1-7 September 2024 Actions speak louder than words

James 1: 17-27

**17**Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. **18**He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.

### 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.

**Bible notes**

James, the brother of Jesus, is the leader of the early Christian Church. As a disciple and sibling, he understood God’s heart and purpose. As God’s servant (v.1), his counsel is priceless and worthy of heeding.

God is the source of every gift, which is perfect, exactly what is needed and dispensed from heaven. These gifts are not the result of human generosity, personal talent, hard work or good fortune, but are blessings from God.

Furthermore, God has given us the greatest gift: Jesus, the word of truth. James’ readers understood that the ‘first fruits’ conveys a special status of being set aside as belonging to God (v.18). The invaluable gift is for God’s exclusive purpose, and recipients’ actions will speak more powerfully and louder than their words. The habits and behaviours James describes are not a figment of his imagination but those inherent in the cultures these Christians inhabited.

The newfound status of these believers might invite hostility and pressure. It might also lead to arrogance, entitlement and superiority. However, the ‘first fruit’ should produce God’s righteousness (v.19) and, with humility, embrace God’s embedded (implanted) Word (v.21). While the implanted Word saves the soul, James’ central theme (v.23ff) focuses on the proclaimed word, which is not personal or private but communal and public. The impact is devastating when God’s Word is maligned, ignored or forgotten, as is the frustration of God’s purpose. There is a blessing in persevering – pushing through against the odds – being doers of the Word (vv.22-25), controlling our tongues, looking after the vulnerable and not being tarnished by prevailing cultures.

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

James gives sound teaching and guidance for early Jewish Christian leaders on how to live in a moral, responsible way in daily life. In September, many activities restart after the holidays and some may have new responsibilities as team players or leaders. Our actions today will have an impact on the future. For example, it is now time to plan how our garden will look next year and to consider what bulbs to plant, what seeds to order and what needs rooting out or cutting back. It is the same in our lives. What kind of people do we want to be, living out the moral imperative in James’ teaching?

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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**Questions**

* What helps healthy plants to grow?
* What in your own life needs pruning or nurturing for spiritual growth in the future?
* How can God’s Word take root in you this week?

**Prayer**

Adapt to your local context.

Generous God, we thank you for the blessings you shower upon us each day.   
We thank you, O God, with all that we are and all that we have.  
We offer ourselves to you as living sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving.   
We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.   
**Amen.**

**A prayer to end the Bible study**

Go! The study has ended,   
but our service in the world begins.  
May God strengthen and encourage us  
as we go, to live lives of gratitude,   
spilling over into loving responses  
of joyful caring.   
**Amen.**

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