

HEARERS/DOERS

CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- A stack of old newspapers and magazines, scissors, paper and glue
- Copies of the downloadable “Litany” and “Prayers & Thanksgivings” booklets
- Copies of the lesson handout
- Copy of the leader’s notes
- OPTIONAL: Bibles (ESV or similar recommended)
- OPTIONAL: A white board, easel pad, or chalk board with markers/chalk
- OPTIONAL: Have notebooks on hand for teens to take home and use as prayer journals if they wish

ICE BREAKER: WALL OF BRANDS

Bring in a stack of old/unwanted newspapers and magazines. Invite the teens to cut them up and create a collage together of brands that they (or people they know) want to identify themselves with. These are the labels they want to wear, the products they want to use, and the image that these things suggest. If they cannot find the brands they are after in the publications, let them draw them out and add them.

A SMALL GROUP MAY BE HAPPY WORKING TOGETHER ON A SINGLE COLLAGE. FOR LARGER OR MORE INDEPENDENT GROUPS YOU MAY WISH TO HAVE THE TEENS WORK SEPARATELY AND THEN POST THEIR COLLAGES TOGETHER AS ONE LARGER PIECE BEFORE REVIEWING.

THE LITANY: BEGINNING WITH PRAYER

Begin the formal part of the lesson by saying together the Litany, leaving off the Grace (which can be said at the close of the lesson).

AT THIS POINT IN THE LESSON, ASK IF THE TEENS SUCCEEDED IN DOING LAST WEEK’S CHALLENGE, HOW IT WENT, AND WHETHER THEY HAVE ANYTHING TO SHARE.

DISCUSSION: BRANDED WITH A MESSAGE

As an introduction to the lesson ask the teens to discuss the following questions.

DEPENDING ON THE COMFORT LEVEL FOR SHARING IN YOUR GROUP, IT MAY BE EASIER TO HAVE THEM VOLUNTEER ANSWERS WITH ALL RESPONSES WRITTEN TOGETHER ON A BOARD.

- What are the hottest brands that people you know want to be associated with? How important is it to have those brands (in your school or with your friends)?
- What sort of message or image do those brands send?
- If there were an invisible “message” written on you that summed you up, what would you want it to say? (How do you want people to see you?)

A few things worth pointing out (if they don’t otherwise arise during the discussion):

- *Your teens may come up with clothing brands, sports equipment brands, technology brands, even musical brands (artists). Peer pressure around the use of brands by teens is notoriously intense, so encourage your teens to be candid.*
- *A brand is what tells us which company is responsible for producing a product, so it can tell us whether the maker is someone we trust to produce safe, quality things. But often we buy branded products because advertising has sold us an image or idea that we want in order to identify ourselves with a certain group of people. For example, a certain brand of shoes, identified with a star athlete may make us feel we have a connection to that athlete and his or her success. The brands we want usually send messages like: cool, rich, unique, smart, popular, successful, etc.*
- *If we’re honest, we want people to think of us in all of the ways that the brands we buy signal. But hopefully, as Christians, we care, or will come to care even more that other people see God at work in our lives, loving us and transforming us to be more and more like Jesus.*

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THE LESSON: JAMES 1-2

The first part of the lesson (below) can be read aloud. Then the teens are asked to read the Bible text (either silently to themselves or aloud together), followed by some additional questions for discussion.

*To give to all thy people increase of grace, to hear meekly thy Word,
and to receive it with pure affection, and to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit,
We beseech thee, good Lord.*

If you are familiar with the “summary of the law” in the Prayer Book, then these verses will sound familiar to you: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:4).

When Jesus was asked what the most important commandments were in the Hebrew scriptures (that is, the Old Testament), this was the first one he pointed to. This verse is sometimes called, “the Shema” because the first word, which we translate as “hear” comes from the Hebrew word “shema”. Our English translation, however, doesn’t fully capture the meaning of the original Hebrew, because “shema” carries with it not just the idea of hearing or listening, but of then *obeying* what you have heard. We are called to hear the word of God with a receptive heart that responds to what we have heard with *action*.

Christians believe that our salvation has been accomplished through the work of Jesus Christ, *not* through anything we ourselves do. As St. Paul wrote, “by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). Yet genuine faith is shown to be genuine when it produces an active response, showing that we have heard *and* are moved to obey.

Refer to James 1:2-4, 19-25; 2:14-26.

(VERSES HAVE BEEN CLIPPED FROM THE READING FOR THE SAKE OF BREVITY AND FOCUS, BUT IF YOU HAVE TIME TO EXPLORE THE PASSAGE FULLY, FEEL FREE TO READ IT IN ITS ENTIRETY: JAMES 1:2-2:26.)

(THE TEXT IS PROVIDED ON THE BACK OF THE HANDOUTS AND IN THESE LEADERS’ NOTES SO THAT EVERYONE CAN MARK IT UP AND MAKE NOTES ON IT IF DESIRED. ALTERNATIVELY, YOU CAN READ OUT OF A BIBLE).

Read through the text. Then ask the teens to respond to what they’ve just read. Here are some questions to help guide the discussion.

- What are the parts of this text that allude to the “shema”?
- Based on what St. James is telling his readers in this passage, what do you think were some of the problems he wanted to address?
- What can we take from our reading of this passage today – for ourselves and for our churches?

A few notes and reflections for reference:

- *St. James is underlining the connection between “hearing” and “obeying” when he writes, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only” (1:22). Then, when he writes in 2:19: “You believe that God is one; you do well”, he is again calling this important Old Testament text to mind. But he wants his readers to understand that belief is insufficient if it is not accompanied by a heart that loves God and that responds to his word with “fruit” (Galatians 5:22).*
- *The readers of St. James’ letter were facing “trials” of various kinds and he wanted them not to give up, but to press on in their faith, becoming mature (1:2-4). He specifically tackles “wickedness”, anger and people who are slow to listen and too quick to speak (1:19-21). Most of today’s passage is focussed on the problem of people who heard the word and were stopping short of allowing that word to change them: they were acting like hypocrites who said one thing and did another (2:15-16).*

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- *“Too many Christians mark their Bibles, but their Bibles never mark them.” – Warren W. Wiersbe. St. James wants his readers to be “marked” by what they read, to be motivated to reflect on God’s word, and then to take that one step further and allow God’s word to change them from the inside out till they are living lives that shine with virtuous character and acts of love – things that can be true for us as individuals as well as church communities.*
- *Note: The story of the sacrifice of Isaac in the Old Testament is one that can be challenging for modern readers. You may wish to conclude today’s reading at James 2:20 if you are concerned that the lesson may get off-track. Abraham had been called out of one land and people to serve the living God, and many of the stories we have about him show the challenges he faced in learning that this God was different from the barbaric gods that he was used to and that he – Abraham – had been called to be different also. This particular story underlines Abraham’s faith, obedience, and trust in God. Note that God never intended for Isaac to be harmed, although this sort of sacrifice was common in the worship of Canaanite gods. Later, in Jeremiah, we read God’s words of heartbreak when the people of Judah set up places “to burn their sons and daughters in the fire”: “something I did not command, nor did it enter my mind” (7:31, 19:5, 32:35). The only human sacrifice God ever intended was the one he himself would provide for us in Jesus Christ.*

DURING EACH LESSON, IF THE TEENS RAISE THEOLOGICAL OR BIBLICAL QUESTIONS THAT YOU DON’T FEEL CONFIDENT ABOUT ANSWERING, SAY SO, BUT LET THEM KNOW THAT YOU’LL FIND THE ANSWER AND RESPOND AT THE NEXT MEETING.

PREVIEW: AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Take a brief moment to look at the at-home challenge together.

THE WEEKLY “AT-HOME CHALLENGE” IS TYPICALLY A SIMPLE ASSIGNMENT TO SPEND SOME QUIET TIME IN PRIVATE PRAYER. ENCOURAGE THE TEENS TO GET NOTEBOOKS THAT CAN BE USED AS PRAYER JOURNALS. ASSURE THEM THAT THEY WILL NOT BE REQUIRED TO SHOW THEIR JOURNAL OR THEIR PRIVATE PRAYERS TO ANYONE.

Each morning and evening, follow your own rule of prayer.

(IF YOU DON’T HAVE ONE, TRY SAYING THE MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS FROM THE “FORMS OF PRAYER TO BE USED IN FAMILIES”, WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 728 OF THE BCP. IF YOU DON’T HAVE A COPY, YOU CAN LOOK IT UP HERE: [HTTP://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER.](http://prayerbook.ca/resources/bcponline/family-prayer))

Jesus said to his disciples: “Follow me” and they did. Spend some time this week reflecting on those simple words. Are there changes that he might be asking you to make in your life? Are there ways in which he may be calling you to serve others? By the end of the week, decide on one practical step you can take towards greater obedience in following Jesus.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through this collect.

O Almighty God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men: Grant unto thy people, that they may love the thing which thou commandest, and desire that which thou dost promise; that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(THE COLLECT FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER, BCP PAGE 194)

CLOSING PRAYERS

Close with any prayers that might be appropriate in the context of the discussion of the day.

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AT THE END OF EACH LESSON, IF YOU FIND THAT YOU STILL HAVE LOTS OF TIME REMAINING, YOU MIGHT CHOOSE TO TAKE SOME TIME TO EXPLORE THE “PRAYERS AND THANKSGIVINGS” SECTION IN THE BCP (PAGES 39-62, OR YOU CAN USE THE DOWNLOADABLE BOOKLET). AS YOUR GROUP MEMBERS COME ACROSS PRAYERS THAT THEY FIND RELEVANT, PAUSE AND PRAY THEM TOGETHER. IF YOU’RE PRESSED FOR TIME, YOU MIGHT CLOSE WITH THE THEMED PRAYER FROM THE AT-HOME CHALLENGE.

Then finish with the “Grace”, printed at the end of the Litany booklet.

JAMES 1-2: **HEAR THE WORD, THEN OBEY IT**

1 ²Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing...

¹⁹Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. ²¹Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

²²But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing...

2 ¹⁴What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled”, without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

¹⁸But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ¹⁹You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! ²⁰Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? ²¹Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? ²²You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; ²³and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. ²⁴You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. ²⁵And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? ²⁶For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.