

June 5, 1994

James 1: 19-25

We have been making some changes in our office. As a result, I moved from my back room on the fourth floor to the front room on the fifth. Out of this move, came a need to do something with the wall plaques that I have accumulated over the years.

I remembered the pride with which these plaques were received. The hurry to get them framed and carefully placing them on the wall so that they would show off to their best advantage. And there they hung.

Time to move and I had to ask myself, "Is it worth the trouble?" "Do they really mean anything anymore?" They don't. So now they are packed away in a transfer case, sitting on the floor. Someday, someone, will need the space they now occupy and they will head for the dumpster.

And it didn't cost me a tear.

When you look at reality, there is not much to be said for earthly rewards.

I left my ^{Dixon} moving venture to work on this lesson. I picked up a book that Ed shared with me. It is a New Testament Study Bible, based on the concept that faith impacts the world. I put it to the test to see how this study Bible could impact our lesson today.

The message from Chapter 1 of James jumped out: "Why the rush?" Another question: "Is the abundant life found in quick results?", i.e, Was the abundant life hanging on my wall?

The conclusion reached was that God wants people to be someone, more than to get somewhere. Rather than measuring our worth through achievements and wall plaques, God evaluates our character. In this evaluation, he looks for such virtues as peace, truth, serenity, and strength of character.

In Chapter 1, James says God wants us to be (and here I am quoting from the study Bible):

1. People who can endure testing and trial. (Verse 4)
2. People who trust God to provide for their needs and feel free to ask for his help. (Verse 5)
3. People who can discern between good and bad choices and make wise decisions. (Verse 12-16)

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4. People who give generously to others, just as God as given generously to us. (Verse 17-18)
5. People who listen well and respond thoughtfully. (Verse 19-21)
6. People who act instead of just talking and whose actions benefit others. (Verse 22-25)
7. People who value and show compassion toward others who are in need, especially who are forgotten. (Verse 22-25)

The writer suggests that we may need to slow down and take a long hard look at the direction of our lives.

I am reminded of the city man who left the metro for a trip through the countryside. He was able to drink in the green around him; to hear the continuing chatter of the birds; to fill his lungs with the fresh air; to enjoy to peace of the moment.

Thirsty, he came to a crossroad. A filling station, a general store, a few houses, and not much more. While he was enjoying the cold drink in the dark interior of the general store, he asked the proprietor if he didn't think the country life had it all over the city. The man replied, "I don't know, I lived all my life here in town."

Cities, bundled up against the wonders of nature, have always been hard on the spiritual life. It is hard to open up to the spirit when we are so fired up to get from one place to the next.

Thessalonica was a bristling, noisy, important city of Jesus' day. It was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia. The early Christians in this city were particularly disturbed. A group of these Christians were sold on the idea of Christ immediately returning to earth to wind things up. Some even refused to work. Some were visibly engaged in disposing of their property.

They had an idea what would happen to the dead, but what about the living? They were worried about what would happen to the living when Christ returned.

Even now and then one sect or the other will pop up with the pronouncement of Dooms' Day. The end of the world based upon something that they have read and interpreted. We read about these groups and laugh.

We read about those in Thessalonica and think how stupid of them to get up so upset over something over which they had no control. But that is the way the human story goes.

Not a day goes by that I don't end up upset over some event that happened miles away and over which I have no control. To these Thesolonians, and to me, and maybe to you, Paul writes "We beseech you, brotheren, that you study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands."

How do we deal with our problems and find the stability in this troubled world to love and enjoy this gift of life? Paul says to study for quietness; strive for a quiet mind.

Listen to a newscast, tune in to the loud and continuing throb of the drumbeat that some call music, drive down the freeway at 70 miles an hour, just try to cross the street. No wonder we try to escape into the unreal. Some turn to drugs, some to whiskey, some to the television.

Paul says find your sanity and your solutions in the quietness of the spirit. We can do this by making room. That is to set aside a special time of silence and meditation. This past week I heard a preacher on the television say that each individual needs to have a special place for prayer. Paul says we need to have a special time for quiet.

Quit thinking about the things of the world that trouble us and fill our minds with the good things that happen to us. When you go to bed, concentrate on the good things that happened during the day. If nothing else, find at least one good thing and build on that. Go to sleep with the mind filled with the good in your life. Makes the morning light a little brighter.

Remember the eternity of God. Our life span is but a tick on the clock of eternity. Our troubles and our frustrations, monumental as they are, will pass with time. The Psalmist found the answer when we wrote, "Lord, thou has been our dwelling place in all generations, before the mountains were brought forth or ever thou had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, though art God."

Paul advises us to mind our own business. As Christians we are commanded to care for others. To do for others. We are not commanded to go out of our way to stir things up. The world has to be straightened out, people reformed, committees appointed and set upon their task, but the important thing is to mind one own's business and make a success with it. We take a giant step toward world reform when we start with ourselves.

Washington is a prime example of the problem that flows from the busybody mind. They flit hither and yon, passing rules to guide the lives of other people, but look at that body itself.

Look at your society. Women are bound and determined to conquer the business world. Look at what is happening to their families. Gain a paycheck and lose a family. What a horrible price to pay.

Another problem that good people have is they take on too much. The rule is to give the job to the person who is the busiest. It is a good rule to get the job done. But what does a busy fellow have to sacrifice to do it?

The last bit of advice that Paul gives those troubled Christians was to work with your hands. Hard instructions for a city folk to follow. There is not a lot that I can personally say about this advice. I do know that involvement in an activity that calls on the mind to concentrate on what the hands are doing, is a therapeutic exercise.

Back before Dr. MacGowen's retirement, he was asked his advice as to what a person needs to face in a troubled and inflationary society. His advice, "maintain a little liquidity; a few good friends; and be able to render a service."

I started my preparation for this morning with the idea of concentrating on verses 19-25. We were to talk about being quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. I never got there. "What is the rush?" got in the way and I haven't come up with an answer. Read this first chapter of James along with Thesolonians 4:11. Study for quietness of spirit; mind one's own business; work with one's hands. The consensus is that we will be a better person and our life will be more enjoyable.