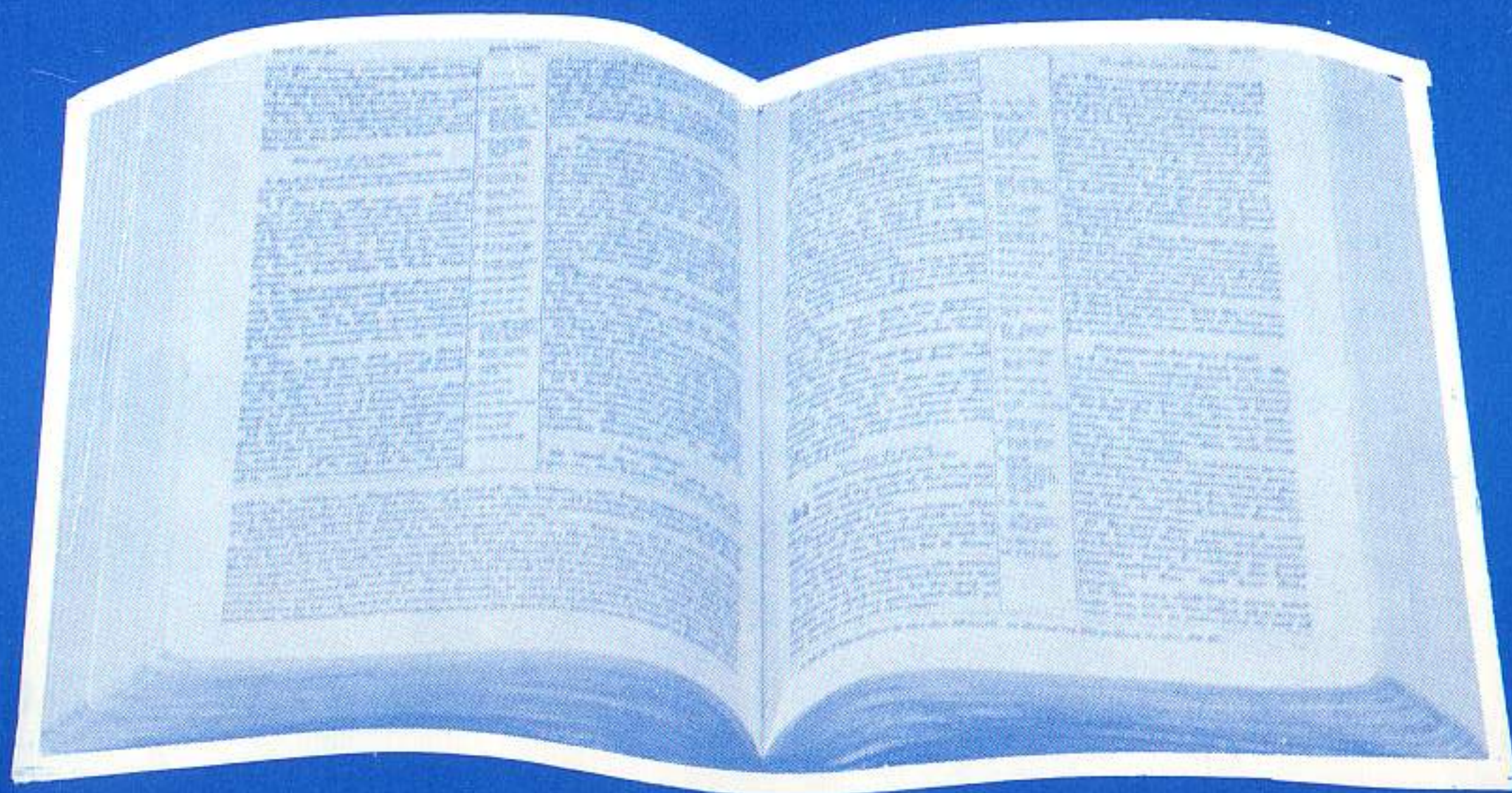


STUDIES IN MARK-LUKE-JAMES (TEACHER)



BIBLE LESSONS FOR ADULTS

STUDIES IN MARK-LUKE-JAMES (TEACHER)

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BIBLE LESSONS FOR ADULTS

Africa Coordinated Curriculum
for Bible Study

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CHAPTER ONE

THE WAY OF UNSELFISH SERVICE

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:

Mark 10:35-45; Luke 10:1-16, 25-37

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:

Mark 10:35-45

MEMORY VERSE: "...but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all" (Mark 10:43-44).

TEACHING AIM: I will help members understand that true greatness comes from serving others.

TEACHING AIDS: Cut pictures from magazines or newspapers of success as the world sees it. These could include a business man, a nice house, car, a good meal, happy children, good schools. Bring a large piece of paper and some glue to class. (Make glue by mixing flour and water.) If these are not available, you could draw the pictures on the paper.

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Study

We want to think of two ways to measure success in the lesson today. The two ways are very different. One is the way the world sees success. The other is success as Jesus sees it.

Read Mark 10:35-40. Jesus had taught many things in the time he had been with his disciples. James and John had heard much of this teaching, but they were still thinking

in a worldly manner. They and their mother still failed to understand what the kingdom of God was like. Read also Matthew 20:20-21 and 27:56.

The terms "right hand" and "left hand" were Jewish ways of asking to be next to the king in honour. They were really asking to be given the highest positions of honour in the kingdom.

Look at Jesus' answer in Mark 10:38. Jesus told them very nicely that they did not know what they were asking. If Jesus had granted their requests, James and John would have occupied the crosses on the right and left of Jesus on Golgotha. It was there that Jesus was lifted up and glorified by his Father.

What does this tell us about James and John? Greatness in the kingdom was beyond their understanding. They were thinking of becoming great as they knew it. They still expected Jesus to be an earthly king. People usually thought of greatness by how many people were under one's authority. Jesus taught that this was not the way to true greatness.

Jesus asked James and John if they could drink of his cup and be baptized with his baptism. They said yes, but they did not know what they were saying. "Cup" and "baptism" were old symbols for suffering. In Jesus' case it meant death on the cross. Indeed James and John would

suffer in their lifetime. Jesus knew James would die a martyr's death early. John would have a long life of being a martyr. But Jesus had to tell them that it was not his work to give the places of honour. That choice belonged to his heavenly Father.

What did the other disciples think of the requests of their friends? They were angry. Perhaps they too were thinking of having those places of honour. They just had not decided how to ask for them.

Jesus talked about the heavenly way of greatness. He said first, that whoever wants to be great has to be a servant. (verse 43) Next, whoever wants to be greatest of all must be a slave of all. (verse 44) Then Jesus told them he had come to serve and not to be served.

In verse 45 Jesus talked about his purpose for coming into the world. He used the title, Son of man, which means he is the Messiah. This is the first time in the book of Mark that we find Jesus talking about the reason for his coming. He came to die in our place. The word, ransom, is only used two places in the New Testament. The other place is Matthew 20:28. It means freeing a captive for payment. Another word similar to this is redemption. We find that word often in the Bible. (Luke 1:68; 2:38; 24:21; Hebrews 9:12; 1 Peter 1:18 and others)

So Jesus told the price of being a disciple, but he also lived what he taught. He followed the will of God perfectly.

TEACHING THIS LESSON

Introduction

Say: "Today we are going to talk about success. What does it mean to be successful?" (Wait for answers. If members do not answer quickly, ask what things would be included in the life of a person who was successful. As they answer, paste the pictures you have brought to the large paper. If pictures are not available, draw them quickly. Do this where they can see what you are doing.)

Say: "There are at least two ways to measure success. These things certainly are part of a successful person as the world sees success. Most of these things are what we would call 'good things.' When used properly they can make life more pleasant. We would be glad to have most of these things, wouldn't we?"

"Our Bible lesson today is Mark 10:35-45." (Tell a good reader to read those verses to the class.)

Interpretation

Say: "In these Bible verses we learn about two men who wanted to be successful. They wanted everyone to see that they were successful. They thought of a plan that would show the world that they had done well.

"James and John, the sons of Zebedee, went to Jesus and asked for a special favour. They asked that when he came into his glory he would let them sit, one at his right hand and the other at his left.

"This was the way of asking for the two highest places in the kingdom. These were the places of honour."

Ask: "What do you think Jesus thought about this request?" (Give time for members to answer. Be sure they say that James and John had heard much of Jesus' teachings. He must have been disappointed that they were still thinking of an earthly kingdom.)

Ask: "What did the other disciples think of this plan?" (When someone says they did not like it, ask why. Show that they too wanted places of honour in the kingdom.)

Say: "Jesus told James and John that they did not know what they were asking. He meant that he would come into his glory on the cross of Calvary. If those two men had the places to his right and left, they would have been on the crosses beside him. Indeed, they did not know what they were asking. Then Jesus added that it was not his job to give the places of honour. His Father would do that.

"Then Jesus taught how a person can be really great." Read verses 43-45 again.

"A person can be great in God's kingdom if he is a servant. And whoever wants to be first must be a slave of all. Jesus said he came to serve, not to be served."

Application To Our Lives

Ask: "How does this definition of greatness, or success, compare to our ideas a few minutes ago? Look at the picture again. What is the purpose of the items we thought showed success?" (Wait for answers. Show that these things are for the personal enjoyment of the owner. They are for comfort. They are not bad things, but they should not have first place in our lives. We should use any of these things that we already have to help other people. They should help us in being a servant to other people. For example, we should share our food with others who do not have as much as we do. We should invite other people to our homes and make them comfortable. We should use the money earned at our jobs as God intended it. First we should give a tithe, or one tenth of our money, back to God through his church. The remaining part should be used carefully to his honour.)

Ask: "Which is most important, to be successful as the world sees it or to be successful as God sees it?"

Ask: "As we pray, think of things you can do this week to be successful in God's eyes."

Close in prayer after a short time for members to think about this.

CHAPTER TWO

THE WAY OF GENUINE PRAYER

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:

Luke 11:1-13; 18:1-14

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:

Luke 11:1-13

MEMORY VERSE: "...Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Luke 11:9).

TEACHING AIM: I will encourage members to establish and practise an attitude of genuine prayer.

TEACHING AIDS: chalk board and chalk or a large paper

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Study

Read Luke 11:1-4. The Gospel of Luke emphasizes Jesus' prayer life. It was a necessary part of his life. The disciples who lived so close to him saw how important prayer was to Jesus. That is why they made the request of Luke 11:1. Jesus answered by giving them the model prayer. Matthew gives a longer account of this event. Read also Matthew 6:9-15.

Jesus' disciples asked him to teach them to pray. Jesus gave them this prayer to show them how to pray. It was not to be recited every time they prayed. It was not the only prayer they should pray. It was an example of how they should pray.

Verse 2 shows us that God is very near. He is our Heavenly Father.

We have close communion with him. But he is also the holy God. His name should be hallowed or treated with great respect.

The first request we make to God should be for his kingdom to come on earth. We should pray that his will be done in the hearts of all his people. We pray for God to complete the work he is doing in the lives of his people. After this, we should make our requests for the things we need. Food and the matters of life are mentioned here.

Prayer also includes the confession of sin. It should show that we are willing to forgive other people for what they have done to us. One should not expect to be forgiven if he is not willing to forgive others.

Prayer shows that we depend on God for strength and guidance. God allows us to be tested, but he promised that we would never have more temptation than we could bear. If we depend on him, he will deliver us from the evil that surrounds us.

Then Jesus taught a parable to show the need for prayer. Read verses 5-8. Jesus had taught the disciples how to pray. He had helped them know what words to say. It was harder to show them how much they needed to pray.

In the parable, the man had a great need. It was a serious duty to

offer food and rest to travellers. But the host had nothing to set before his guest. He had come late. He was not expected. The host felt so strongly his need to offer food to his guest that he disturbed the sleep of his neighbour to ask for food.

It was not easy for the neighbour to get up and find bread in the dark. His children were also sleeping, and his getting up would disturb them. The whole family slept in the one room of the house, and when one person got up everyone was disturbed.

But the need was so great that the man was willing to disturb his neighbour. The neighbour tried to say no, but the host kept asking until he got the bread. The neighbour gave him the bread to get him to leave them alone.

Likewise, Jesus said, if you ask of your Heavenly Father, he will give to you. If an unwilling neighbour will give because someone keeps on asking, how much more will your Heavenly Father give to you.

God knows our needs, and he gives many gifts even before we pray. But our deepest needs will be met through prayer.

TEACHING THIS LESSON

Introduction

Say: "Today we will think about prayer. Prayer is talking to God. It is also listening to God. The writer of the Gospel of Luke showed us that prayer was very important in Jesus'

life. He spent a lot of time praying to his Father. Sometimes he prayed where the disciples could hear the prayer. Other times he went away alone to pray.

"The disciples who lived very close to Jesus soon recognized that prayer was very important to Jesus. One day they asked him to teach them to pray. Jesus gave them a prayer which we call 'The Lord's Prayer' or the 'Model Prayer.' It is recorded two places in the Bible. Today we are reading Luke 11:1-13, but you can also find this prayer in Matthew 6:9-15. Matthew gives a longer account."

Interpretation

Say: "When we read the Bible verses today and talk about them, please watch for some requirements for having prayers answered. As you see something, tell me and I will write it on the chalk board (or paper.)"

Have someone read Luke 11:1-4. Jesus began his prayer in verse 2.

'Father' shows us that God is very near to us. We can talk to him at any time and any place. But the next words say, "hallowed be thy name." This shows that God is holy. We should always show great respect when talking to God. Does this much show us something that we should write on the board that is a requirement for having prayers answered?" (If members do not understand what you want, go ahead and write "Personal relationship with

God." Explain that because he is our Father, we are his children. We can pray to him about anything.)

"Then Jesus prayed, 'Thy kingdom come.' When we pray, our first concern should be for God's kingdom to come. This would mean that God had finished his work in us. It is a wonderful time that all Christians can look forward to." (Write on the board, "Want God's will to be done.")

"We can notice here that Jesus prayed next, 'Give us each day our daily bread.' Prayer is often answered when two or more people pray together. This is not necessary, however. Prayer can be answered also from one person.

"Next Jesus talked about forgiveness. He asked the Father to forgive us as we forgive other people. This is a requirement for prayers to be answered. We must be willing to forgive anyone who has done something to us." (Write this one on the board.)

Say: "That is all the requirements we will find, but Jesus went on to teach a parable to show the need for prayer."

Use your Background Study and the Bible verses to teach this parable, verses 5-13. Show that we must pray for specific needs. We must be

persistent, and we must pray out of our need.

Show also that we should pray expecting to receive what we ask. We do not deserve to have our prayers answered, but God gives because of his faithfulness and goodness.

Application To Our Lives

Ask: "As we have studied this lesson, what have you learned about prayer?" (Let the members answer.)

Say: "Think about your life and your prayer time. Which of these characteristics of prayer do you lack most in your own prayer life." (Do not require answers. Just allow a bit of time for members to think about each question.) "Are you willing to make some specific plans for improvement of your prayer life? What are you going to do this week to develop a stronger prayer life?"

"Will you choose a time of day that you will use for praying? Choose also a place where you can pray quietly. Begin to make a list of people for whom you will pray. Write also your request for that person. When God answers your prayer, write the date. As you look back at your list after a short while, you will see that God has answered many of your prayers."

CHAPTER THREE

THE WAY OF FORGIVING LOVE

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:
Luke 15

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
Luke 15:11-32

MEMORY VERSE: "And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him" (Luke 15:20).

TEACHING AIM: I will help believers understand more fully God's forgiving love for the lost. I will also encourage them to practise that love toward others.

TEACHING AIDS: chalk board and chalk (or large paper)

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Study

Luke 15 is one of the best known chapters of the Bible. It tells about God's joy over the repentance of one sinner. Read the whole chapter as you prepare to teach this lesson.

When the lost son went to a far country, he lived well until his money was finished. Then he was in a sad condition. It was the responsibility of the son to return to the father. The answer to his problems was there all the time. The son had to decide to go back.

Jesus said the young man "came to himself." It was as if he had been

asleep and suddenly woke up. He saw what a bad condition he was in, and he remembered home. He did not appear to have any idea of returning to his sonship. He could only hope his father might let him work as a servant in his household. The boy remembered that his father treated his servants very well. At least he would have food and clothes, and a warm place to stay. He certainly did not have that where he was!

Not all fathers would do what this boy's father did in this situation. But God, the Heavenly Father, always does. He wants sinners to come to him for forgiveness, but he waits for them to decide to come and ask for that forgiveness. God responds with great joy when any sinner comes to him. He has already done all that is needed to provide that forgiveness. It is only necessary for the sinner to repent.

The elder brother was not as happy as the father was. He complained about the treatment given to the younger son.

The elder had stayed home and taken care of business, but he had not felt the sorrow the father had felt for the younger son. He was as lost to his father as the other boy had been. He even refused to call the boy his brother. He said, "...this son of yours...."

Then the elder brother began to look at himself. He told the father what all he had done that was good. He had stayed at home; he had worked hard; he had obeyed. He even used a word that called himself a slave.

He began to feel sorry for himself. "You have never given a party for me," he complained. "You did not let me kill an animal so I could have my friends come in."

The elder brother even made a charge that had not been mentioned before. He said the boy "...devoured your living with harlots...." Jesus had not said anything about this in the parable. Perhaps it was just the evil mind of the elder brother. Perhaps it was envy and judgement.

The elder brother was jealous of the younger brother. He could not rejoice in his coming home. He could not be happy that the one who "...was dead..." was alive again.

The father answered very kindly and patiently. He explained that if the elder felt he was a slave, it was his own choice. All the benefits of sonship were his too. He had only to take them.

We do not have an ending to the parable in the Bible. We do not know how the elder brother responded to his father's explanation.

This was a picture of the Pharisees. They thought they were so good that they depended on that goodness to save them. They were lost because of their goodness. Jesus

hoped some of them would come to him, but they had to choose to do it.

TEACHING THIS LESSON

Introduction

Say: "Today we are thinking about a chapter of the Bible that is very well known. We usually call the last story of Luke 15 'The Prodigal Son.' It would be better to call it 'The Forgiving Father.'"

"Who would like to begin telling us what happened to the younger son in the parable?" After one person has told some of the story, let another tell more. Then another can continue until they get to verse 17.

Now divide the class into three groups. Have one group take the younger son, one the older son and the other the father. Tell them to make a list of words to describe each of these men. If they need help, you could suggest for the younger son words like rebellious, greedy, sinful and repentant. For the elder son, suggest jealous, envious, self-centred, judging and bitter. For the father, suggest loving, kind, patient and forgiving.

Call the class back together and let each group report. Write the words on the chalk board under the title of each man.

Interpretation

Begin with Luke 15:17 and tell the story of what happened in this parable. Emphasize that the younger son had to make a decision to go back to his father. The father was

not required to go looking for his son. At all times, the answer to his problems was there. He just had to choose to take it.

Show the joy of the father when the son returned home. Tell how he did not consider taking the boy back as a servant. He gave him back his place as a son.

Use your Background Study to help with telling this story.

Discuss the actions of the elder brother. Talk about why he felt he had not been treated properly. Why did he feel he deserved to be treated differently?

Show that this was the attitude of the Pharisees of that day. They thought they were so good that they deserved salvation. They thought they could earn salvation by the good works they did. They were not even interested in saving a lost person. They would prefer that he be destroyed instead of saved.

Say: "Both sons were sinners. The younger one admitted his guilt and repented. The older son was not guilty of the sins of passion. His guilt was of having an unloving heart. He had a bad attitude which stood between him and his forgiveness. His guilt kept him from enjoying the full benefits of being a son of his father.

"The last we see of the father in this parable is that he was standing patiently waiting and hoping the

other son would repent. He would never turn either one away. He wanted to gently lead both into full fellowship in the family."

Application To Our Lives

Ask if there are other words which the class would like to add to the three lists on the chalk board. If so, write them also.

Say: "God loves sinners just as the father in the parable loved his sons. God does wait for each person to make his own choice. He does not force anyone to come to him, but he lovingly receives every repentant sinner who does come. God has great joy when one of his own comes home to him. He forgives his sin and never holds it against him again.

"What is your attitude toward a lost sinner? Are you happy when one is forgiven and brought back into the family of God? Are there some people whom you consider too sinful to be forgiven? Do you think they deserve to be punished?

"Are you willing to help lost people find forgiveness? Will you help them grow spiritually after they have found the Lord?

"Sometimes people stumble and fall into sin even after they have been forgiven. Do you encourage them and help them get back on the right path? Is there anything in your attitude which you need to ask God to forgive. He will hear you now."

CHAPTER FOUR

THE WAY OF RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:
Mark 12:41-44; Luke 16:10-15, 19-31

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
Mark 12:41-44; Luke 16:10-15

MEMORY VERSE: "He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and he who is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much" (Luke 16:10).

TEACHING AIM: I will help members find ways to practise faithful stewardship of their lives and possessions.

TEACHING AIDS: None

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Study

Read Mark 12:41-44. Jesus used the giving of a poor widow to teach true giving. He sat where he could see the woman as she put two small coins into the temple treasury. The coins were called mites, the smallest coins in use in that time. Therefore, the smallest gift a person could give was one mite.

The woman could have kept one or both of the mites, but she gave all she had. The rich people were giving much larger gifts in amount of money, but Jesus said her small gift was greater than all theirs. They had given only what they would not even miss. She had given what was needed for her life. In Jesus' eyes,

the greatest gift was what cost the giver most.

The amount of the gift does not really matter. It is important to give a gift that costs the giver something. Not many people will do without something so they can give a bigger gift to the church.

Read Luke 16:10-15. These lessons teach us that a person will fulfil a large task the same way he does a small one. His work on a small job is a good test of how he would do a larger one. This is certainly true of earthly things. No man will be given a higher office until he has proved his honesty and ability in a smaller position.

Jesus continued the teaching to include eternal things. He explained that on earth men are in charge of things that are not really theirs. In truth, nothing on earth belongs to man. Man is just a steward of the things he claims are his on earth. They really belong to God. Man can not take them with him when he dies. They are only in his care for a short time. But in heaven man will get what is really his. What he gets in heaven depends on how he uses the things of earth.

Verse 13 teaches that no man can serve two masters. When a person owned a slave, he owned him completely. The slave could not work for anyone else. He could not even

work for himself. He and all his time belonged to his master. He had no hours off from work. Every hour of every day and every bit of his strength belonged to his master. This is the picture Jesus was describing. It was impossible for a slave to work for two people.

Serving God can not ever be a part-time job. When a person chooses to serve God, every moment and every bit of his strength belong to God. He has no spare time to serve Satan.

The Pharisees who heard this teaching did not like it at all. They were lovers of money, and they seemed to connect earthly prosperity with goodness. If a man had wealth, they thought he was a good man. They thought earthly possessions were a reward for goodness. But the more they raised themselves up before men, the farther they wandered from God. It is not good for a man to think of himself as good, but it is worse for him to claim that the things he owns prove his goodness. God does not see greatness the same way men do. He knows all that is within the hearts of men.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Introduction

Tell this story to introduce the lesson today: "When Joseph finished secondary school he had many friends, but when examination results came in he had not passed.

"He began to look for a job, and after many days he had not found work. Finally, one who knew his situation wanted to help him. He offered him a job milking cows on his farm. He would have to wake up early and be at his work. He would also work late in the evenings. The job would not pay a lot, but if he did well in it, perhaps one day he would be promoted to farm manager.

"The employer was very surprised on the first morning to see Joseph come to work in his best clothes. He wore a white shirt and tie, and a suit which he usually wore to church. He asked Joseph how he planned to milk cows in those clothes. Joseph knew what he had been hired to do, but he just thought perhaps there would be a better job for him. He was not willing to do the common work of milking cows."

Explain that the lesson today is about the way men use what they have. This includes money, but it also includes many other things. Some of those are time, energy and opportunities.

Interpretation

Have members turn to Mark 12:41-44. Tell someone to read those verses to the class. Use your Background Study to help you talk about the woman's gift.

Say: "Surely no one would have blamed the woman if she had given only one coin and had kept the other one for her own needs. Anyone who would give half of what they had

would give a good gift. Jesus taught that the size of the gift was not as important as the cost to the giver. One mite would have been a large gift for the poor widow, but she gave all."

Tell another member to read Luke 16:10-15.

"These verses teach us that man must be faithful in the way he uses whatever has been entrusted to him. Nothing on earth belongs to any man. All is God's. Man is just a steward of some earthly possessions for a little while.

"What is a steward? He is one who manages another person's property. He is responsible for the care of those things. He does not own them, but he must take care of them.

"In verse 10 there is a contrast between little and much. The little means the things the man is allowed to use on earth. The way he uses these things tells whether he would be able to manage greater things in heaven, the eternal riches God will give him.

"Unrighteous mammon' means wealth as the world knows it. This is a very different from the 'true riches' that God gives to faithful stewards in heaven. Earth is a testing ground where man's real character is revealed. The test is his attitude toward the things he owns.

"Man may be responsible for a small part of God's world. That only lasts a short while. But the world and all that is in it always belongs to God. But what a man is given in heaven is really his. There is nothing temporary there.

"A man decides what is important to him by who his master is. The word, serve, in verse 13 really means 'be a slave to.' Teacher, use your Background Study to talk about the meaning of being a slave. Explain also the Pharisees reaction to Jesus' teachings.

Application To Our Lives

Say: "Let us mention a few things we can learn from our lesson today about giving. First, giving must be a sacrifice. The amount of the gift is not as important as what it cost the giver. Secondly, we should look carefully to see what we hold back from giving. Is there some part of your life, some part of your activity, some part of your possessions that you have not given to God? Thirdly, if you will be faithful in the little things in life, God knows he can trust you with much.

"It is beautiful to think that the small gift of a poor widow would be remembered two thousand years. We may think we have little to give, but if we give all to God, he can do things with it and with us that we can not even imagine."

CHAPTER FIVE

JESUS OFFERS HIMSELF

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:

Mark 11:1-11; 14:1-15, 41

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:

Mark 11:7-10; 14:32-36; 15:33-39

MEMORY VERSE: "And he said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt'" (Mark 14:36).

TEACHING AIM: I will encourage members to examine their own need for personal commitment to the will of God.

TEACHING AIDS: pencils and paper

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Study

Read Mark 11:7-10. When Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a colt, he proclaimed publically that he was the Messiah. He had revealed this in veiled ways to his disciples but not to the world. The people had hoped for an earthly king, and he would have ridden in the city on a strong war horse. But Jesus chose a lowly donkey, a symbol of peace. He came without arms and without army. He offered peace at its best, with God's fullest blessing.

The donkey colt had never been ridden before. This was important, because for an animal to be used for a sacred purpose it must not have been used for anything else.

But the people still did not understand that Jesus came in peace. They welcomed him as they would have welcomed one who had conquered their enemies. When they shouted Hosanna, it was not really a shout of praise. *Hosanna*, a Hebrew word, means "Save, we pray." It was a cry to God to save his people now.

Read Mark 14:32-36. Jesus left the upper room and went to a place he often went. The garden of Gethsemane was a place Jesus liked to go to pray. He needed to talk to his Father, and he also needed his friends with him. They did not need to talk to him. He just wanted them to be near him and to pray. Just a short time before they had said they would die with him. But they could not stay awake to pray for a single hour. Surely the men were tired. Their strength had been drained by all that was going on.

What can we learn about Jesus in this passage? First, he did not want to die. He was only 33 years old, and there was so much work he would have liked to do. He also knew about the pain of the crucifixion. He did not want that. He had to choose to go on, as we often do.

Next, he did not understand fully why it must be this way. But he knew it was his Father's will, so he must go on. He had to accept what he did not understand.

Last, he accepted the will of his Father and agreed to it. *Abba* is the Aramaic word for 'my father.' Because God was his Father, he could go on.

Read Mark 15:33-39. Jesus was hanging on the cross, and at about noon there was complete darkness. It lasted until 3 p.m. For the first time, Jesus was completely separated from his Father. Jesus bore the sin of all men in his own body, and God could not look upon that sin. The physical pain of Jesus could not compare with the pain he felt at that moment. The Aramaic words in Mark 15:34 are a quote from Psalms 22:1. Those who were watching did not understand the words, *Eloi, Eloi*. They thought Jesus was calling Elijah to come and help him. When Jesus cried out in thirst, someone dipped a sponge in vinegar and offered it to him. Then they stood by and waited to see if Elijah would come to help, but Jesus cried out and died. He had finished the work he came to earth to do. He did not need to suffer any more.

At the moment Jesus died, the curtain in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. This shows that it was not done by man. If man had done it, it would have been torn from bottom to top. The curtain was the one that protected the holy of holies. The people were not allowed to go there. Only the priest could enter the holy of holies and that only on a certain day. This meant that from that moment, man could go directly to God. He did not have to wait for

a priest to go for him. God is always available now to any who will go to him through Jesus Christ, his Son. We can pray to him at any time and in any place.

TEACHING THIS LESSON

Introduction

Divide your class into half, or into smaller groups. Have them read Mark 11:7-10 to start their thinking. Tell half of the people to look for things the people wanted in a Messiah. The other half should look for what Jesus was. Give pencils and paper so they can write their lists. Allow a few minutes for the groups to work. Then call the class back together.

Let the groups tell what they have written on their lists. Compare the two.

Interpretation

Say: "Today we will look at three Scripture passages that took place near or at the time of Jesus' crucifixion. The first is Mark 11:7-10. Jesus had never said openly to the world that he was the Messiah. He had let it be known in veiled ways as he taught the disciples. We must remember that the people were looking for an earthly king who would deliver them from the evils they were suffering.

"Jesus chose a donkey colt to carry him into Jerusalem. This would show the people that he was a King of peace. A warrior would have ridden a strong horse.

"The donkey had never been ridden before. This was important because an animal used for sacred purposes could not have been used for anything else. By entering the city this way, Jesus was saying he was indeed the Messiah. But he was a King of peace. The people wanted a king who would conquer their enemies, a man of war.

"Even the word, *Hosanna*, was not really praise to the king. It was a word saying, 'Save us.'"

Use the Background Study to teach the meaning of the other two passages used in the lesson for today.

Application To Our Lives

Say: "God calls us to understand the need for personal commitment to his will, no matter what it costs us. Jesus did not try to escape the cross. He had committed himself and his death on the cross to God. God brought life to those who follow him because Jesus was faithful to die on the cross. God brought life out of death. It seemed that evil was in control that day when the earth grew dark at midday, but God completed man's salvation. Jesus was faithful to do what he had agreed to do.

"Jesus' sacrifice was a real sacrifice. He did it in order to do

God's will. God requires the same of us. We must commit ourselves to him completely. Whatever the cost, it never can be more than the life, joy and peace that God gives.

"Each of us chooses what kind of life he will live. Then he commits himself to it. Is there any help to guide us to choose well? Yes. Who was with Jesus to help him choose what he would do? The Holy Spirit helped him. None of his friends were there, but the Holy Spirit was his Guide. Jesus made his own decision with the help of the Holy Spirit.

"Who makes your decisions and choices? Each person makes his own decisions. Sometimes a person even decides to let another tell him what to do. That cannot happen if the one does not allow it.

"Who helps you make your choices? The Holy Spirit wants to be your guide and helper. He is available at anytime.

"Have you chosen to commit yourself to God? Have you accepted the love he has offered you? Some people say they have chosen not to decide yet. That is really a choice against God. You must choose to be his or not to be his. There is no other choice. What will you choose today?"

CHAPTER SIX

JESUS LIVES

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:

Mark 15:42-16:8; Luke 23:50-24:12

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:

Mark 15:42-16:8.

MEMORY VERSE: "And he said to them, 'Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him'" (Mark 16:6).

TEACHING AIM: I will encourage members to welcome the fellowship of the living Christ into their lives.

TEACHING AIDS: Every member needs a Bible.

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Study

Jesus had died on the cross at about three o'clock on Friday afternoon. The next day was the sabbath, and the beginning of that day was six o'clock. After six o'clock the sabbath law would be in effect, and no work could be done. That meant they could not even bury the dead. Often the bodies of criminals who died on crosses were never buried. They were just taken down and left for animals of prey. The Romans did not care how long a body stayed on a cross, but the law of Moses taught the Jews that a body should not stay overnight.

Joseph of Arimathea worked quickly. He went to Pilate and asked

for the body of Jesus. Sometimes criminals hung on crosses for several days before death, and so Pilate asked the centurion if Jesus was dead. The centurion said Jesus was dead, and so Pilate agreed to let Joseph take the body.

Who was Joseph of Arimathea? He was a wealthy, respected member of the Sanhedrin. Luke 23:50-51 tells us Joseph had not consented to the death of Jesus. But his grief must have been great because he had not spoken out for Jesus when he was alive. Joseph had been a secret disciple, and he must have wished he had testified openly of his faith.

After Jesus died, however, Joseph very bravely asked for permission to bury the body. It took a lot of courage to do this. There had been threats of expelling anyone from the synagogue if they followed Jesus. Yet timid Joseph did what the disciples could not do. He identified himself as a disciple of Jesus who wanted to bury his body.

Joseph hurried to take the body from the cross. John 19:38-42 says Nicodemus was another secret disciple who helped Joseph. Do you remember Nicodemus? Read his story in John 3. Others may have helped.

Joseph brought fine linen material to wrap the body. Nicodemus brought spices to crumble between

the layers of cloth. Then they very gently laid Jesus' body in Joseph's nearby tomb. It was a new tomb, unused, cut out of a rock. It was the sort of tomb a rich man would have.

The men rolled a large stone into place at the entrance of the tomb. It was placed so it would keep men and animals from disturbing the body.

Some faithful women, Mary Magdalene and Mary, watched to see where the body had been put. They planned to come later and do their anointing of the body. They could not work on the sabbath, according to the law, but early the next day they brought spices for the body. They began to wonder how they would move that large stone. With that worry and the death of Jesus, they must have hung their heads in sorrow. When they looked up, the stone had already been moved.

When the women got to the tomb they saw a young man sitting on the right side. Read his words in Mark 16:6-7. He said they should tell the disciples and Peter. Peter was also a disciple, but he needed special encouragement. Peter had promised to die for Jesus, then he denied him three times. He, like the others, had run away when the time came for Jesus to die. How very kind it was to speak especially to Peter! It must have given him strength for a special hour of need.

TEACHING THIS LESSON

Introduction

Say: "Open your Bibles to Mark 15. Today we will use our Bibles to find answers to many questions. When you see the answer to the question, raise your hand. I will call for one to read the verse with the answer. (Teacher, try to call on different people so many will take part.)

"Before we begin the questions, who would like to tell us what the study was about last week? Please tell us briefly." (Let one tell what happened in Chapter Five.)

Say: "The Scripture for today begins with Jesus' body hanging on the cross. He had died on Friday around three o'clock. The sabbath would begin at six o'clock that evening. After the sabbath began, no one could do any work. That meant they could not even bury Jesus' body after six o'clock. Whatever they would do, they had to do quickly. Let us see what they did."

Interpretation

Ask: Who asked Pilate for permission to bury the body of Jesus? (verse 43, Joseph)

Where was Joseph's home? (verse 43, Arimathea)

What kind of man was Joseph? (verse 43)

What question did Pilate have? (verse 44)

What did the centurion tell Pilate? (verse 45)

How did Joseph prepare the body? (verse 46)

What kind of tomb did Joseph use? (verse 46)

How did they seal the tomb? (verse 46)

(Teacher, stop here and tell anything that has been left out of your study to this point. Use the material in your Background Study. For example, tell that it was a very brave act for Joseph to ask to bury the body of Jesus. Explain why this is true. Then continue with questions.)

Who watched to see where Jesus was buried? (verse 47)

What did the women do after the sabbath? (verse 1 of chapter 16)

What question troubled the women? (verse 3)

What did they see as they came near the tomb? (verse 4)

What else did they see? (verse 5)

What did he say to them? (verse 6-7)

(Teacher, explain anything else that was not included in the questions. Talk about the special kindness to Peter in mentioning his name separately. Remind the members of Peter's need to be comforted in this very sad hour.)

Application To Our Lives

Say: "It would be very easy for us to study this lesson and have a strong feeling of defeat or sadness. Indeed,

the crucifixion was a very great tragedy. But it was also a great victory. We must always be very grateful for this event. Jesus suffered great pain for us, physically and when he was separated from his Father because of our sin. But Jesus does not want our sympathy. He wants our faith. He wants us to receive his act of love for the forgiveness of our sin. Then he wants us to tell other people about it so they too can be forgiven.

"The cross and the tomb were empty because Jesus rose from the dead. More than 500 witnesses saw him after his resurrection. Jesus is alive. We do not serve a dead Christ. He lives, and because he lives, we too can live.

"Jesus' resurrection proves three things:

1. His work of atonement is complete.
2. It guarantees that we too will live again
3. It shows he is Lord of all life and has the power to give life to those who follow him. He laid down his life, and he had power to take it up again.

"The only reason Christians today do not have more power in their lives is that they have not given him complete control of their lives. The same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead is available to every Christian today. Have you asked him to control all of your life?"

CHAPTER SEVEN

SURPRISED BY JOY

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:
Luke 24:13-35

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
Luke 24:13-16, 25-35

MEMORY VERSE: "They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?'" (Luke 24:32).

TEACHING AIM: Members and I will remember that God is with us at all times, for fellowship and for witness.

TEACHING AIDS: Choose three members to act the Scripture for today. You will need to make copies for them or have them use their Bibles to get the words they must say. You must do this early in the week. Have them come together to practise before they do the acting.

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Study

Two men were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus, about eleven kilometres journey. They were talking about all that had happened in the past few days, Jesus' crucifixion, the empty tomb. The risen Jesus joined them on the road, but they did not know him. The men spoke honestly to him, and their words showed just how the disciples and other friends were feeling before they knew about the resurrection.

They had hoped that Jesus would deliver Israel, but he had been killed on a cross. There were some women who said the tomb where he had been buried was empty, but no one had seen Jesus. If he were alive, someone would have seen him! The men were confused and disappointed.

There were many people who had studied the Scriptures in that day. They knew a Messiah would come as a glorious King, but they did not understand the passages that told about suffering as the way to deal with evil. Jesus began to explain this to the two men as they walked along. He talked as if the cross was a victory, not a tragedy. Jesus used the Scriptures to explain things about himself.

When the three men arrived at the village, Jesus appeared to be going further. They invited him to stay there with them, for it was then late. It was not good to walk at night. Jesus accepted their invitation and went into the house.

A little while later, the men were about to eat supper. When they were at the table, he took the bread, blessed it and broke it. He gave bread to them, and their eyes were opened. They recognized Jesus, the risen Lord. And he vanished from their sight.

Then it was the two men who made a journey at night! Normally

people would not walk eleven kilometres after dark, but these two had to go back to Jerusalem. They had to tell the disciples what had happened to them. They had to share the good news that they had seen the risen Lord. Their steps must have been quicker and easier as they walked. Their hearts were full of joy.

When they found the disciples, the eleven were together, and others were with them. They too had good news to share. "The Lord has risen indeed and has appeared to Simon!" they reported. Again, Simon Peter had been reassured of the love of Jesus for him, even though he had failed Jesus. The Lord had appeared to him after he had risen.

The men from Emmaus told what had happened to them, and how they recognized Jesus when he broke bread. Sorrow had turned to joy.

TEACHING THIS LESSON

Introduction

Say: "Our study for today begins on the day Jesus rose from the grave. His body was missing from the tomb, but he had not yet been seen by anyone. Two men were walking toward Emmaus, about eleven kilometres journey. It was late afternoon, probably just enough time for them to get home by about dark. Three of our members are going to act out what happened."

Interpretation

(Look at the Teaching Aids. Have one member read the part of

Cleopas, another of Second Man and the third will read the part of Jesus. The two men are talking and walking when Jesus joins them.)

Cleopas: It was the worst thing I have ever seen.

Second Man: Yes, there is no doubt about it. I was sure he would redeem Israel. (Jesus comes near them.)

Jesus: Good afternoon. May I walk along with you?

Second Man: Yes, we're glad to have you.

Jesus: What was this bad thing I heard you talking about as I came up?

Cleopas: Are you the only person in Jerusalem who does not know what has happened these last few days?

Jesus: What are you talking about?

Cleopas: About Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet who did wonderful things. He also spoke such wonderful words. No one has ever taught like he did. But our chief rulers condemned him to death and crucified him. We had hopes that he would be the one to redeem Israel. Today is the third day since he died. Some women went to the tomb this morning and did not find his body. They came back saying they had seen angels who said he was alive. Others went to the tomb also, and they agreed that it was as the women had said. But nobody has seen him.

Jesus: O foolish men and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? Don't you remember that Moses and

all the prophets taught about him. Have you read in Isaiah about the Suffering Servant? Jesus fulfilled every prophecy that was written.

Second Man: We have arrived at our place now. It is much too late for you to go on. Come in and stay with us.

Jesus: Thank you. You are very kind.

(The three enter the house and sit. After a while one man pretends to set bread before the others. Jesus took the bread, gave thanks for it and broke it. He offered portions to the other men. At that time they recognized him. They look surprised, they look at his hands and see the scars from the nails. No one says anything. Jesus backs away and leaves.)

Cleopas: Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?

Second Man: I am surprised that we did not know him sooner. We must go back to Jerusalem and tell the others. Jesus is alive!

(The three readers may return to their seats. Thank them for their work.)

Say: "The two men did return to Jerusalem, even though it meant travelling after dark. They found the eleven disciples together, and some other people were with them. The two from Emmaus did not get to tell their story first. The excited disciples said, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!' Then the

two told what had happened to them, and how they had recognized Jesus when he broke the bread. Later Jesus appeared to many other people. You can read about that in the Gospels."

Application To Our Lives

Say: "Jesus is alive! It is a fact. He brought joy and hope to his disciples again.

"Look at the two men from Emmaus. Before they met Jesus they were full of doubts and fears. After a short time with him, they were full of hope and joy.

"This sort of change happens to people today. They can be burdened down with cares and troubles. When they spend time with Jesus in worship, prayer, and Bible study the living Christ opens their hearts and eyes to the truths he has for them. They go away with joy in their hearts. They know they do not face their problems alone. Jesus will help them.

"When the two men walked toward Emmaus, they had read the Scriptures, but they did not understand them. Jesus helped them understand, and they had good news to share with other people.

"Before the hour with Jesus, the two men felt very sorry for themselves. They thought the future was hopeless. When they learned that Jesus was alive, they felt good about their past and their future. Will you let the living Christ come into your life and give you joy and hope for the future?"

CHAPTER EIGHT

JESUS COMMISSIONS HIS FOLLOWERS

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:
Luke 24:36-53

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
Luke 24:44-53

MEMORY VERSE: "...repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47).

TEACHING AIM: I will help members begin or continue to witness to unsaved people.

TEACHING AIDS: None

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Study

Luke 24:44-53 is an account of the last appearance of Jesus after his resurrection. It also tells us about his leaving earth to return to his Father.

In Chapter Seven we learned that he opened the eyes of the two men who were going to Emmaus and taught them the Scriptures. They had read the verses many times, perhaps, but they had not understood that the cross was the way of victory. Jesus made the meaning clear for them.

Today we learn that Jesus opened the Scriptures to all who were listening to him. (verse 44) He had told them these things many times before, but he added the message of repentance and forgiveness for

everybody of all nations. (Read verses 45-47.) Jesus was telling the people that God had always planned to bring salvation to everyone who would receive it. If they would remember that, they could understand the Scriptures.

Jesus told the disciples that they were his witnesses. They were the ones who would continue the work he had started. They had walked with him on many journeys. They had seen him heal the sick, they had heard him talk about his Father. They knew of the miracle of his birth. They had heard him pray, and he had taught them to pray. Finally, Jesus had opened their understanding, so all he had taught them had become clear. Their job now was just to tell what they had seen and heard. They would tell what had happened in their own lives.

Jesus knew, however, that they did not have power to do all he needed for them to do. So he told them to wait in the city (Jerusalem) until that power would come to them.

You can study the book of Acts to learn more about this. Read Acts 1 and 2. Many topics are the same in Acts as we found in Luke. We see clearly that Jesus was talking about salvation for all men of all nations, both in that time and in all the years to come. They should begin to teach and preach in Jerusalem, where they

were, but they should not stop there. The gospel is for everyone. All the prophecies about Jesus had been fulfilled. He then charged his disciples to carry the message to the whole world, to fulfil that prophecy.

Luke 24:50-53 gives a short account of the ascension of Jesus. You can read more about that in Acts 1:9-11. You remember that the disciples had been very sad, discouraged, confused and disappointed. Now they were sure of his resurrection, and verses 52-53 say "...they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God." We see again the great difference Jesus made in their lives.

The resurrection of Jesus was the end of a special time in the lives of the disciples and other believers. No longer would Jesus walk and talk with them as he had in the flesh. They would not depend on him in the same way they had in the past.

But it was the beginning of an even more wonderful relationship. Jesus was going to send the Comforter to be with them, and he would help them in every thing. He would never leave them alone. And Jesus would go on to heaven, and he would wait for them there. They had a friend on earth, but they also had one in heaven. They did not need to fear dying, because they would be with Jesus immediately. It was no longer like walking out into a dark night. They would be walking toward the Light. No wonder the disciples

could go back to Jerusalem: "...with great joy...continually in the temple blessing God" (verses 52-53).

TEACHING THIS LESSON

Introduction

Tell this story: "There was a loud crash as two cars ran together with great force. Many people were shouting and crying. Very soon policemen were there to help with the injured people.

"Were there any witnesses?" one asked. Two people came forward to say they saw the accident. They were witnesses. They could tell the police exactly what happened in the accident.

"What is a witness? A witness is someone who saw and can give information about exactly what happened. A witness tells what happened to himself or to herself. A witness gives information that he knows to be true because he was there or it happened to him. We will think today about the witnesses of Jesus."

Interpretation

Say: "Today we will finish our study of the books of Mark and Luke. We will look at the last verses of Luke 24.

"Jesus had appeared to many people after his resurrection. This account, beginning verse 44, was his last appearance before he went back to heaven to be with his Father. He wanted the disciples to know clearly what their job would be.

"Jesus had fulfilled all the prophecies that had been made about him. We can read them in the Old Testament in the books written by Moses, those written by prophets and in the Psalms. These people, especially the disciples, had read those verses many times. They had heard Jesus teach the truths about himself, but they still did not understand very well.

"At this time, however, verse 45 tells us Jesus opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. He wanted them to understand completely who he was and why he had come to earth. In fact, they were the ones who would continue the work he had started. It was Jesus' plan that these believers would take the gospel to the whole world. He was leaving the earth very soon to go back to heaven. These believers would be his witnesses. They would tell what they had seen and what had happened to them.

"But Jesus knew the disciples did not have the power to do what he was telling them to do. So he promised to send power to them from on high. He told them to wait in Jerusalem until that power would come. Then they would be able to speak without being afraid. They would speak the message clearly so others could understand.

"Then Jesus led the people out of the city to a place called Bethany. He lifted his hands and blessed them.

While he blessed them he left them. Acts 1:8-11 tells about this also. Who will read that for us?" (Let one read.)

Application To Our Lives

Say: "The last two verses of Luke tell us what the disciples did next." (Have a member read Luke 24:52-53.)

"The disciples' lives were very different after they were sure Jesus had arisen from the grave. Once again they had joy and hope for the future.

"They had joy and hope, but they also had something else. They had a job to do, and it was a big job. How could they tell the world about Jesus? Wouldn't that be impossible?

"Jesus had told them they should tell the world, beginning in Jerusalem. He meant they should start where they were at that time. When the Holy Spirit was ready for them to go somewhere else, he would lead them. They just needed to be faithful witnesses where they were.

"That is the job of faithful witnesses today. Begin telling those around you what Jesus has done for you. When he leads you somewhere else, you can tell people there.

"Jesus' plan was a good one, because you and I have heard about him today. Who will hear about him next because you were a faithful witness?"

CHAPTER NINE

TESTS OF FAITH

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:
James 1:1-18

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
James 1:1-15

MEMORY VERSE: "Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him" (James 1:12).

TEACHING AIM: I will help believers know they can overcome life's temptations by praying and by studying and obeying God's Word.

TEACHING AIDS: chalk board and chalk (or a large paper)

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Study

Read James 1:1-4. James, the half-brother of Jesus, wrote the book of James. But he identified himself as a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He was writing to the Jewish Christians who were "scattered abroad" or living outside Palestine. But his book speaks to Christians of every race, place and time. James said Christians should accept their trials and testings as a way of becoming spiritually mature.

Verse 2 says something that may sound strange to us. We are to face the difficulties in life with joy.

Temptation is not to be thought of as being tempted to do wrong. It is a testing that can make us stronger in our faith.

Verse 3 teaches that we have an opportunity to grow stronger in faith when we meet disappointments, sorrows and failures. When we use the faith we have to meet these problems, our faith will grow stronger. If we never had troubles in our lives, our faith would remain weak.

Read verses 5-8. We often think a person with a good education is very wise. This may be true, but it is not always true. Wisdom is the proper use of knowledge.

In verse 5, James said that some who lacked wisdom were responding in the wrong way to difficulties. He said the remedy for lack of wisdom is prayer. He told us to ask God for wisdom. God is the only source of true wisdom.

In verses 6-8 James talked about a double-minded or unstable person. He is one who moves first in one direction, then another. He is never sure where he is going. He believes, but he has doubts too. He wants to depend on God, but he also wants to live his own way. If a person like this has trials and difficulties, they do not face them properly. Their faith is shaken because they have no wisdom from God.

Read verses 9-11. Many churches have some rich members and some poor members. James shows in these verses that in Christ all are equal brothers and sisters. Both rich and poor need to understand that they have the things they own for a short time only. These things should not have a very important place in the life of that person.

Read verses 12-15. Sometimes we would like to blame God for our being tempted to do wrong. But God cannot be tempted to do evil himself, and he does not tempt others to do so.

TEACHING THIS LESSON

Introduction

Tell this story: "It was during the rainy season that Lydia was walking up a hill on her way home. Suddenly her foot slipped in the mud, and she fell on some rocks. She felt a sharp pain in her arm, and she could not move it without more pain. Her husband helped her to the house, but the pain continued.

"We must go to hospital to see if you have broken your arm," he said. He gently helped Lydia wrap her arm so it would not hurt so much as they made the journey to hospital.

"The doctor took an xray and showed her where the bone was broken. Then he wrapped her arm in plaster until it was very big. The plaster began to dry quickly, and the pain eased as the arm could not move.

"After a few weeks Lydia went back to the doctor, and he removed the plaster. The bone had healed, but Lydia was very troubled. Her arm had once been very strong. She could carry heavy buckets of water. She could dig in the field. Now the arm was very weak. It seemed she could not lift a cup of tea!

"What will I do?" she asked the doctor. "My arm is so weak."

"That is what I expected," the doctor explained. "The strength will return to your arm as you try to use it. For the first few days you can do very little. Just move it some, then begin to lift very small things. As the strength returns, you can lift heavier items. Soon your arm will be as strong as it was before."

"This is the way with our faith. When we use the little faith we have, it grows to become stronger. Then we will have stronger faith for when we need it. That is what our Bible lesson for today is about."

Interpretation

Tell a member to read James 1:1-4. Remind the class of some of the trials and difficulties of the early Christians. They met opposition from the synagogue and Jewish religious leaders; there was opposition from the Roman government; they were laughed at by other people; and they faced the usual problems we face today.

Ask: "What are some of the problems we have today?" (Write these on the chalk board as members

say them. They might say money, drought, loss of job, husband leaving wife and children, robbery and theft, problems with children, sickness, etc.)

Ask: "How could some of these problems help us become mature Christians?" (Let some of the members share their thoughts.)

Have someone read verses 5-8. Ask: "What is knowledge?" After some discussion ask, "What is wisdom?" Let members share their thoughts.

Ask: "Is it possible for a man who is very well educated to not be very wise?" (Yes)

Ask: "Have you ever known anyone with very little education, but who was very wise?" (Perhaps members will tell of someone like this.) Say: "Wisdom is the proper use of knowledge. Wisdom comes from God."

Read or have someone else read verses 9-11. Say: "James seems to be saying two things. First, a person's wealth cannot be measured by the material possessions he owns. Secondly, a Christian cannot let the getting of wealth become the most important thing in his life."

Read verses 12-15. Show how these verses go with verses 2-4 by saying we will be rewarded by enduring trials. Explain that God does not tempt us. He lets us be tempted sometimes so we will grow stronger.

Application To Our Lives

Say: "There are at least four truths to be found in this lesson." 1. Faith that has not been tested is not really faith. Ask: "How can faith be tested?" (illnesses, hardships, persecution, etc.) We also face the temptation to sin. This is especially hard during times of testing.

2. We grow spiritually when we meet tests using the power of God which he offers us. Christian maturity does not come suddenly. It is a long process of growth.

3. We should never look for temptation saying God will rescue us. We must never try to prove our faith by putting demands on God.

4. We must accept the blame for our own sin. We often try to blame other people and say they tempted us. Sometimes people say God tempted them, but this is not true. God does not tempt anyone to sin. Instead he will always help us when we need him.

Say: "As Christians, we have already had trials and difficulties in our lives. The purpose of these is to make us stronger Christians. Our faith becomes strong through prayer and studying God's Word. Then we can overcome our problems."

Have someone lead in prayer asking the Holy Spirit to live in each member's life during the coming week. Ask him to help each one overcome the trials and difficulties he must face.

CHAPTER TEN

A FAITH THAT WORKS

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:
James 1:19-2:26

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
James 2:14-26

MEMORY VERSE: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (James 1:27).

TEACHING AIM: I will help Christians express their faith by planning a ministry to someone who needs help.

TEACHING AIDS: chalk board and chalk, pencils and paper

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Study

As a basis for this lesson, we should read James 2:1. This shows that we can not show partiality to anyone. That means we must not do good things for one person because he is rich, powerful or for any other reason, if we can not do those things for someone else who does not have money or power. Everyone is equal in worth to Jesus. He died for everyone on equal terms. He died for all classes of people, and he expects his followers to minister to everyone.

Jesus never let partiality, prejudice or injustice damage his character.

He expects the same from Christians today.

Read James 2:14-26. Faith in God is shown by loving works of obedience to him. In Galatians 2:16 Paul said that we are not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. In our Scripture today, we find James saying that our deeds or works will justify us. (Read verse 24 again.)

When Paul said we are not justified by works, he was talking about observing the many Jewish ceremonial laws, especially circumcision. When James said we are justified by works, he was clearly talking about works of social service, such as feeding the hungry and helping the fatherless.

Also Paul was looking at faith at the very beginning of Christianity. James was looking for evidence of faith (works) in the life of the believer.

Paul spoke of "becoming a Christian," James of "being a Christian." Paul was looking at the root of faith. James looked at the "fruit" of faith.

Paul, in Ephesians 2:8-10, said that we, through our faith, are saved by God's grace for the producing of good works. This is what James said in chapter 2.

James began by giving an illustration. He said: Suppose you have a friend who needs food and clothes. You say to him, "Well, good-bye. God bless you. Stay warm and eat well." James asked, "What good does that do if you do not give him food and clothes?" Then he said three times that faith without works is dead. Read verses 17, 20 and 26.

Verse 18 says a man answered by saying one person could have works and another faith. He seems to be trying to say that both are not necessary. James said clearly in verses 19-20 that real faith is accompanied by works. This is the evidence of faith.

When we study what both men wrote, we learn that a man can not be saved by his good works. Man can not possibly do enough good to earn his salvation. Jesus paid for that when he died on the cross. We can be saved only by believing in Jesus and accepting his free gift of salvation. After a person is saved, however, he will want to do good things for other people. He will want to show the love of Jesus to them too. This is a natural part of being saved. The works do not gain salvation, but they show that the person has already been saved.

James ended his statement that faith is proved by works by using two examples from Hebrew history. He named Abraham and Rahab. Then he repeated once more that faith without works is dead.

TEACHING THIS LESSON

Introduction

Tell this story: "A story was told of a man who said to all the people that he could walk on a wire across a mighty river. Some believed him, but many doubted that it could be done. They watched carefully as the man fastened a strong wire from one bank of the river to the other. He drew the wire very tight, and then very slowly made his way across.

"The people cheered as he arrived safely to the other side, and then he returned to his starting place.

"Then the man claimed he could push a wheelbarrow across the river. 'Do you believe I can do it?' he asked. The crowd roared, 'Yes, yes.'

"Again people watched with great excitement, as he pushed the wheelbarrow very slowly to the other side. Then he brought it back to where he had started.

"The man turned to the crowd. 'Do you believe I can put a man in the wheelbarrow and push it safely across?' The crowd yelled as one voice, 'Yes, yes.'

"May I have a volunteer?" he asked. Suddenly the cheering crowd became quiet. People began to laugh nervously. No one was ready to ride in the wheelbarrow.

"Today we are talking about faith. What do you think about the faith of the crowd in the story we just heard?" (Let members respond.)

"When the time came for them to put their faith to the test, it failed, didn't it? Let us think now about a faith that works."

Interpretation

Give each member a piece of paper and a pencil. Write the following jobs on the chalk board, and tell the members to write them in order of which is most important: accountant, carpenter, banker, policeman, pastor, doctor, farmer, judge.

Let those who want to tell why they chose one as most important. Have someone read James 2:1-9. Ask whether they think material wealth helped them choose.

Ask the class how their church would react if two visitors came to the church at the same time. One was a very well-dressed man in a big car. The other was a man with clean but mended clothes who had walked from a neighbouring village.

Have a class member read James 2:14-17. Use the material in the Background Study to explain that James and Paul were not disagreeing about faith and works. Explain what Paul meant by works and what James meant. Make clear that James said that works grow naturally out of faith.

Have someone read verses 18-26 about the two people James used as examples in his teaching. Have some members turn to Genesis 22:1-14 and others turn to Joshua 2:1-21. Let each one read their verses quickly and quietly then let someone tell the

class about it. Show how this relates to James' words.

Application To Our Lives

Say: "What can we learn from this study. First, faith without works is worthless. If we claim to have faith and fail to have compassion on those in need, we deny that we really know God. Next, it is not enough just to know facts from the Bible. We must make them a part of our daily lives if we want to be right with God. (Even the devil knows many facts from the Bible.) Next, we can find examples of many people in the Old Testament who put their faith to work. Abraham and Rahab were mentioned in this study. Can you think of others? (Allow some to answer.) If a Christian does not help others, he is not doing what God planned for him to do."

Ask: "Do your actions as a Christian show a real faith that works? What are you doing to help others physically? What are you doing to help others spiritually?" (Do not require answers, but let each person think about these questions.)

Tell each person to think of someone he or she knows who has a problem. This could be sickness, a problem at work, hungry, needing school fees, lonely, grieving, or many other problems. Tell each one to think of one thing they can do this next week to help that person.

Read again James 2:17. Lead in prayer asking God to give each one the courage to put faith to work.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SPEAKING WITH WISDOM

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:
James 3

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
James 3:3-18

MEMORY VERSE: "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity" (James 3:17).

TEACHING AIM: I will help members begin making specific changes in their speech habits, guided by the Holy Spirit.

TEACHING AIDS: none

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Study

James began chapter 3 telling teachers that God would hold them responsible. Teachers will be subject to heavier judgement than those they teach. Everyone is responsible to God for personal service, but God will hold teachers, preachers, deacons and other church leaders more responsible for what they do or do not do.

James showed the reason for this. The teacher or preacher must do a lot of talking. In speaking, there is an opportunity for false teaching, sin and leading others to sin.

James used the illustration of a horse with a bit in his mouth. When

a rider wants to control a horse's actions, he controls his mouth. So, a person who wants to control his own life must begin by controlling his own mouth.

A large horse can be guided by the small bit in his mouth. A person's whole life can be guided by control of the tongue.

James used another illustration. A ship, like a horse, is a large thing that can be controlled by something small, the rudder.

Beginning in verse 5, James talked about how terrible a tongue can be. He spoke of a great forest being destroyed by the careless use of a small match. But the careless use of the tongue can destroy things like a home, family, church, reputation or job.

The whole body can be affected when an arm, leg or some part is diseased. So our whole person is affected by an evil tongue.

In verses 7-8, James said all types of wild animals and birds have been tamed and used by man. But we cannot take the poison from evil tongues.

Verses 9-10 say the tongue was made for better things. But because we can praise God and bless his name, it is even worse when we use our tongues in an angry way and curse God or his creation.

Then James talked about true wisdom. He gave the qualifications for a wise teacher in verse 13. He said a wise man has knowledge which is information and certain skills. True wisdom is the proper use of this knowledge.

A wise teacher is careful about what he says. He is submissive to the will of God. The truly wise person is humble.

In verses 14-16 he listed some bad characteristics. He calls this false wisdom. James said the root of the problem of false wisdom and an evil tongue is the heart. From it come both blessing and cursing, evil deeds and good ones.

James was saying to every Christian, especially teachers, guard your heart. Keep it pure because this will direct your speech and actions.

This false wisdom does not come from God. It is worldly. Where there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there will be disorder and every other kind of evil.

Then James contrasted this in verse 17 with positive characteristics. The wisdom from God is pure. One who has true wisdom will be peaceable, gentle and willing to listen to others. He or she will be full of mercy and good works because these come from a pure heart.

TEACHING THIS LESSON

Introduction

Tell this story: "Josiah and Leah had not been married very long, but

they were happy in their tiny home. He worked in the town about three kilometres away, and she was trying to get the small farm started. She planted and cultivated, took care of the goats and kept a few chickens.

"One evening Josiah came in from work very tired. He was not happy with the way Leah had done the work that day. He did not like the food she cooked for him. It just seemed that nothing was right that day. He said some very harsh words to her and went to sleep.

"The next morning Leah had Josiah's tea ready a bit early. She had laid out clean clothes for him and polished his shoes. For a moment Josiah thought about what he had said the night before. He thought of telling her he was sorry he had said it, but he did not do that. Instead he went off to work.

"When he returned in the evening, he did not see Leah in the house. He began to look around, and there in the field lay her lifeless body. He ran to her hoping to see that she was breathing, but she was not. Josiah's mind quickly recalled the words he had said the day before. He knew Leah had died working to please him.

"Throughout his long life, Josiah was troubled by the useless words he had said to the one who loved him. He would have paid a large price to erase them, but he could not. Let us look at what James said about the tongue."

Interpretation

Say: "Teachers in the early church were important. The apostles, prophets and missionaries were always going from place to place. They did not stay with one congregation. This left the teachers the responsibility of instructing the new converts and teaching the congregation. James taught that a teacher has great responsibility because he has great opportunity for good or evil. James wanted the teachers to understand that responsibility."

Have someone read James 3:3-6. Say: "In these verses, James told about some small things that get big results." Explain that a horse is a large animal, much stronger than a man. But a small person can control a large horse when a bit is put in the horse's mouth. The horse does not lose any of its strength, but the bit and bridle in the hands of the rider will control the horse. The bit, then, is a small object that does a large task."

Explain James' other illustration about a rudder of a ship. "A ship that drifts in a river, lake or ocean is dangerous to anything in its path. But when a skilled pilot steers the ship, it becomes very useful. It can transport people and goods. The pilot places a small amount of pressure, the small rudder moves and the large ship turns."

Say: "James said that the tongue is also a small thing which can be used for good or evil."

Explain James' illustration of a small spark setting a large forest on fire. Ask: "Have you ever seen fire out of control? Perhaps it was started to burn trash or grass. Then the wind came, and it spread until there was no way to control it."

Say: "Just as a fire destroys when it is out of control, a tongue which is out of control can destroy a home, family, church or a reputation. A person can cause more problems in a few minutes than can be controlled in months."

Have someone read verses 7-8. Say: "Even wild animals have been tamed by men, but men have not learned to control the tongue."

Application To Our Lives

Read verse 9. Say: "James said we use our tongues for both good and evil. He said we pray and praise God, then we go to the marketplace and use sharp, angry words when something does not please us. This is not good."

Have someone read verses 13-18. Use the Background Study to help you explain true and false wisdom. Help the class to see our need to discipline our tongues. Ask each member to think silently about one way he or she can use the tongue and true wisdom properly during the coming week.

CHAPTER TWELVE

DEALING WITH WRONG ATTITUDES

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES:
James 4:1-5:6

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
James 4:1-10, 13-17

MEMORY VERSE: "Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin" (James 4:17).

TEACHING AIM: I will help Christians discover that submission to God heals conflicts and broken relationships.

TEACHING AIDS: Write the seven suggestions of James on a large paper to use in the Interpretation.

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Study

As in the past three chapters, James has some very strong words for Christians who do things that harm their Christian witness. Some were having trouble getting along with one another. So they criticized and judged each other. Some made their plans without taking God into consideration. James wrote this chapter to correct these problems. Read the Memory Verse to see how he closed the chapter.

Read James 4:1-4. By "wars and fightings" James did not mean wars between nations. He was talking to a group of Christian people. Of course, wars between nations are usually caused by the same reasons.

James asked, "What is the reason for these problems between people? How did they start? What causes Christians to quarrel among themselves? Did not Jesus promise his followers a peace they would not understand? If Christians had this peace, why did they quarrel among themselves?"

James pointed out that this happened because sin had not been removed completely from their lives.

He said they were selfish, wanting only what they themselves wanted. Some wanted things so much they would do almost anything to get it.

James told them their prayers were wrong. They prayed, but their intentions centred around their own selfish desires. They had no thought for others' needs.

He said they were like an unfaithful wife who made friends with her husband's enemies. James reminds us that friendship with the world separates us from God. He reminds us of Jesus' words: we cannot serve two masters.

Read James 4:6-10. In verse 7, James gave the solution to the problem.

1. Submit yourselves to God. This is a personal choice. No one can make this decision for another person.

2. Resist the devil, and he will flee. Satan is a coward. If the Christian will resist, the devil will flee.

3. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

4. Cleanse your hands. No one dared to approach God without clean hands.

5. Purify your hearts. Remove everything undesirable from your hearts so you will be fit to serve him.

6. Mourn and weep. This describes a person who repents.

7. Humble yourselves before God. Recognize God's greatness when compared to your smallness.

Read James 4:13-17. The people whom James was addressing probably were merchants who moved around a lot. Many of the Jews who lived in the cities were merchants. Jewish merchants sometimes formed a business group. Before going into a city to do business, they would make careful plans. They tried to make sure that their business operated well and made a profit.

With this in mind, James made the comments. He was talking about those who made big bold plans concerning their business without considering God's will.

James was not judging those involved in business. He was criticizing their attitude. They were very proud and sure their plans could not fail. They would make a big profit. They did not consider God's

will at all. It is not wrong to make careful plans, but our attitude about it can be wrong. He said we have no idea what is in the future.

In verse 15, James said we should always say, "If God wills, we will do this." We should plan for the future but recognize that God is in control of the future.

In verse 16, James told the merchants that if they plan without considering God, they are just boasting of their own plans.

Verse 17 says that people listening (and we who read this) understood the things James was saying. We know God is in control of the future. We know what we should do, but we do not do it. We are just like the people for whom James was speaking. James said this is sin.

TEACHING THIS LESSON

Introduction

Tell this story: "Elisha was a salesman for a large company. One day he got a notice that the company was going to have a contest. Whoever sold the most during the month would get a gift of a car. The manager would post a weekly account of the sales of all the salesmen, so they would know how they were doing.

"It was a beautiful car, and Elisha wanted it very much. 'I will get that car,' he said. 'Whatever it costs, I will get it.'

"The first week showed Elisha leading by a small amount. He

would work harder the next week. But the second week Joel had sold more. Elisha became very angry and began to make his plans.

"He called some of the customers in Joel's area and offered to sell to them at cheaper prices. He told them Joel was cheating them. Then he offered gifts to those who would buy large amounts from him. In the last week he started lightening the weights of the items people bought, but he charged full price. He was determined to get the car, whatever it cost him.

"James wrote about people who had bad attitudes and worked only for their personal gain. Let us look at James 4."

Interpretation

Read James 4:1-5. Say: "Perhaps you are thinking you would never do what Elisha did to get something you wanted. But what are some things Christians do when they want something badly?"

Ask: "Have you ever been tempted to tell only part of the truth? Have you been tempted to suggest that someone might have done something wrong?" (Let the members discuss this if they want to. They may suggest other ways people work to get their own way.)

Use the Background Study to explain the problems in the early church.

Say: "James said the problem was sin which was still in their lives. They

were selfish and were concerned only for themselves."

Ask: "Do we have this problem in families, churches and communities today? Is the problem still sin?"

Ask: "Are our prayers selfish? Do we only ask for things? Do we think only of ourselves and our families?"

Have someone read James 4:6-10. Use the Background Study and the paper you have prepared to talk about the seven things James suggested.

Ask: "Will these things work with our problems today? If so, how?" (Let members discuss this.)

Have someone read James 4:13-17. Use the Background Study to explain about the merchants in early Jerusalem and other cities. Be sure to explain that James did not say business and planning were wrong. It is the attitude about planning and planning without God that are wrong.

Application To Our Lives

Ask: "Do you want God's will for your life? Are you willing to follow God's will when you know what it is?"

Continue: "What are some ways we plan without God?" (Let the class members give examples.)

Tell members to think quietly of one wrong attitude they have toward another person. Give them time to pray and ask God to help them know what they can do about it.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

AN ENDURING FAITH

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:
James 5:7-20

VERSES IN TODAY'S LESSON:
James 5:7-11, 13-20

MEMORY VERSE: "...The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects" (James 5:16).

TEACHING AIM: I will help believers use enduring faith in life situations.

TEACHING AIDS: chalk board and chalk

PREPARING TO TEACH

Background Study

In this chapter James urged his listeners again to live patiently. (See James 1 again also.) James gave three examples of patience: a farmer, the Old Testament prophets and Job.

He also called the people to prayer: prayer for one another, prayer for health and forgiveness of sins.

Read James 5:7-11. The early Christians were looking for the return of Christ. As months and years passed, they became discouraged. They were mistreated by their employers, laughed at by neighbours and often cheated by merchants. James tried to encourage them and assure them that the Lord was in control of their future.

He called them brethren, speaking to them kindly and firmly as brothers and sisters in the Lord. He told them God has rich rewards for those who wait patiently. But they must be willing to give God full opportunity to work out his plan for them in his own time.

In verse 8 James used the first of three illustrations. The people knew about farming. Every year the farmer had to wait for the "early" rain to soften the soil that had been baked by the hot sun. When the rain came, the farmer could plant his seed. Then he waited again for the "late" rains to bring the harvest.

Perhaps James was comparing the farmer's first waiting period with Israel's long wait for the Messiah to come. The second waiting period could be compared with the second coming of the Lord. We do not know when he is coming, but we know he is coming.

In verse 9 James said the right attitude toward Christ's coming should give us a right attitude toward our brothers and sisters in Christ. He warned us again about grumbling and criticism.

In verses 10-11, James used the other two examples. He mentioned the Old Testament prophets who often suffered ridicule and persecution, but they stayed true to

God. Also Job suffered much, but he continued to trust God.

Read James 5:13-20. James had said there would be problems and that we would need patience. Here he gave help for those problems -- prayer.

In verse 13, James said those who are suffering or discouraged because of persecution should pray. And those who had reason to be thankful should praise the Lord.

In verse 14 the church was to pray for the sick. Oil was commonly used in healing, and they were to "anoint with oil" in the name of the Lord. James was not saying we should not use modern medicine and doctors. He encouraged the use of whatever medical knowledge might be available. This does not remove the need for prayer in healing. The Lord brings about all healing, with or without medicine, and the prayer of faith can heal.

Do you remember that several times in past lessons James told the people to live in unity and harmony, to try to get along with one another? In verse 16, James told them to confess their sins to the ones they were committed against so they could pray together. Then he said the prayer of a righteous man has much strength as it goes on working. A person's prayer never stops working.

James reminded them of Elijah, a person like we are. But Elijah's prayers were answered. When he

prayed for drought, it came. When he prayed for rain, it came.

In verses 19-20 we must remember that James was talking to fellow Christians. He was not talking about winning the lost. He was talking about helping a fellow Christian who had turned away from God. James said the person who helps him will be saving that one from death. If the sinner's change is genuine, he will turn from his sinful ways and ask for and get forgiveness for his sins.

TEACHING THIS LESSON

Introduction

Tell this story: "Benjamin was known as a man who was not interested in anything that went on at the church. He spent many hours drinking in the bars. When he came home, his only interest was his little daughter, Sarah. He was very proud indeed of the little girl, and she loved him too. He would do almost anything for Sarah -- except go with her and her mother to the church. Every night before sleeping, Sarah prayed for her father. Her mother also prayed for him every day.

"One night Sarah woke up with a high fever. She was seriously ill and soon unconscious. Benjamin went to get a doctor whom he knew. He gave the child medicine, but it seemed she would not live. Friends from the church also heard about the illness. Some of them came and prayed for the child. In a little while Sarah opened her eyes. She asked for a

drink of water. Her fever had past. She would recover.

"Benjamin looked at her with tears in his eyes. He told his wife that he wanted to know the Jesus who helped his little girl to get well.

"Mama Sarah thanked God for answering her prayers. She knew he had used her daughter's illness to bring Benjamin to salvation.

"Read the Memory Verse for today to see why that mother knew God would hear her prayer." (Read that verse to the class.)

Interpretation

Divide the class into two groups. Tell Group 1 to look at James 5:7-9 and Group 2 to look at James 5:10-11. Both groups should look for signs of encouragement James gave his readers. Tell each group to choose a leader to report to the class. After about 3 minutes, call for the reports. Tell the class that verses 7-11 were probably written for the oppressed poor mentioned earlier in the chapter.

Use your Background Study to help you teach verses 13-20. Begin by asking if anyone has had an experience that shows that verses 13-15 apply to today's life. Does anyone in your class believe these verses do not apply today?

Let members tell ways these verses could be useful today.

Have a member read verse 16. Ask if someone could give the meaning of the last part of verse 16 in different words. Let several give their ideas.

Read verses 17-18. Tell members to look at 1 Kings 17 and 18. Read these two chapters before class so you can tell about Elijah's prayers.

Have someone read James 5:19-20. Explain (from the Background Study) who this sinner in verse 20 is.

Application To Our Lives

Tell members you want them to help you list four things James wrote about in chapter 5. Write these on the chalk board as they tell you. You write numbers 1 to 4. Teacher, write beside 1, a warning to the rich. Ask a class member what number 2 would be. (reasons for living patiently). By number 3 write the importance of being truthful. They should tell you that 4 is caring for one another.

Say: "Today we talked mostly about number 2 and number 4. Now let us think quietly about how we could practise James' advice in at least one way during the coming week."

Close with a prayer calling for God's guidance and strength in everything we do.