

Semicontinuous
Song 2:8–13
Ps. 45:1–2, 6–9
Complementary
Deut. 4:1–2, 6–9
Ps. 15
Jas. 1:17–27
Mark 7:1–8, 14–15,
21–23

Hearing and Doing

Goal for the Session Youth will complete activities that explore living a faithful life that hears and does the Word.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on James 1:17–27

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Aaron L. Utti

For a covenant community, which is not immune to heated disputes, James urges his readers to be quick to listen, slow to speak. James undoubtedly sat through assemblies where contention fractured the community. He observed that human anger will not produce results that make things right. James is intense, using acid rhetoric: “rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness,” he admonishes (v. 21). On the other hand, he says, listening and being listened to open the door to the righteousness of God for the community.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Haruko Nawata Ward

In Greek philosophy, every being has its origin in the highest Being. This Being is also named the Source, Life, Light, Good, Truth, and Idea. Each being is placed in the hierarchy of beings, as on a ladder. Each receives energy from the Source above. If the being is closer to the top of the ladder, it receives and reflects brighter light; if the being ranks toward the bottom, it receives lesser light and stays shadowy. Calling the Christian God “Father of lights” (v. 17), the writer of James shows that every life-giving gift to Christians also comes from their Source. However, by stating “there is no variation or shadow due to change,” the writer departs from Greek cosmology. In the Christian universe, every Christian receives this gift equally and not according to his or her rank in the hierarchy. The supreme gift that Christians receive is “birth by the word of truth” (v. 18).

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” by Archie Smith Jr.

James calls us to be responsible, taking seriously our emotional lives, our religious faith, and our behavior. We can envision ourselves as early signs of God’s new creation. We can begin by embracing the whole of ourselves and taking responsibility for our constructive and destructive potentials. Living this way can increase our critical discernment. It can foster the development of persons and communities. Such living, when joined by the faithfulness of many others, can become a strong current that helps to transform the world.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Peter Rhea Jones

The reference to new birth signals a critical intention of a purposive God. One may draw this out in terms of a theology and ethic of divine giving (John 3:16), giving being at the heart of the universe. Generosity grounded in the character of God and embodied in the mission of Jesus can unfold as an influential model of the Divine. To be generous is consonant with the nature of God. God comes through as reliable as well (v. 17c), even from a cosmic perspective.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

James 1:17–27

Focus on Your Teaching

Some young people are doers, people of action. They live lives that seem to be constantly in motion. Others are hearers, quieter and more reflective. James reminds us that both qualities—though they can be abused when taken to extremes—are important and must be nurtured. In this session, guide youth into an exploration of both hearing and doing the Word. Offer them opportunities to practice hearing and doing as important aspects of the Christian life.

Gracious God, help me to both hear and do as I prepare for this session and lead your young people. In Jesus' name. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- newsprint
- tape
- markers
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- pens or pencils

For Responding

- option 1: mural paper, poster paint, brushes, related art supplies
- option 2: copies of Resource Sheet 2
- option 3: writing paper, pens

For Music Connection

- recording of “Would They Love Him Down in Shreveport” by Bobby Braddock, music player

Sit on the floor, and then stand up. Turn around three times clockwise. Do four jumping jacks, and then give everyone in the room high fives while singing “Jesus Loves Me.”

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, if you choose option 1 in Responding, prepare a large sheet of mural paper (bulletin board or butcher paper, etc.) to be painted in an appropriate location.

Invite youth to form a line across the meeting space. Explain that you will whisper instructions (in the sidebar) into the ear of the person at the head of the line. The instructions must then be whispered from person to person; stress that participants must not let the instructions be overheard. After the instructions reach the last person in line, that person must perform the specified actions.

Thank the performer and then review the original instructions, noting how much or how little they changed along the line. Explain that this session concerns two of our callings as Christians: hearing and doing God’s Word. Point out that, as in this activity, we can’t do without first hearing, but hearing alone is not enough. Pray:

Gracious God, inspire us by your Spirit to both hear and do what you command. Amen.

EXPLORING

Explain that the letter of James, dating roughly from the first century, was written to provide ethical teaching for some of the first Christians. It can be difficult to follow, sometimes stringing together apparently unrelated ideas. Invite youth to read James 1:17–27 silently, and then reassure them that their study of this passage will be divided into four digestible blocks, helping them to make sense of its teachings.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (It Starts with God), which deals with the first section of the Scripture passage, James 1:17–18. Together work through the readings and reflection questions on the resource sheet. Then, before moving on, invite the youth to summarize, in their own words, the main idea of these two verses. Write their summary on a posted sheet of newsprint.

Next, read together the second block of the Scripture passage, James 1:19–21. Point out that Aaron L. Uitti, in the “What?” excerpt on page 1 observes that “a covenant community”—that is, the church—“is not immune to heated disputes.” Invite the youth to reflect on disputes among Christians in which participants, failing to listen, were quick to speak and become angry. Discuss the following questions:

- ✧ What’s the hardest part about following this advice?
- ✧ Does James mean that we should never speak our minds or become angry? When are these behaviors appropriate?
- ✧ To what or whom, according to James, should we “be quick to listen” (v. 19)?

Invite the youth to summarize the main idea of these three verses and add this summary to the posted sheet of newsprint.

The third section, James 1:22–25, is the heart of this passage. Read these verses together and explore the following questions:

- ✧ Does verse 22, which speaks of “hearers who deceive themselves,” contradict the previous section? Why or why not?
- ✧ How is a mirror (vv. 23–24) like and unlike “the perfect law” (God’s Word, v. 25)?
- ✧ What is the proper relationship between hearing and doing?
- ✧ How do hearing and doing reinforce each other?

Again, invite the youth to summarize the main idea of this section and add this summary to the posted sheet of newsprint.

Suggest that the final block of this passage, James 1:26–27, returns us to where we started: God. Read these two verses together and then read the following sentence from the “Now What?” excerpt on page 1: “To be generous is consonant with the nature of God.” Inviting the youth to keep this thought in mind, discuss the following questions:

- ✧ What, according to James, makes religion “worthless” (v. 26)?
- ✧ Is “pure and undefiled” (v. 27) religion limited to caring for orphans and widows? How do you know?
- ✧ What does it mean to “keep oneself unstained by the world” (v. 27)?

One last time, invite the youth to summarize the main idea of this section and add this summary to the posted sheet of newsprint. Then, looking at the four section summaries, ask how they might be further condensed into a single main idea. Conclude the discussion by observing that the youth have practiced hearing God’s Word; now it’s time to begin doing God’s Word.

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of the following learning activities:

1. **Self-Portraits** Youth will practice “embracing the whole of ourselves” (“So What?” excerpt, page 1) by contributing self-portraits to a mural that celebrates God’s generosity in creation. Read James 1:18 and the “So What?” excerpt, and invite participants to add their self-portraits to the mural paper. Encourage the youth to strive not for perfect

The comparison between a mirror and the Word (vv. 23–25) is not immediately clear. If youth find it difficult to grasp, suggest that in a mirror they see only themselves but in the Word they see both themselves (in the stories of biblical figures) and God, who desires to communicate and be in relationship with them.

To make the purpose of this activity and its connection to the Scripture explicit, consider weaving James 1:18 and words such as “We are children of God” into the mural.

physical likenesses but for images that show themselves as God's beloved children. When the work is completed, ask:

- ✧ How does seeing and embracing yourself as a child of God count as a way of doing God's Word?
- ✧ When you see yourself as God sees you, how does it affect your interaction with God, with others, and with the world?

2. Do the Word Youth will reflect on practical ways to do God's Word. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (The Word We Do) and give participants time to read the Scripture passages silently. Then lead a discussion in which the youth explore the following questions:

- ✧ Is it possible to do and be all that these passages require? Why or why not?
- ✧ Are some of these scriptural commands more important than others? Explain.
- ✧ Is doing God's Word simply a matter of doing what the Bible says? If not, what else is involved?
- ✧ What is your "plan" for doing God's Word?

EASY
PREP

3. Confession and Commitment Youth will respond to God's Word in James 1:17–27 by writing prayers of confession and commitment. Encourage the youth to write their prayers as letters to God, accepting the judgment in James' words of criticism and taking on the challenge of living up to his commands. Invite participants to read their prayers for the group, and then thank them for hearing and doing God's Word.

CLOSING

Invite youth to reflect on what they've learned about being both a hearer and a doer of the Word.

As the youth probably have either just begun or are about to begin a new school year, encourage them to recall James' teaching as a way of getting the new year off to a positive start. Offer the following blessing and charge:

You are children of God! By God's generosity, you are the first fruits of all creation. You have hearts, minds, tongues, and ears—and the capacity to use them to serve your creator. So do it: Go out into the world and be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger. Be both hearers and doers, loving God and one another. And God goes with you. Amen.

■ ENHANCEMENT

MUSIC CONNECTION

Listen to "Would They Love Him Down in Shreveport" by Bobby Braddock and explore the following questions:

- ✧ Which of the song's lines particularly resonate with you? Why?
- ✧ Which of the song's lines do you find especially hard to accept? Why?
- ✧ In what ways does "Would They Love Him Down in Shreveport" illustrate the difficulty of hearing and doing God's Word?

It Starts with God

Read James 1:17–18 and then the “Where?” excerpt, below:

WHERE is God in these words?

In Greek philosophy, every being has its origin in the highest Being. This Being is also named the Source, Life, Light, Good, Truth, and Idea. Each being is placed in the hierarchy of beings, as on a ladder. Each receives energy from the Source above. If the being is closer to the top of the ladder, it receives and reflects brighter light; if the being ranks toward the bottom, it receives lesser light and stays shadowy. Calling the Christian God “Father of lights” (v. 17), the writer of James shows that every life-giving gift to Christians also comes from their Source. However, by stating “there is no variation or shadow due to change,” the writer departs from Greek cosmology. In the Christian universe, every Christian receives this gift equally and not according to his or her rank in the hierarchy. The supreme gift that Christians receive is “birth by the word of truth” (v. 18).

From “Theological Perspective” by Haruko Nawata Ward

Work together, with a volunteer artist, to draw simple pictures on a posted sheet of newsprint of the Greek and Christian “ladders” described above. Then discuss the following questions:

- How does God act toward creation?
- What words describe God’s character (both from Scripture and from your own perspective on God)?
- Where do we “rank” in relation to God and creation?
- What blessings and responsibilities do we have because of our relationship with God?



The Word We Do

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

—Leviticus 19:18

Praise the LORD! How good it is to sing praises to our God; for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.

—Psalm 147:1

Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.

—Amos 5:23–24

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

—Micah 6:8

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.”

—Matthew 5:43–45

A certain ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother.’” He replied, “I have kept all these since my youth.” When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”

—Luke 18:18–22

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

—Galatians 5:22–23

What verse(s) would you add to this list?

Word
God's
Doing