

James: Mercy Triumphs Week 3; Level 1.5 Homework

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1.

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“Has anybody besides me gotten caught not listening? Does anyone else doodle your way through conference calls and then have no idea what to say when it’s your turn to talk? Or, on the other hand, is it always your turn to talk?”

“Read **James 1:19-21**. (If you’re writing out the book of James, write these verses now.) Now, take note of the three instructions in verse 19; we are encouraged to be:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

“Star the one (or ones) most challenging to your natural personality.

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“Let’s focus first on the first pairing: ‘quick to hear, slow to speak.’ Our first big assignment this week is to lock our lips and listen. Here’s a little extra motivation: Proverbs 17:28...

*Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent,
and discerning if they hold their tongues.*

“Now let’s shift to number 3: ‘slow to become angry.’

“Just between you and God, how much of an issue do you have with anger?”

Mark on this line: not an issue-----BIG issue

“Reflect on the last seven days. What kind of things sparked feelings of anger?”

“How often is your anger expressed in words? Anything you wish you could take back?”

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“Now look at James 1:20 and record the harm of anger:” _____

“Read Ephesians 4:30-31:”

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

“How does this verse imply that anger could affect how the Holy Spirit shows up in us?” _____

p. 76 “Let’s spend our last few moments fastened to the end of verse 21. What does James tell us to humbly do?” _____

p. 77 “Today’s segment of Scripture comes full circle here. Above all, God desires for us to be quick to listen *to Him. To His Word.*

“God reminds us that He didn’t plant His word in us just so we could divert it toward someone else’s conviction or deliverance. That’s true even when we have righteous indignation. We need humility to receive a word from God down into the soil of our humanity. We tend to take God’s message to us and hang it around someone else’s neck, but its first target was our own souls.

“We who trusted Christ as Savior were instantly saved from eternity apart from God, but we have continual need of deliverance until He brings us safely into His heavenly kingdom.”

2. “Please read **James 1:22-25** (and write it out, if you’re doing that).

p. 78 “We can work a Bible study until the desert turns to ice and still be stuck in the same bondage. We can underline our Bibles till our pens run dry, without a drop of ink splattering our lives. Self-deception slithers in when we mistake *appreciation* for *application*, or being *touched* with being *changed*.

“Glance over James 1: 16-27; How many times does he mention self-deception? _____

“The tricky part is that hearing all by itself really does lend a certain satisfaction.... The Word of God, however, is meant to do more than penetrate. It’s meant to activate.... The Word was meant to work. And through it, we were meant to bear fruit.

p. 79 “James’ older brother (Jesus) taught a similar lesson... We can well imagine that Christ’s claim in Luke 8:21 echoed in James’ memory: ‘...My brothers are those who hear and do the word of God.’

“We were created to be satisfied with nothing less than the fulfillment of our original purpose. Read James 1:25; What does this person do, and what is the promise at the end of the verse? _____

“Let’s repeat that for clarity: ‘This person will be blessed in what he _____.’

“Do you see the concept? It’s not until the hearing turns into doing that believing turns to blessing. Our ‘doing’ may not always equal physical activity. The initial act of obedience might be waiting on the Lord or setting our minds firmly upon His faithfulness.”

3.

Please read James 1:26-27 (and write it if you're doing that).

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"Verse 26 stirs up a question: do we consider ourselves religious? We may have been trained to insist that we have a relationship, not a religion. But out of that relationship with Jesus, we engage in activities that show our devotion to Him.

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"Name ways you show your devotion to Jesus through the course of a month." _____

"The dictionary defines 'religious' as: 'showing faithful devotion to a deity.' So judging by that, we'd have to say we seem religious.

"And this, dear Sister, is where James lights up the subject like a stick of dynamite. It starts in verse 26; looking at that verse, complete the sentence:"

*If anyone thinks he is religious and _____
_____, then his religion is _____.*

"Various translations say 'reign in his tongue,' or 'bridle his tongue.' The rider -- us -- is being told, 'Control your horse!' -- our tongue.

"What if we don't? To quote various translations, our religion is *useless, in vain, empty, worthless, futile.*

"James doesn't budge one inch. We keep falling in the trap of thinking that if the good outweighs the bad, it's all good. James says if we show all sorts of devotion to God but don't bridle our maverick tongues, it's all worthless. Glance at 1:26 again; James once again mentions self-deception.

"What do you think can be self-deceiving about showing devotion, but not reigning in our tongue?" _____

"After James tells us what true religion is *not*, he sketches two quick images of what true religion *is*: Read James 1:27 and describe his idea of 'pure and undefiled' religion."

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"We're not meant to limit all faithful devotion to these two practices. We're meant to see them as living, breathing exhibitions of real religion.

"Let's look at the first exhibit: 'to look after orphans and widows in their distress.' James sketched the two classes of people in his culture with the least rights, the least hope, and the greatest vulnerability... they were subject to shameless oppression and neglect....

“What images come to mind as you picture the exploited and neglected in our day?”

“I’ve heard a number of voices point out the strong trend toward social concerns among younger believers. Many of our Christ-professing college students and young adults resonate deeply with hands-on efforts toward the poverty-stricken and oppressed.

- p. 86 “Social consciousness beckons us all, but the ways we could respond are as varied as our holy passions. We are called to tend to the poor, but see what specific opportunities make your heart jump... Ministries that resonate with me are often geared to the abused or to those demoralized by addiction.

“What about you? Where does God stir up your passion?” _____

“God doesn’t ask us to do what doesn’t matter. Let’s muster the courage to ask Him to show us who to help and how. The mystery is that, there, we often find our own healing and fulfillment.

“One last element in James 1:27... the final image in James’ sketch of pure and undefiled religion.... “To keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” World pollution... It hangs a heavy veil of smog between us and God, distorting our vision and weakening our resolve. So how on earth do we serve in this pollution without smelling like it?

“You don’t live this life accidentally. You make up your mind who you want to be and daily die to the rest. Your surrender yourself to living in the tension where you’ll always be stretched and often be broken... You accept that there are far easier ways to live, but you were born for nothing less.”

4. Read James 2:1-7 (and write it, if you’re doing that).

- p. 87 “Yesterday we devoted very little space to James’ second picture of undefiled religion: “to keep oneself unstained by the world.” Remember, Bibles weren’t originally formatted into chapters and verses. In 2:1-7, James talks right on about keeping ourselves unstained by the world with an example that’s still spot-on today: our quick tendency to treat people differently.

“Left to ourselves, we’re full of preference and prejudice. We favor one, dismiss another... We stereotype. We assume. Our prejudices are so deep that we don’t recognize them. Let this segment of Scripture speak its brutal truth to us....

“Writer Anne Lamott once said, ‘You can safely assume you’ve created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do.’ Consider the following verses:

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Lev. 19:15 Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.

Acts 10:34-35 Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.”

Rom. 2:11 For God does not show favoritism.

“Prejudice in its most obvious form, racism, is an abomination to God... it is never harmless, never funny, and never to be taken lightly.

“Our great temptation to discriminate may not be racial. Maybe it’s more about some who seem like winners and others who seem like losers. We naturally prefer those who possess what we esteem -- whether social status, talent, spirituality, intelligence, style or beauty -- and we devalue those who don’t. Do we ever catch ourselves paying overt attention to one and not to another?

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“Look at James 2:2 and picture this setting: Your church, small-group Bible study, or Christian event.... You belong. Two contrasting people walk in who don’t. What happens then? Which one do we pay attention to?

“Reread James 2:4. If we discriminate, what do we become?” _____

Now consider 1 Cor. 1:26-29 --

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

“Why does God tend to choose the weak over the strong? _____

_____.

“Lord, have mercy on us. Help us see any hint of our faces in this mirror.”



5. Please read (and write?) James 2:8-13.

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“The Scripture referenced in James 2:8 is Leviticus 19:18 --

‘Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

“This command echoes throughout the New Testament --”

Matt. 22: 34-39...the Pharisees... tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ... And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Roman 13:8-9 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. ... whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Gal. 5:13:14 You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

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What phrase do these verses share? “ _____ your neighbor as

_____ ”

What does James call this commandment/law? (see James 2:8) “the _____ law.”

“Look carefully at James 2:12. How are we to speak and act?” _____

“Think about this carefully: how could loving others as we love ourselves turn out to be liberating to us? Think practically as well as theologically and write your thoughts here.

“Boiling things down to one sentence is a relief. We’re meant to pause at this point and hear these words: if, out of your love for God, you are loving others, ‘you are doing well.’ (v. 8)

“Ending the lesson here would be a wonderful thing, but about the time we give a sigh of relief, James says, “Whoever keeps the entire law, yet fails in one point, is guilty of breaking it all.” (v. 9)

“James no doubt got that holy notion from Jesus. In Matt. 5:19-24, Jesus didn’t let His listeners get away with feeling smug about their good standing with God while they were in poor standing with others.

If this idea that “failing in one point of the law equals breaking all of it” is new and frightening to you, I recommend that you read the page found at: <http://theromanroad.org> and/or find a leader at Hope to talk to about it.

p. 94 “No we’re not bound to ritual laws but we are indeed bound to love. Jesus Himself said, ‘I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you must also love one another.’ (John 13:34)

“What is love if it ignores reconciliation? Are you, perhaps, hoping you and God are so busy in your relationship that your need for reconciliation with someone has gone unnoticed? I’ve been there, hoping God was distracted, but all the while, He wasn’t.

“Several years ago a dear friend told me something she felt God was asking her as she resisted reconciliation. ‘Do you just want to be right? Or do you want to have relationship?’

“Are these thoughts resonating with you in any way? If so, how?” _____

“If this royal law was the only one we vowed to keep, sooner or later we’d give in to selfishness and stand judged guilty.”

Look back at James 2:13. Write out the last four words:

“We need something bigger than justice. We need mercy... We need our eyes pried wide open to mercy so great and so rescuing that it cannot help but make us merciful. We need the mercy of a holy, righteous God.

“Lord, shake us out of the slumber of our self-righteousness and awaken us to the mercy that breeds mercy. The love that loves others as itself.”

Bonus:

p. 92 Beth’s comments on “loving others *as we love ourselves*.”

“Well, what do you know? Loving God and loving others does not equal hating ourselves after all. But before we curl up in obsession with self, let’s note what one commentator cautions.” [A paraphrase:] *James is not, like some modern thinkers, saying that we have to conquer self-love before we can love others.* Rather, the “love others as yourself” command found throughout Scripture assumes that people have a healthy, balanced view of self; *it would not have assumed that people have a sick self-view.*

If loving yourself is a significant issue for you, please consider this: Rom. 5:8 --

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

If God loves you, who are you to think that your standards need to be higher than His?

If you need further help, please seek out a Christian counselor or mentor to help you with this. But don’t wait for personal perfection before beginning to love others. You will find healing there, too.