



Study Series

James: Week Three

Bible

James 1:19-27 (NIV)

Listening and Doing

19 My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, **20** because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. **21** Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. **23** Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who

looks at his face in a mirror **24** and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

25 But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

26 Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. **27** Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Sermon Summary

After urging his dear friends to endure the testing of their faith – by looking through the test to the blessing that awaits those who endure, and by looking to the provision of their generous Father in the midst of testing – James turns his attention in a more specific way to how this endurance, which he equates with a love for God, is acted out.

In James 1:19-27 he turns to three very practical expressions of our love for God. These expressions fall under the ‘headings’ of being quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger. In typical fashion, James doesn’t deal with them in the same order, nor does he use the same language throughout this section, but these topics of listening, speaking, and anger are clear.

He begins where he ends; with anger. He urges his dear friends to **be slow to anger**. This, of course, gives permission to be angry, but only if it meets certain conditions. The central condition is that our anger must produce the kind of righteousness that God desires. Righteousness is not an abstract concept for James but is the kind of right living that God desires. In the language of Jesus it is the actions that usher in the kingdom of God. Our human anger rarely produces this sort of outcome. Usually, our anger is essentially selfish. When we are slow to anger we are imitating God (see Exodus 34:6) and if God – whose motivations and intentions are always holy – is slow to anger, how much more so ought we to be slow? So, James urges his readers to rid themselves of the sorts of behaviour that, when coupled with anger, only produces trouble, and instead, humbly accept the word. In this context it is unclear when speaking about ‘the word’ if James is referring to the Old Testament or to Jesus, though we are not forced to choose, the point is this: If you want to know what our anger ought to achieve – the kind of righteousness God desires – it is found in the word.

This moves James to his second topic; being quick to listen. Again, his interest is in our actions and he makes his point quite clearly. **Don’t just listen to the word, but do it**. He then uses a simple parable of someone looking into a mirror and forgetting what they look like. We shouldn’t push this image too far. The point is, that looking in a mirror is pretty similar to not doing anything. We have a look, make sure our hair looks okay and that our shirt is tucked in, and off we go, and we often don’t give it another thought. We mustn’t treat the word of God like a mirror, but do what we hear. And if his point isn’t clear, James pronounces a blessing on those who do the word, continuing in it and doing it (and yes, he’s that repetitive).

Having urged us to be slow to anger and quick to listen, James turns to speech. He'll have much more to say about his in chapter 3, but here, with the emphasis on action, he seems to be saying simply, that **a religion that is all talk is useless**. His example of worthwhile religion is all about action – caring for widows and orphans in their distress. He also calls his readers to keep themselves from being polluted, or stained by the world. This has to do with humbly accepting the word and doing it – it protects us (you might say Scotchguards) our lives.

Our love for God, expressed in endurance – an active faith – is here identified as a faith that is slow to become angry, and that is; continually immersed in the word to know the standards of righteousness that God desires, is quick to do what God commands us, and is one that is actively at work caring for those God cares for.

For James, in this section of his letter, one question is woven through his writing; after hearing the word, what are we going to do about it?

Questions

These questions are a guide for conversation. Please take your time over them, and don't feel in a rush to finish them. The objective of a group discussion is to engage in meaningful conversation around a Biblical idea, invite the Holy Spirit to lead your time of reflection.

Have a go at question 1 before reading the passage.

1. Opening Discussion: Our world is full of competing messages about the things we **should** do? Invest well, read this book, get fit, study hard? Our Christian faith can often feel the same, pray more, care for others more, grow in this area of Christlikeness. What '**shoulds**' get the most of our attention and why? Do these '**shoulds**' often turn into us taking meaningful action? Resist the temptation to find a solution, and take some time to share your answers with the group.
2. Get comfortable, and read James chapter 1:19-27. As you read, or hear it read, notice if there are words or phrases that 'jump out at you'. What are they? (Try to resist the urge to explain **why** it jumped out – this is about creating space for often familiar passages to say something new to us, allowing God to show you something). Invite the Holy Spirit to lead you to that word or phrase. Share what you've been lead to.
3. James gives us permission to be angry at times, but what are the characteristics of an anger that produces righteousness? How does that differ from our anger (most of the time)?

4. How might the way we read and study the Bible need to develop, so that we do not just hear it, decide that it is important, but walk away unchanged and fail to act?
5. In the Bible God, who shows no favouritism and loves everyone, does have a bias towards the poor and marginalised. They are his 'favourites'. What does God's love, directed in this way, indicate about His nature, and what are the implications for how we live out our faith?
6. How do we prioritise and engage with those aspects of our faith that we recognise we may need to work on and grow in? What practices might we need to develop or changes do we need to make, so that we begin to live our faith increasingly out loud?

Prayer

Time is often a very genuine pressure in our culture, carve out some time now to reflect on your answers to question 6. Pray for each other, that the Holy Spirit would help us to identify, and create space to engage with, aspects of our faith that God is inviting us to recognise now.