TEACH IT **MIDDLE SCHOOL** SESSION 3

1. Materials

For this session each student will need—

- the James 1 Scripture sheet
- the student journal page for Session 3
- his or her own Bible, pen, and notebook

You'll also need—

- a whiteboard and markers
- colored pencils (at least two colors per student)
- two signs, one that reads YOU ARE HERE and one that reads GOD'S WILL
- optional: your church directory or local phone book

2. Session Intro

GOALS OF SESSION 3

As students experience this session, they will—

- discover the detailed instructions James gives for living out the Christian faith.
- explore what these instructions teach us about God and about obedience.
- be challenged to use these detailed instructions as a gateway for discovering what God wants them to do.

PRAYER

After your students have gathered, open your session in prayer. Pray that they'll see the instructions given to us by James as a simple path to discovering God's will in their lives.

OPEN

God's Will Primer

After opening with prayer, get the discussion rolling by playing a round or two of the game *Father, May I?* (a little-known spin-off of *Mother, May I?).* Create signs for the game—one that reads YOU ARE HERE, and one that reads GOD'S WILL. Put the signs on opposite sides of the room. Identify one student as Father; the other students are the children.

To begin the game, have Father stand at the side of the room labeled GOD'S WILL. Have the children line up at the side of the room labeled YOU ARE HERE.

The students will take turns asking, "Father, may I _____?" and making a suggestion for moving forward. The Father will reply, "Yes, you may" or "No, you may not, but you may _____ instead" (see the following suggestions). Depending on the Father's reply, the player will move closer to GOD'S WILL or farther away. And of course, if players forget to use the phrase "Father, may I?" they go back to the start position. The first person to reach GOD'S WILL wins the game. That student becomes the Father, and a new round begins.

Some suggestions for "Father, may I?" include—

- take three (or more, or less) steps forward
- take two giant steps forward
- take ten baby steps forward
- hop forward like a frog, four times

Some suggestions for "Father" replies—

- Yes, you may (this is always an option)
- No, but you may take…(fewer steps, or baby steps instead of giant steps, or steps backwards)
- No, but you may…(do the sprinkler dance, sing 15 seconds of your school fight song, crabwalk around in circles, or any appropriate activity Father thinks up.)

You may want to create some replies ahead of time and write these on 3" x 5" cards. Make sure the suggested activities can be done quickly (in under 15 seconds) to keep the game moving—and don't forget to intersperse some YES, YOU MAY cards.

After playing a round or two, regroup and discuss these questions:

What makes this game tricky?

How is this game similar to (or different from) discovering God's will for your life?

Transition into the next exercise by saying something like—

By the time we finish this session, we may find that discovering God's will is easier than we think.

3. Digging In

Read Instructions before Engaging Life

Draw your students' attention to their Scripture sheets and share the following—

1. **James often indicates a change in subject with the phrase *my brothers*. So think about what we could conclude about James 1:19.**
2. **Read James 1:19-27 using your Scripture sheets.**
3. **Using colored pencil, draw a cloud in one color over every reference to God.**
4. **Use another color to underline every mention of the readers of the letter.**

While students are reading, draw the framework for the following three-column chart on the whiteboard. This is what it will look like after the students tell you the instructions found in James 1:19-27.

Instructions	Inner/Outer	Next 14 Days
Be quick to listen, slow to speak (1:19).	*Outer*	

Be slow to become angry (1:19).	*Inner*	
Get rid of all moral filth and evil (1:21).	*Inner*	
Humbly accept the Word planted in you (1:21).	*Inner*	
Do what the Word says (1:22).	*Outer*	
Keep a tight rein on your tongue (1:26).	*Outer*	
Look after orphans and widows in distress (1:27).	*Outer*	
Keep from being polluted by the world (1:27).	*Inner*	

After a few minutes, ask the group members to look back at the clouds they marked and discuss these questions:

What do you learn about God in this passage?
He desires that we live a righteous life (1:20).
God wants us to look after orphans and widows and keep ourselves from being polluted by the world (1:27).

Look back at the verses you marked about James' readers. What commands or instructions does James give his audience? As we list these on the whiteboard, we'll begin to see a picture of the righteous life James is referring to.
List their responses in the first column on the whiteboard, one instruction per line. Ask students to write the same information on their journal pages.

4. Taking It Inward

From the Inside Out

Share that these instructions can be classified in two categories: our inner life and our outer life. Ask students to tell you which of these instructions are inner and which are outer. Have a volunteer come to the whiteboard and write INNER or OUTER in the second column as other students say which is which. Possible observations from the passage are noted in the chart, but you may come to different conclusions about which category some instructions fit into. Invite students to write *inner* or *outer* in the proper column on their journal pages.

5. Digging Deeper

Hear, Then Do

God has always put a premium on doing his commands, which is why James could promise that we'll be blessed when we obey God's Word. Explain that the students are going to spend some time in solitude now, studying what Jesus had to say on this subject.

1. **Find places of solitude (quiet focus) where you can have a little privacy with God.**

2. **Be sure to have your Bibles, journal pages, James 1 Scripture sheets, and pens.**

3. **Follow the instructions for the Digging Deeper exercise and interact with God through prayer about the connection between hearing his Word and doing what it says.**

After about 10 minutes, call the group back together. Ask—

In the passages you just read, what two-step process does Jesus apply to his words and commands?
We need to know his commands and obey them.

How have you been doing with these two steps lately?

Ask volunteers to share where they rated themselves on the scales from the journal page and why.

HEARING SCALE:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I haven't cracked a Bible in weeks <									> I have regular, invigorating time in God's Word

DOING SCALE:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
In one ear, out the other <									> Making every effort to please God

Explain that Jesus attaches some hefty promises to these two steps—a good indicator that they're crucial for Christians. Ask—

What adjustments do you need to make in your life in order to experience these promises?

6. Taking It Inward

So Act Already!

Granted, you and your group members are busy. The whole world is busy! But could it be that God is waiting for us to take James 1:22 more seriously? Spend the next few minutes strategizing ways you and your students can put into practice the instructions they've uncovered in James 1. The following are some examples to help the group get out of the starting block. Tell the group—

We're going to close with a group work session to help each of us crank up the intensity for hearing and doing the Word of God. What are some practical steps we can take to hear the Word better? What are some things we can do to put the Word into practice?

Refer to the instructions you have listed on the whiteboard, and ask students to refer to the column on the journal pages labeled Next 14 Days.

Then ask—

How can we—as a group or as individuals—start obeying these instructions, or obey them more consistently? Take a minute to write down an idea or two for each instruction.

Encourage students to be specific. Give them a minute to write some ideas for each instruction in the column Next 14 Days on their journal pages. Then ask them to share their ideas and write these on the whiteboard in the column labeled Next 14 Days. After you have some ideas written down, help students develop a plan for one or more of the ideas in the Next 14 Days column. Here are a couple of examples:

- When you get to the widows and orphans in James 1:27, write on the whiteboard names of specific people the group can help, and ask students to write them on their journal pages. Have a church directory or phone book handy. Divvy up the names and phone numbers of these people. Have one or two students adopt a person for the next 14 days. Have them make a phone call, drop in for a visit, or volunteer to help with some chores.
- Take a 14-day fast from the things of the world. Your students will know what has the potential to pollute them—what they read, watch, listen to, or talk about. Ask them to write anywhere on their journal pages two or three things to avoid.

Finish this exercise with the following question:

What did James say will happen if we do these things?
We will be blessed in what we do (1:25).

7. Wrapping It Up

Start Simple

Use these questions to take your group back to the discussion at the beginning of the session:

Did today's Scripture make it easier to know God's will for your life? If so, in what ways?
Steer the discussion to conclude that when we do what God reveals in his Word, we're doing his will. When we look after widows and orphans in their distress and keep from being polluted by the world, we're doing what God accepts as pure and faultless—his will.

So if you want to discover God's will for your life, based on James, how would you get started?
Let the group discuss this one for a few minutes and then wrap up.

Obeying God in the simple things (the baby steps) is a great starting point for obeying him in the bigger areas (giant steps) of life. For example, as you help a widow in your neighborhood, God may see he can trust you with something else. He may move you on to another ministry that defines your life's calling, or he may simply bring more orphans and widows your way. By faithfully obeying God, you'll soon discover you're doing his will for your life—and you'll be blessed in all you do.

Before closing in prayer, ask whether anyone would like to take up God on his idea of pursuing pure and faultless religion—ministry to widows or orphans. If so, pray a prayer of dedication for those who wish to pursue this type of ministry.