JAMES 5:1-11
IT'S NOT JUST THE MONEY

TEACH IT **COLLEGE AGE** SESSION 10

1. Materials

For this session each student will need—

- the James 5 Scripture sheet
- the student journal page for Session 10
- his or her own Bible, pen, and notebook

You'll also need—

- a whiteboard and markers
- colored pencils (at least two colors per student)
- a $10 or $20 bill

2. Session Intro

GOALS OF SESSION 10

As students experience this session, they will—

- discover how treatment of the poor ranks with God.
- explore ways they are rich that have nothing to do with money.
- be challenged to adjust their priorities and pursuits according to a godly perspective.

PRAYER

After your group has gathered, begin by praying that your students will use this session to begin to develop a trust in God's Word and see they can depend on God's perspective.

OPEN

The Good and Bad of Money

After opening with prayer, get into the session by holding up a $10 or $20 bill (or higher—the bigger the bill the better). In your own words, say—

What I've got in my hand may look good to you, but it can be used for good or for bad. How could it be used for bad?
-It could be used to buy illegal vices (like prostitution or drugs).
-It could be used to buy destructive things (like pornography).
-Its power could be used to exploit people.

How can it be used for good?
-It can provide a meal or two for someone who's homeless.
-It can buy a Bible or uplifting music.
-It can be put toward sponsoring a child through a relief program.
-You can put it toward your bills and then live debt-free as the Bible advises.

What makes money such a desirable commodity? What does it give us?
-Seek to elicit four or five answers and write these in a corner of your whiteboard. Answers might include: power, respect, security, comfort, etc.

3. Digging In

Painting the Money Picture

Explain to your group—

1. **Money is one of the top five topics addressed in Scripture. In fact, it gets almost as much attention as love.**

2. **Read James 5:1-11 from your Scripture sheets.**

3. **Use colored pencil to circle every reference to the readers of the letter.**

4. **Use another color to underline every mention of the Lord.**

After they've been working for about five minutes, ask—

What did you learn about the Lord in these verses?
-The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord God (5:4).
-The Lord Jesus is coming (5:7).
-The Lord Jesus' coming is near (5:8).
-The Lord God brought about great things in Job's life (5:11).
-The Lord God is full of compassion and mercy (5:11).

List the students' observations on the whiteboard. Leave them on the whiteboard throughout the session. You'll come back to them. As the discussion unfolds, be sure to help your group determine whether James is referring to Jesus or God with the title *Lord*.

What group of people does James appear to be singling out in this passage?
He appears to be singling out the rich.

Can we draw any conclusions about who these rich people are in James 5:1-6? Are they the same people as in James 5:7-11?
As the students discuss, feel free to add your thoughts from your Prep It. Draw out the following possibilities:
-They could be rich people who are part of the Christian community (James' original audience).
-They could be rich people outside the Christian community who are exploiting James' readers (see James 2:6). In James 5:7-11 the author turns back to his original audience, the Christian community.

What word pictures does James use to describe the situation of the rich?
-Your wealth has rotted (5:2).
-Moths have eaten your clothes (5:2).
-The corrosion of your gold will eat your flesh like fire (5:3).

Why do you think James is being so harsh?
The rich were exploiting their workers (the poor).

In verses 7-11, James instructs his readers about how they should behave. Looking at what you circled in this passage, what behavior is James encouraging?
-Be patient (5:7).
-Be patient and stand firm (5:8).
-Don't grumble against each other (5:9).

Why are James' readers supposed to act this way?
The Lord's coming is near (5:8).

4. Digging Deeper

Take It To the Bank

Share with your students that, before you go any further in the session, you want to make sure they don't get the wrong idea. God is not anti-wealth. Ask for volunteers to read to the group the following passages from their Bibles:

Genesis 26:12-14
One of God's patriarchs was so wealthy even the Philistines envied him.

Job 1:1-3
Job was incredibly wealthy, and described as "the greatest man among all the people of the East."

Matthew 27:57-60
Jesus was buried by a rich man, who was also one of Jesus' disciples.

What do these verses show us about God's take on money?
He's not anti-wealth. Some of his best people had great wealth.

5. Taking It Inward

Harsh Words for the Rich

Now ask the group:

Putting it all together, what two main points is James making in this passage?
If you're rich, watch how you're using your riches! Don't exploit the poor.
If you're poor or being oppressed by those richer than you, be patient and persevere; the Lord is coming soon.

How do these teachings relate to the rest of James' letter?
Encourage students to look over their Scripture sheets from previous sessions. James addresses the subject of wealth in James 1:9-11, 2:1-9, and 4:13. Help the students see his pattern of defending the poor and admonishing the rich.

Which category do we fall into—the rich or the poor?
There's no right or wrong answer to this question. Just help your students relate their choice to what James wrote.

If we're not rich in money, there are ways we can still exploit people. All of us are rich in some way. We may be rich in personality, humor, athletic ability, or musical ability. Like money, all of these things can be used for bad or for good. For instance, how could you use humor to exploit people just as the rich exploited people in James 5?
A person could use humor to humiliate someone or to get a laugh at another person's expense.

A few other examples to discuss: How could you use intelligence, leadership ability, or even friendliness to exploit people?
-Intelligence: taking advantage of others who may not see all the options.
-Leadership ability: seeing people as a commodity to be influenced.
-Friendliness: projecting something more likeable than the real you.

6. Cross-Checking

What's Your Account Balance? (Does It Even Matter?)

Transition into the next exercise by saying:

> **Do you ever see homeless people and wonder if God cares? He does. In fact, God mentions the poor and the needy more than 200 times and in nearly every book of the Bible. In most of these verses God is asking his people (that means us) to look out for them.**
>
> **We won't be looking up all 200 verses, but I want to give you a chance to hear God's concern about helping people in need.**

Explain—

> **1. Find places where you have some privacy and can be alone with God.**
>
> **2. Be sure to take your Bibles, journal pages, and pens.**
>
> **3. You'll be doing the Cross-Checking exercise on your journal pages. As you read the passages listed, make notes on everything you learn about how we're to treat the needy.**

After about 10 minutes, have your students get back together. Ask—

> **How would you sum up the main theme of these verses?**
> *Live generously and give mercifully—expecting nothing in return.*
>
> **Any clues as to why mercy is such a big thing with God?**
> *God wants us to show mercy to those who can't pay us back since God showed mercy to us and we can't ever pay him back. As we extend mercy, we show our gratitude for what God has done for us.*

Explore mercy a bit further with these questions:

> **Mercy is one of God's main themes. What are some of your favorite places in Scripture where mercy makes an appearance—either the act of mercy or the word *mercy*? Think parables, psalms, other New Testament teachings, and so forth.**
> *-Moses' song (Exodus 15) after the crossing of the Red Sea.*
> *-The end of Psalm 23.*
> *-The parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:23-35) who was forgiven a great debt he owed but sought to extract a meager debt owed to him.*
> *-People coming to Jesus asking for healing, often greeting him with words like, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Matthew 15:22).*
> *-Jesus telling us that we will be shown mercy in the same way we show mercy.*
> *-Mary's song (Luke 1), sharing her gratitude for being chosen.*
>
> **How can we make mercy a more prominent feature in our day-to-day interaction with people?**
> *Here's an example: Ask if any students have been an "alien" (Exodus 23:9) at a school at any point in life—maybe a time when they were the new student. Ask them to share that feeling and whether it helped them empathize with other "aliens" who came after them. Use this as an example for how we can show mercy out of our personal experiences.*

7. Taking It Inward

Share the Wealth!

Explain that there are two ways we can apply James 5:1-11—as a warning and as a declaration of hope. First we'll look at the warning.

The list about the Lord should still be on the whiteboard from earlier in the session. Direct your students back to it. Ask—

> **Let's get back to what we learned about the Lord in James 5:1-11. What trait of the Lord do you see that goes along with the Bible verses you just read?**
> *The Lord is full of compassion and mercy (5:11).*
>
> **Your journal pages contain a list of potential areas in which you could be rich—areas that have nothing to do with money. Check any that apply to you. Add other areas if you think of them.**
>
> **Then think about how you can use your riches to help the people around you who are needy in those areas. For example, if you checked intelligence, perhaps you could use your brainpower to tutor someone who struggles in a certain class. Write an idea or two for each quality you checked.**

After about five minutes, have volunteers share their ideas. Then say:

> **Look again at James 5:7-11 on your Scripture sheets and note the places where you marked instructions and references to the Lord. What connection do you see between these instructions and the info about the Lord?**
> *-It's easier to be patient in suffering if you know that the Lord's coming soon.*
> *-Patience and not grumbling are offshoots of compassion and mercy.*

Ask three volunteers to look up these passages in their Bibles: Philippians 4:four to six, Hebrews 10:23-25, and Hebrews 10:34-37. While they're looking up the verses, say something like—

> **One of the main themes of the New Testament is that life as a believer will be tough, but we can take heart—Jesus is coming back. We're going to listen to three Bible passages that reflect this theme. As each one is read, write any instructions you hear in the space provided on your journal pages.**

Have the volunteers read the passages. Give your students time to finish making notes between passages. Then ask—

> **How are these verses similar to James 5:7-11?**
> *They give instructions for how we're to treat each other; they point to the fact that Jesus is coming soon.*
>
> **How much is Jesus' return on your mind from day to day? Does that event cross your mind or affect your behavior in the least?**

As you ask the following three main questions, have your students rate themselves on the scales printed on their journal pages. Accompanying each main question are a few bulleted questions (not on the journal pages) for discussion. If time allows, use these questions to help students apply the three main points.

1. **How well does the way you act toward others reflect the fact that Jesus could return any minute?**
    - **How can your gentleness be evident to all?**
    - **How can you encourage others and spur them on toward love and good deeds?**
2. **How well does the way you're handling life reflect the fact that Jesus could return any minute?**
    - **Are you persevering when times get tough?**

- **Are you overcoming temptation?**
- **Do you view your temptations in light of Jesus' return?**

3. How well does your relationship with God reflect the fact that Jesus could return any minute?

- **Do you pray as if he really exists?**
- **Do you try to get to know him as much as possible, so that you'll be familiar with him when you finally see him face to face?**
- **What are some ways you can celebrate God all day, every day?**

8. Wrapping It Up

Make a Prayer Deposit

Draw your students' attention to the list of responses on the whiteboard from the questions discussed at the beginning of the session: "What makes money such a desirable commodity? What does it give us?" Then ask—

What have we learned in this session that will help us achieve these things without pursuing money?

Examples—

-Power: Mercy is more fulfilling than gaining power.
-Respect: Being patient with people will lead to respect from people.
-Security: Looking forward to Jesus' return will generate more personal security than a nice nest egg or large retirement account.
-Success: Since wealth can rot, true success is measured in how we treat people.

Close the session with a time of silent prayer. Ask students to dwell on the fact that Jesus is coming soon—maybe even tomorrow. Encourage them to think of their behavior in recent days—thoughts, attitudes, dates, free time, school—in light of the fact that Jesus could return sooner than they think. Allow several quiet minutes of prayer, trusting the Spirit to fill them with his voice.