

Marks

Daily Prayer ■ Weekly Worship ■ Bible Reading
Giving Time, Talents & Resources
Spiritual Friendships ■ Service In & Beyond the Church

of Discipleship

April 11, 2021

Day 1: James 1:17

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

James insists that Christians must act out their faith in service. Service is giving God's love to others without looking for something in return. A perfect gift is one with no strings attached. God first loved us and Jesus died for us while we were still sinners. These are the perfect gifts from above. We can ignore God's love and live as if God does not exist but if we accept God's love we cannot help but share that love with the world. God knows if we feel loved, that act will propel us to share that love.

Question: What is the best gift you ever received? The best gift you ever gave?

Challenge: What do you think about the statement, "if we receive God's love we cannot help but share it"?

Scripture: 1 John 1-10

Day 2: James 1:18

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.

The image of midwife is not often used to describe the mission of the Church. Yet a more powerful image cannot be found. Imagine helping God give birth to life using the truth (the Gospel). It is amazing to think that simply put, the mission of the Church is to give birth.

Question: What do you think "first fruits" means?

Challenge: How has our church helped give birth to hope?

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:14-18

Day 3: James 1:19-20

My dear brothers, (and sisters) take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

James, like the early Christians, was concerned that the new movement might not show the proper care and love for the members of that movement. In the Greek and Roman culture relationships that obligated people to each other were based on family or power. The thought of charity for charity sake was a foreign concept. The new community was to be one where people cared not because of family or power but because the other is the brother or sister that Christ died for.

Question: Do you feel closer to your family members or to friends?

Challenge: Practice the rest of the week to listen and to be slow to speak.

Scripture: Job 33:1-7, Psalm 81:8-16

Day 4: James 1:22-24

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man, who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does.

Acting out of love means not counting what you will get out of the act. It is true that in giving we receive but that is not the point of giving.

Question: Could you draw a picture of yourself?

Challenge: Look closely at yourself. Is what you see what you think you look like to other people?

Scripture: Psalm 34:11-22

Day 5: James 1:26

If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.

James points out the 500 pound gorilla in the room. We will sing praise to God and lose our temper with a brother or sister and let them have it. Many think that withholding comment will keep one from sinning. Yet body language speaks volumes. James is not just addressing someone actually cutting down another person but addressing the thought that is behind the nasty comment. When a person begins to believe that someone else is worthless and dead wrong they believe that gives them the right to verbally assault them. Some time back I suggested (in another congregation) that we buy new hymnals. A woman objected because the old ones were not used up. I then said, "lets not take it from the budget but see if individuals want to buy one." More than enough were sold and we bought them. Four years later when I suggested something else that did not succeed, the same woman told me, "see I told you were wrong headed and did not know what you were doing as pastor." She was not in compliance with James 1:26.

Question: Can you control your tongue?

Challenge: Notice people this week and see if you can tell if they are religious.

Scripture: James 3:1-12

Day 6: James 1:27

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.

Religion is the acting out of our belief in the world around us. Taking care of widows and orphans was a way of saying to share the love of God in word and deed.

Question: How can a person become "polluted" by the world?

Challenge: Do you find it easy to practice what you believe? How about when you are angry or hurt?

Scripture: Exodus 22:22-28