

THE FIRST 15

Labor Day, September 2, 2024

Today is Monday, September 2 and we are studying what the Bible says about doing good in the world.

OPENING PRAYER

As I approach these first fifteen minutes of the day devoted to the Lord, I pause and become still. I take slow, deep breaths and focus my entire being on the presence of God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I eliminate surrounding distractions, quiet the noise of my mind, and listen for the voice of the Spirit speaking to my soul. Blessed Lord, I worship and praise You in the quiet stillness of the morning. Help me hear the message You have for me today. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing. James 1:22-25 (NRSV)

REFLECTION

The book of James is unique in the New Testament for its no-nonsense, practical and proverbial wisdom. James provides a straightforward look on how to live life as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Living a life of faith is a blessed gift from God and I am to live generously - loving others and offering myself in service every day. Putting Christ first in my life generates active compassion toward those in need. In the first chapter, James quickly calls me to action - to do less for myself and to do more for others.

I reflect on what it means to be a “doer of the word.” I enjoy Bible study and the reading of scripture, yet I remember that the Biblical teachings are given to me to be put into practice. I confess there are times when I read scripture or listen to a sermon and feel a sense of conviction, determined to change something in the way I live my life, yet once I leave my time of devotion or exit the sanctuary I forget my intentions. James encourages me to persevere so that I will not forget the word of God, but through grace put it into action. Acting on the truths of scripture will bless me and others.

James causes me to reflect on times I have heard the word of God as well as times I have acted on the word of God. Even though I know the teachings of Jesus, there are instances when I do not put His words into action. When I reflect on my spiritual journey toward maturity, what action verbs from James’ passage most align with my progress - words like hear, look, do, act, continue, persevere, or remember? Or perhaps my spiritual progress more closely aligns with

verbs such as - leave, forget, ignore, overlook, or deceive. Is my relationship with Jesus Christ the highest priority in my life? Am I allowing Jesus to transform me, increase my compassion, and spur me on to do good deeds?

Ask: As I look back over the past weeks and examine my actions, how have I put God's word into action and spent time doing good? What opportunities might I have to do good and serve others in my upcoming day?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Holy Lord, forgive me for the times I hear Your words of truth yet consequently forget them in my daily life. Teach me to look more intently at Your perfect law and proceed to put Your precepts into action. I ask for the gift of Your sanctifying grace to grow a heart of compassion in me so that I am quick to respond to Your Word with generous good deeds. Come into my heart and examine the barriers which prevent Your transforming Word from breaking through so that my resultant behavior is noticeable. Grant me perseverance to grow in grace and holiness, soften my heart and increase mercy and love as only You are able to do. Amen.