

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: October 28, 2018
Lesson Title: "With Obedience"
Lesson Passage: James 1:19-2:4

ABOUT THIS LESSON

This lesson has three focal points: (1) Godliness means self-control (Jas. 1:19-21). (2) Faith is something you do (Jas. 1:22-27). (3) Wealth isn't the measure of a person (Jas. 2:1-4).

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

- (1) Explain why poor Christians have reason to rejoice.
- (2) Name some of the spiritual problems associated with wealth.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

Begin with this anecdote: While the "Battle of Britain" was raging during the World War II, two Londoners were waiting out a German air raid in an underground bomb shelter. One of the men, an agnostic, said to his Christian companion, "If your God is as almighty as you say he is, why doesn't he stop this bloody war?" His friend's response was short and to the point: "Because," he replied, "God didn't start it." *Then comment:* People ask this sort of question about all kinds of evil in the world: Why does God permit the terrible suffering in Syria, or the recent killings in schools, churches and public places? *Point out that the answer is essentially the same:* "God didn't start it." These evils are the result of human selfishness, immorality and the lust for power. James deals with this theme in this week's lesson passage.

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. Comment on the first point: GODLINESS MEANS SELF-CONTROL (James 1:19-21): (1) The world seems to be full of angry people who claim to be godly. In fact, they often indulge in angry outbursts in the name of God. **EXAMPLES:** (a) Some people regard displays of anger in the pulpit as a sign of truly spiritual preaching. (EXAMPLE: A deacon in a Kentucky church complimented his pastor for being a "hard preacher.") (b) Studies show that child abuse, spouse abuse and elder abuse, much of it resulting from outbursts of anger, are no less common in church-going families than in the population at large. *Read James 1:19-20, then comment:* In these verses James says in no uncertain terms that anger does not work the righteousness of God. **FOR DISCUSSION:** We sometimes say a person had an "uncontrollable temper," but anger is not an inherited personality trait that can't be helped; it usually grows out of hatred, contempt for others, power struggles or other selfish motives. It can be controlled. (2) Display a condensed paraphrase of v. 19 on a poster: QUICK TO HEAR; SLOW TO SPEAK; SLOW TO ANGER. (3) Interpret v. 21: Two things need to be said about "the word that is

able to save your souls." First, it is not merely the taught, or preached, word; it is the word that has been "engrafted" or "implanted," the "word which has taken root in you." ILLUSTRATION: The "implanted word" is equivalent to the "seed that fell on good ground" in the Parable of the Sower (refer to Mt. 13:18-23). Those who have heard the word and have responded in faith have been saved; but they must continue to receive the word through preaching and Christian teaching so that it can go on empowering them and renewing them in spirit. ILLUSTRATION: One who has been to a performance of Handel's cantata, Messiah, does not say, "No, I don't need to go this year, because I heard that last year." Similarly, every encounter with the word of God is a new, living experience.

2. Call attention to the point, "FAITH IS SOMETHING YOU DO" (James 1:22-27): (1) Verse 22 is the key verse in this passage. (2) "Be ye doers" should be understood in a continuous sense (i.e., "keep on striving to be a doer of the Word.") (2) "Word" refers to all the teachings of Jesus (equivalent to "these sayings of mine" in Mt. 7:24 and "all things whatsoever I commanded you in Mt. 28:20). (3) The term "hearers" was often used to describe those who sat in the synagogue and listened to the reading of the law. APPLICATION: James is not minimizing the importance of being a hearer of the word. He is saying, "Don't just listen to the gospel. Put it into practice. If you don't, you are just fooling yourselves."

3. Finally, emphasize the final point: WEALTH ISN'T THE MEASURE OF A PERSON (Jas. 2:1-4,6): (1) The more we value material things, the more we tend to measure people by what they have and what they wear. (James 2:1-4 speaks to this point.) FOR DISCUSSION: Are we inclined to pay more attention to visitors and new church members who are well-dressed than to those who are dressed shabbily? (2) Wealth breeds injustices. In 2:6 James puts his finger on a social sin that is both ancient and modern, the exploitation of the poor by the rich. Here, James is describing a common condition in the society of his day, where many people (especially within the church) were desperately poor. They were easy targets for moneylenders who would charge outrageous interest rates, then drag these pitiable debtors to court where they could not pay. (Call attention to James 5:4, which points up another evil practice, withholding the pay of workers. Refer to the numerous Old Testament passages in which this practice is roundly condemned--Deut. 24:14-15, Lev. 19:13, Prov. 3:27-28, Malachi 3:5. Explain that, in that day, many laborers lived "from hand to mouth," feeding their families on each day's wages. They had no surplus money; if a day's wages were withheld, they didn't eat. (3) Wealth encourages selfish living. This is the point of James 5:5. Luxury tends to breed a taste for luxury. The rich have lived in pleasure, "fattening their hearts." This, in turn, has led to licentious living ("and have been wanton"), all the while ignoring other people. (Refer to the classical example of this in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31.)

CLOSING THE LESSON

For discussion: Clement of Alexandria, a second-century Christian preacher, said: "I know that God has given us the use of goods. but only

as far as is necessary....It is absurd and disgraceful for one to live magnificently and luxuriously when so many are hungry."

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