

Righteous Life

James 1:19-27



Preparation: *Pray before people arrive. Ask for the leading of the Holy Spirit in your conversation. Read the scripture for today, and study Stulac pg. 61-87. Circle or highlight the discussion prompts from this study guide that seem to fit your group best.*

Beginning the group study: Pray for a desire for righteousness to come today.

Read aloud James 1:19-27

- What things stand out to you in the text from James?

From Stulac (pg. 61-63) printed here:

“When King David faced his times of most intense persecution and danger, he frequently prayed a rather impressive request. On his heart was his need not merely for protection from his attackers but, even more, for protection from sin.

[Have a volunteer read **Psalm 25:4-5, 20-21**]

[Have another volunteer read **Psalm 141:3-4**]

It was a kind of praying we Christians need to learn: not just ‘Lord, keep me safe,’ but ‘Lord, keep me pure,’ because we abhor sin even more than suffering. This is the need the apostle James saw for the young Christians who had been scattered by persecution. He wrote in loving concern to strengthen them for clear-headed moral courage even when others were doing evil and even when that evil was being done against them.

But James is not merely a moralist. A moralist has a list of ethical guidelines by which to live a happy and respectable life. A Christian has a person, Jesus Christ, to whom the Christian owes everything, to whom the Christian surrenders everything, for whom the Christian lives in everything. Because of that relationship with Christ, the Christian becomes a person of deep moral commitment. That is how James writes – as a Christian of profound moral earnestness. Therefore what he writes now is not just a gathering of moralisms: ‘Be quick to listen and slow to speak, because it will help you get along better with people.’ James is writing about life in Christ.

He has just been telling his readers: When you face trials of various kinds, beware of the temptation to sin. It is not the suffering of the trial but the temptation to sin that is the most serious danger to you, because sin kills the sinner. Sin gives birth to death, whereas you have been given birth by the work of Christ to be delivered from sin and death. Because you have been given life in Christ, now live *the righteous life that God desires*.

James urgently charges Christians to be sure to practice their faith by the specific behaviors listed in this section. James is conveying that his instruction is important, that it is for each individual reader to personally put into practice. The tone at the beginning of

this passage is, 'Because you are very dear to me, I am urging all of you: be sure to do these things...'”¹

¹ Stulac, George M. 2010. *James*. IVP Academic.

Getting started:

- What are your initial reactions to the three commands in verse 19?
- Talk about the times where your quick tongue got you into trouble.



James's instruction to his readers applies to anyone who interacts with other people: be quick to listen and careful when you speak. James sees the immorality and the destructiveness of an uncontrolled tongue. That's why his first command about the tongue is to silence it. Instead of talking, listen. He doesn't say "listen a lot," but he does say "listen first." Be quick to do it.

- Discuss how the pressures of trials make us slow to listen and quick to speak (maybe even speaking in anger).
- Consider the solution James offers in verse 21.

In verse 21, James is acknowledging the prevalence of evil in the world. Jesus said this too (Mt. 6:34), and taught that you can store up either good or evil in your heart – and out of that abundance your heart will direct your speech (Luke 6:45).

- Is the abundance of your heart God-honoring on a daily basis?
- You may wonder, "how can listening to words save you?" Consider how James's teaching is rooted in Matthew 7:24; how the words of Jesus saved the inhabitants of that house.

James goes on to explain how to use the lifesaving word of God; and it's simple. He says, "don't be a hearer of forgetfulness but a doer of action." Take what you hear, and do it. True blessedness – the joy of Christ's kingdom – comes not by escaping trials but by obeying the word of the Lord.

- When are you most forgetful of God's word? If so, talk about the reasons why that could be. Also consider some solutions.
- Consider James's emphasis here: that it's not enough to be hearers. What might that imply about our worship services or Bible studies?

This week, "doing something" might flow naturally out of your discussion. If so, that's fantastic – run with it! If not, consider this: James asks us to live by the law of God, and promises that God will bless us. Jesus summarized the law by saying, "Love God with your whole heart, mind, soul and strength; and love other people." That sounds like a good place to start. Live by that rule – in everything you do (waiting in line, participating in class, making a meal, caring for children, interacting with food servers), ask yourself, "How am I loving God and loving others in this moment?"

Maybe your group wants to select a particular area to focus on (profs, church members, parents, roommates, co-workers) to live out the Word.