draw near to God means to come closer to Him in intimacy and fellowship. Share how you draw close to God to the point that nothing else matters to you in this world. How do you start the process of drawing near to a Holy God, according to verse 8? How do you purify yourself in order to come before the Lord?
- c. *Take life seriously (v. 9).* James tells us that in order to fight off the draws of the world, one should take life seriously. Do you live your life only from pleasure to pleasure? Does it mean that Christians cannot enjoy life? What does it mean to live your life for God's glory?
- d. *Humble yourself before the Lord (v. 10).* The world seeks to entice you through self-glorification, but humbling yourself means putting yourself in the hands of the Lord and allowing Him to work His will into your life. Discuss how the world entices even Christians to seek self-gratification. When you approach Him with humility, how does He respond?

Walk

May this hymn be the anthem of your Christian walk:

*Who is on the Lord's side? Who will serve the King?
Who will be His helpers, other lives to bring?
Who will leave the world's side? Who will face the foe?
Who is on the Lord's side? Who for Him will go?
By Thy call of mercy, by Thy grace divine,
We are on the Lord's side—Savior, we are Thine!*

Worship & Prayer

Heavenly Father, I acknowledge that I struggle between love for the world and love for You. The lure of the world for pleasure is sometimes strong and overwhelming. But thank You that You have provided ways for me to overcome the world so that my love for you will prevail. And by your grace, I can resist the devil and submit to you instead. Thank you for the privilege that I have in you to draw closer to You in intimacy and fellowship. Help me to take life seriously so that I can live a life for your glory. Give me the strength Lord to humble myself before You and to allow You to work out your will in my life. Thank you for the victory I have in you over this real struggle. In Jesus' name. Amen

Louder Than Words #9
Ridding Godless Self-Confidence

Word

Scripture Reference

James 4:11-17

Discussion Questions

1. How do you usually react when people make wrong assumptions about you or judge you the wrong way?
2. Decisions make up most of our daily life. While there are people who are afraid to make the wrong decisions that they end up not making any decisions at all, for a lot of us, making decisions come easier because of our experiences in correctly assessing a situation and quickly making the right choice. These experiences tend to make us confident in our ability to make the right choices or the correct assumptions. However, when a follower of Jesus Christ takes God out of his/her decision-making process because he/she makes so many decisions everyday that he/she simply does not have time to consider consulting with the Lord, then that believer is in danger of godless self-confidence. James addresses this matter and teaches us how to rid ourselves of this attitude. Discuss how quickly you can misjudge someone without knowing the facts about that person. Where do these wrong assumptions usually lead to?
3. Read James 4:11-17. James shows us two truths that we all need to realize about ourselves:
 - a. *Realization #1: You possess an inability to see into the hearts of men and women (v. 11-12).* Since you cannot see the heart of another person, you need to be careful in assessing or judging and criticizing that person. Only God knows what is truly in the heart of man, so judgment should be left solely to Him. In what manner should we speak to one another (v. 11)? Discuss what happens when we are quick to pass judgment on others instead of leaving the assessment to God? Instead of being critical and judgmental, how should you handle those people who bring out the negative feelings in you?
 - b. *Realization #2: You are unable to plan with absolute certainty for the future (v. 13-14).* Life is like a vapor that appears and then vanishes. Not knowing exactly what will happen tomorrow should keep you from being too self-confident of the course of your life, but does this mean that you cannot plan your life? What does it mean then? Discuss what possible causes can wipe out even the best-laid plans.
4. Being unable to plan for the future with certainty, consider these five spiritual

factors that can help you plan for the eternal future:

- a. *Jesus is coming again.* Are you prepared to meet Jesus Christ face to face? What will you tell Him if He asks how you spent your time on earth? Would He be pleased with the advocacies you spent your life supporting?
 - b. *You can't take anything with you.* How do you plan to use what you have right now, since when you leave this world, you cannot take any possessions with you?
 - c. *Leaving a spiritual legacy is more important than your own legacy.* What spiritual legacy can you leave behind for your family or to the people around you? How is it more important than your own personal legacy?
 - d. *There are eternal rewards at stake.* Have you done anything for God that has eternal value, such as sharing the gospel and leading someone to the Christ? What achievements done for the Lord's sake can you present to God?
 - e. *Am I becoming more like Christ.* Are you making an effort to reflect Christ in you, with the time that was given to you?
5. Following the two realizations mentioned, James had written two action points we can take:
- a. *Action Point #1: Trust God enough to submit to His will (v. 15).* This action is the opposite of godless self-confidence. Have you ever asked God, "Why not?" when you pray and do not get your way? What is the right thing to say when you are making plans? What does it mean to submit to God's will?
 - b. *Action Point #2: Recognize God enough to acknowledge His work (v. 16-17).* Taking credit for what belongs to God is definitely pride talking. Share how you acknowledge God's work in your daily life. When you tell your life story, does it include God? Is He part of your successes?

Walk

How you rid yourself of godless self-confidence speaks louder than words to the unbelieving world of your real faith in Jesus Christ. Trusting Him enough to submit to His will and recognizing Him enough to acknowledge His work in your life will keep you from the slippery slope of godless self-confidence. Never be afraid to trust the all-knowing God. Looking at your life plans, what aspects of it do you need to commit to God in prayer? How can you place your future plans in His hands?

Worship & Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for the reminder that I am but a human with many limitations, but You are the God who isn't bound by any limits at all. You are the God who is all-knowing and sovereign over all. Because of who You are, I am free from making judgment of the hearts of men, and free from the worry of what the future might bring. Therefore I place my trust in You alone. Do not allow me to become confident in myself, instead enable me with a tender heart, humble and hungry for You, Father, so that as I rest assured that Christ is coming again, I may become more like Him. In Jesus' name I ask these things. Amen.

Louder Than Words #10
Living in Light of Eternity

Word

Scripture Reference

James 5:1-12

Discussion Questions

1. What significant things in life do you think are worth waiting for?
2. Every person born on earth is made for eternity. For a Christian, death is just a doorway to cross going into the realm of eternity. The Apostle Paul who lived with his heart fixed on eternity wanted to spend his life pleasing God. In the same manner, when pleasing God becomes your purpose and you begin to live your life for eternity, you find better meaning and hope in your life. But how do you live in view of eternity? How does it affect your actions and the pursuits of your life? These actions and pursuits speak louder than words to an unbelieving world of your authentic relationship with Jesus Christ. Read James 5:1-12. James began this passage by writing about the foolishness of living for the temporary in verses 1-6. There is no middle ground between eternity and temporal. It is either one or the other. He gave three reasons why it is foolish to live in the temporal. First, all the things you work for and want will decay (v. 1-3). The Bible never condemns the rich for being rich. It is not a sin to be rich, however, the pursuit of it and how it affects the person whom to trust and rely on could lead to sin. How did James forewarn the rich about their wealth? Discuss how new things decay and/or become obsolete. How does money or your possessions affect your relationship with God?
3. Secondly, injustice will be found out and dealt with (v. 4). If anyone has used any unethical means to get what he or she have or taken advantage or cheated others to enrich himself or herself, then God will deal with that person. Discuss how the rich take advantage and hurt those who have less. How do you think the Lord will deal with them? On the other hand, how can the rich be of great help to the less fortunate?
4. Thirdly, your luxurious pleasures are only temporary (v. 5-6). If you are only living for the enjoyment of all the luxuries that this present life has to offer, then that's all you are getting. What does it mean to live in luxurious pleasures? How does it affect a person's relationship with God? Discuss the ways you can use money to reflect what is significant to God.

5. The Bible also gives us four ways on how we can live in light of eternity:
 - a. Be patient because the Lord is coming (v. 7-8). What illustration did James use to explain the kind of patience you need? What is the purpose in waiting for those who are living in light of eternity?
 - b. Do not judge because the True Judge will come (v. 9). Discuss why we should keep away from judging others or grumbling against them. Does it mean that you should allow others to step over you? How do you feel when you don't allow yourself to worry about how you can get back at other people who have wronged you?
 - c. Persevere and endure to the end for a reward (v. 10-11). From these verses, what people serve as good models to us? How? How far can you endure for the sake of the Lord? What reward can you expect from God when you persevere and endure suffering and shame for Him?
 - d. Speak the truth so we don't get into trouble (v. 12). How did James caution Christians as to swearing? What should you do in order that others will trust your words?

Walk

What you think about Heaven determines what you think about the present. In order to live in light of eternity, you should understand the foolishness of living for the temporal; that everything you work for will decay; that injustice will be found out and dealt with; and luxurious pleasures are only temporary. Instead, be patient because the Lord is coming; do not judge because the true judge will come; persevere and endure to the end for a reward; speak the truth so you don't get into trouble. What changes can you make in your normal use of money to please God? With what issues in your life can you ask God for patience these days? What steps do you need to take to avoid judging people in your life? Is there a promise that you need to keep? How do you plan to do it?

Worship & Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you that my life on earth is just temporary. Thank You that I can look forward to a perfect place with my perfect Father in heaven. But as I am still here on earth, help me to live my life in light of eternity, that instead of dwelling on material things and pleasures that are temporary and will decay and become obsolete, I will think of what will last forever. Thank you that you are coming back. Help me to wait for your return patiently. And while waiting, help me to be concerned of others and do what I can for those who need You instead of judging and criticizing those people. Help me to love my family, friends, classmates/co-workers in the way you want me to love them. Help me to speak the truth and keep my word, for it reflects how a believer lives for eternity. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Louder Than Words #11

The Most Talked-About, Least-Done Thing in the Christian Life

Word

Scripture Reference

James 5:13-20

Discussion Questions

1. What answered prayer has special significance to you? Share at least one of them.
2. Many people see prayer as a fall back or a last resort to be tried when all else fails. A lot of times prayer is done out of desperation. It seems that prayer is the most talked about but least done thing in the Christian life. There are Christians who don't initiate prayers, couples hardly pray together, and families don't pray daily. How can your testimony effect change, especially through your prayer life? Read James 5:13-20. James closes the book with three things believers need to know about prayer. First is that the attitude you should have towards prayer is this: any time, every time (v. 13). When you are suffering, you can pray. When you are cheerful, you can sing psalms, which is also form of prayer. Why is prayer important at all times? Describe how you apply Paul's admonition to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). How do you express your heart to God?
3. The second aspect of prayer we need to remember is that the object of your trust when praying should be the Lord God (v. 14-15a). The most important thing when praying is not the prayer itself, but the object of your prayer. In verse 14, James refers to someone who is physically incapacitated being prayed for and healed by the church elders. Does this mean that you don't need to go to the doctor to be healed? Or that the prayers of pastors and elders have more power than yours? What do you believe about miraculous healing today and God's involvement in it? Discuss God's ability to heal and perform miracles, what Scripture says about it, and what the Bible teaches us about "faith healers." How are the attitudes of humility and yielding to God's will important in acknowledging God's power to heal?

4. The third aspect of prayer we need to remember is that our inner life condition while praying should be righteousness through confession (v. 15b-16). The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. What holds Christians back from praying with confidence? What then are the prerequisite for an effective prayer? If we already acknowledged our sins to God, why should anyone else have to know about it? What is the effect of a righteous person's prayers (v. 16)?
5. James concludes with this statement, "*Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins*" (v. 19-20). How you live your life is very important, because someone may know the Lord or turn back to Him by seeing your life. How could you help someone who has drifted away from the Lord Jesus Christ? How have other brothers or sisters in the Lord helped you when you were wandering in your faith?

Walk

The book of James put emphasis on faith in action. Right living is the evidence and result of faith. It is what speaks louder than words to the unbelieving world that will affect change in others. Prayer is our lifeline to God. The effects are often more than we thought possible. It is so wonderful that we can pray at anytime of the day regardless of circumstances. The object of our trust when praying should be the Lord God and no one else, and the condition of our inner life when praying should be one of righteousness. What needs, whether situation or people, will you be praying for this week? Is there any personal need that you would want others to pray for you? Is there anyone who has been wandering from his or her faith that needs to hear encouragement from you?

Worship & Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You that my life in You can speak louder than words to the people around me who do not know You. May You help me to live in obedience to Your commands as an evidence of my faith in You, that Your Word as I live it day by day may speak lovingly and truthfully to others. Thank You that I can commune with You through prayer. What a privilege to be able to talk to You anytime! Help me to come into Your presence in every circumstance of my life instead of praying only as a last alternative when everything fails. Thank You that You alone should be the object of my trust when I pray. Thank You for encouraging me to rely only in You. I am also so grateful that through Jesus Christ, I can go directly to You for forgiveness of my sins. Give me a humble heart to own up to my transgressions before You and before others whom I may have offended. Help me to humbly yield to Your will and to live for Your glory. In Jesus Name, Amen.