Joining the Feast

Year B
Fall 2018
Proper 17—Reign of Christ Sunday
What you will find in *Joining the Feast!*

**The Church Year Calendar**
Describes the important church festivals and special days for the coming season. It provides theological reflections on their importance for the church’s life and our own lives.

**The Shape of the Season**
 Presents an overview of the focus scriptures for the weeks in the coming season. It discusses the biblical and theological significance of each passage.

**Joining Worship and Learning: Making the Connections and Time with Children**
A helpful feature in this section of *Joining the Feast* is the inclusion of the stories on the focus scriptures from the multi-age course. These stories can be used in the children’s time during worship. Notice that some songs are used by several age levels but not in the same session. If you are interested in including a prayer, poetry, or artwork from an age level, speak with the leader in advance. May your congregational worship be enlivened by these suggestions to join worship and learning.

**Joining Mission and Learning**
Help the participants in the *Feasting on the Word Curriculum* connect with existing service opportunities in your congregation. Review this list, and offer suggestions to the leaders. Give this chart to the chair of the mission or outreach committee so that the work of the committee can be strengthened through the church school.

**Litanies and Prayers**
A selection of poetic prayers and responsive readings that helps worship leaders connect the church’s educational and worship experiences to find fullness and blessing in the praise and service of God.

**Children’s Bulletins**
A fun activity page is provided weekly to give children a sense of belonging and help them feel welcome in the worship experience. These special children's bulletins connect their worship experience to the education themes.
Joining the Feast

We invite you to “Join the Feast”!

Our exciting Feasting on the Word Curriculum offers great opportunities for the local church. Pastors, educators, and participants can experience the wonder of God’s nourishing word to us. For church schools, for study groups, and in preparation for teaching and preaching, the resources here will deepen and strengthen our faith. We have an amazing “feast” set before us! We desire and can find further understanding in our faith—of who God is and what God has done!

Joining the Feast helps pastors, educators, and worship leaders plan for education and worship. We want to assist in reflecting on how to incorporate scriptural and seasonal emphases across different parts of the church’s life.

Joining the Feast can be shared in education and worship committees. It enables important biblical themes to be integrated into the church’s study and worship experiences. A chart of suggestions for ways educational emphases can be used in worship is a feature of what follows here. Church school teachers can discuss these materials with each other to enhance education for all age levels in the church. Pastors who plan their lectionary preaching will find taking an overall look at this church season to be useful for their preparations. In all this, we want to join teaching and preaching. We want the church’s educational and worship experiences to find fullness and blessing in the praise and service of God!

An important goal for pastors and educators in the church is to connect or join the church’s educational experience with the church’s worship experience. People of all ages who participate in church school study can find their Christian faith enhanced when the Scriptures read and proclaimed in worship reinforce and expand what they have been considering in their educational time. Education and worship can be mutually supportive in helping God’s word in Scripture come alive in the Sunday morning experience. Consideration of the same lectionary reading in preaching can deepen the insights gained in church school.

Pastors who want to build on what has been done in education welcome this Feasting on the Word Curriculum as a way to prepare congregational members for directions into which the sermon can lead. Those who participate in the education time will find the insights gained there enhanced by preaching which considers the same passage and brings God’s word to bear in fresh and nourishing ways. So as we “Join the Feast,” joining the church’s educational and worship dimensions can bring to life the richness of God’s word in Scripture.

Donald K. McKim
Feasting on the Word Curriculum: Teaching the Revised Common Lectionary

Feasting on the Word Curriculum is an exciting, ecumenical, downloadable curriculum resource. It incorporates the uniqueness of the Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary series (12 volumes; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008–11), which provides four different approaches to each of the biblical passages for each of the lectionary readings in the Revised Common Lectionary.

Feasting on the Word Curriculum: Teaching the Revised Common Lectionary is designed for classroom use in the church among various age levels, including children, youth, and adults. Adaptable to a variety of learning settings and teaching styles, this innovative curriculum resource integrates the Feasting on the Word commentary style to explore one of the lectionary passages in ways suitable for all participants. This approach connects worship and faith formation like no other lectionary curriculum ever has.

Each age level of Feasting on the Word Curriculum provides comprehensive, accessible, biblical background for teachers from four perspectives.

What? (Exegetical) Basic information about the backgrounds and meanings of Scripture is essential to understanding. This stream asks, “What?” What are the important things to know about the contexts, language, and settings of the biblical passage?

Where? (Theological) To understand the meanings of passages, we also need to ask, “Where?” Where is God in this passage? Where are God’s will and activities being expressed? Theological questions about where God’s word comes to us in the passage are significant.

So What? (Pastoral) The implications of the passage for our Christian lives make the biblical passage come alive. We ask, “So what?” What does this passage mean to me? What does it mean for my relationship with God and other people?

Now What? (Homiletical) Biblical passages shape our understandings and lives in the church. They connect us with needs in God’s world. So we ask, “Now what?” This prompts us to reflect on how our life and the church’s life can live out what the passage is saying.
The Church Year Calendar

This segment of *Feasting on the Word Curriculum* extends from the fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost (September 2) until the end of the church year with Reign of Christ Sunday (November 25). It coincides with the fall season, the time when many church programs begin again after modified programming through the summer months. As such, it is a time of special vigor in the church with full and active engagements in the church’s ministries, including those of study and education.

The church year calendar for this season is not marked by special liturgical days during this long period of Ordinary Time. Instead, there are Sundays marked by denominational emphases of varying focuses. The day that embraces the most commonality is World Communion Sunday (October 7), when Christians throughout the world celebrate the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. All churches are reminded of our common unity in Jesus Christ, who is the host of the Supper. We live with the reality that there is “the church and the churches.” We function in a denominationally diverse country—and world. Yet, there is the one Christ, who, as Christians, we all worship. As we recognize the distinctiveness of each congregation in the churches we pass on the way to worship on Sunday mornings, we need to look beyond the church buildings to the reason each exists: to worship the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. On World Communion Sunday, the church’s unity in the midst of its diversity can be celebrated. The Sunday also marks the reminder to work for the unity of the body of Christ in every way we can in local communities.

A second Sunday of note for millions of Christians is Reformation Sunday. The day reminds us of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, to which many denominations trace their theological origins. Reformation Sunday acquaints church members with our heritage and should be a day of gratitude. It can also point toward the engagement of our theological
beliefs with daily life, a prime concern for the sixteenth-century Reformers, including Martin Luther (1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–1564). Revisiting this history can provide roots that refresh our faith and energize our Christian lives today and in days to come.

In the United States, the Thanksgiving holiday falls on the Thursday prior to Reign of Christ Sunday. This holiday, though secular in character, does hearken back to religious roots with the New England Pilgrims who set aside a day of thanksgiving to thank God for providential blessings and to express gratitude. Inadvertently, the proximity of a day of thanksgiving to the celebration of the reign of Christ, who is God’s great gift of salvation, provides a model of the Christian life. Our whole Christian existence and experience are captured in the rhythm of grace and gratitude. God gives grace, and we express gratitude. At the end of the church year, we express gratitude in thanksgiving (the holiday and every day) for the gift of grace God has given in Jesus Christ. Grace/gratitude, gratitude/grace is like the physical process of breathing in and out. It is the rhythm of our lives.

As we end the church year, we do so in gratitude, even as we celebrate the present and future reign of Jesus Christ. In him, the future is secure. We hear the words: “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:8). Amen!

Donald K. McKim
The Shape of the Season

This period of the church year in *Feasting on the Word Curriculum* begins with two selections from the book of James before following Mark’s Gospel for most of the rest of the time. The two James passages present very practical dimensions of the Christian life into the beginning of this season, before elements of the life and teachings of Jesus are studied. As such, the James materials orient us to implications of what it means to be allied with and to believe in the Jesus revealed in Mark’s Gospel.

A clear statement of the need for Christian faith to be expressed in actions is found in *James 1:17–27.* The umbrella statement for this mandate is in the injunction “Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers” (v. 22). This implies a full range of expressions of Christian faith in meaningful and significant ways, which have very real outcomes in everyday life. The advice to “be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger” (v. 19) is one example of this directive. James says that “doers who act” (v. 24) will be blessed. In the broadest sense, he says that “religion that is pure and undefiled before God” is “to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world” (v. 27). This shows the heart of the faith to be lived out in concern for those in need—especially the most vulnerable in society: orphans and widows—and to live in such a way that one’s true focus is on what God wants instead of living according to the world’s agenda with its defilements.

In Reformation times, Martin Luther was afraid the book of James would be construed as teaching that salvation is by works. But James’s emphasis is not on being saved by doing good works. It is on Christians letting their faith or belief be embodied in what they do as “doers of the word.” This is a crucial dimension of true faith.

This theme is continued in *James 2:1–17,* which contains the notable statement that “faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (v. 17). We cannot say we have

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1. Passages in bold are those that are the focus scriptures in the *Feasting on the Word Curriculum.*
faith “but do not have works” (v. 14). If one only gives well wishes to those in need, and yet does “not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?” (v. 16). The earlier portion of this passage warns against showing partiality in the community. To show partiality is to violate “the royal law,” which is to “love your neighbor as yourself” (v. 8). It is to violate God’s law. This is dangerous since “judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy.” If we do not extend love and mercy to others, none will be extended to us. But Christians are to live so that “mercy triumphs over judgment” (v. 13). The book of James perceptively and in pointed ways shows the shape of the Christian life as a visible life of faith in which what we believe impacts how we live. This is also consistent with Paul’s focus when he wrote that “the only thing that counts is faith working through love” (Galatians 5:6).

The transition into weeks of studies in Mark’s Gospel begins with Peter’s declaration about Jesus in Mark 8:27–38. In the midst of his ministry, Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” (v. 27). After receiving their responses, Jesus turned the questions to his disciples, in a personal way: “But who do you say that I am?” Peter made the confession: “You are the Messiah” (v. 29). This central affirmation and its parallels in other Gospels (Matthew 16:13–20; Luke 9:18–20) have been seen as the theological foundation for the church: faith that Jesus is God’s Messiah. The confession marks Jesus’ uniqueness as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and the promised Deliverer for Israel. Yet, as the Gospels make clear, Jesus was a messiah who did not provide military or social triumphs over hated Romans or oppressors. Instead, he taught and lived a message of God’s love, which does not look to the world to be an overwhelming display of might or power.

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We do not know the ways in which God’s work is being done in this world, even outside of our normal ways of thinking—that God’s work is done only in the church or by the church. There is a wider work of God that goes on, and this Jesus does not condemn—but blesses.

A month of studies in Mark 10 focuses on Jesus’ teachings and actions. In Mark 10:2–16, Jesus teaches about divorce and blesses children. The divorce passage has always been a thorny one because it touches on many dimensions of human life, culture, and personality. Clearly, Jesus sets forth the divine intention in marriage in the joining of two people. The Mosaic law permits divorce, due to the “hardness” of the human heart—in whatever ways this is shown. The Christian tradition has held these dimensions alongside other scriptural considerations. While divorce is not the truest aim for a relationship, it occurs; and people can go on to continue to serve God, seeking even another chance to enter into a marriage relationship. In the next passage, Jesus blesses children—those who, of course, stand to suffer if their parents divorce. For this and other reasons, they are the most vulnerable members of society. Jesus’ blessing the children represents his concern and care for those who are the most helpless. No wonder Jesus was “indignant” when his disciples “spoke sternly to them” (vv. 13–14). Instead, Jesus welcomes the children, encourages them, and says that it is “to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.” Indeed, we must “receive the kingdom of God as a little child” or we “will never enter it” (v. 15). Adults must assume a posture of vulnerability, an openness to trust and receive Jesus, to enter into the kingdom. By focusing on children as the model citizens of the kingdom, Jesus cares for them and indicates that adults need to recognize their own helplessness and receive Jesus’ blessings in order to enter God’s kingdom.

The story of the rich man is told in Matthew’s and Luke’s Gospels, as well as in Mark 10:17–31. It is a clear statement about the demands of discipleship in following Jesus and about the relation of riches to the kingdom of God. Despite the rich man’s observance of the law, he was lacking the observance of what God desired most: singlehearted devotion to following Jesus, to the point of jettisoning possessions and providing for the poor. Jesus indicated that it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom, it being “easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle”
(v. 25). It is hard, but not impossible. For with God, “all things are possible” (v. 27). This is a word of hope, since riches and wealth are, in a general sense, the things that can drive a wedge between all of us and our following Jesus. Since the days of the early church, it has been recognized that Jesus’ command to the rich man was not a wholesale prescription for all Christians to sell all they have. But the word of warning about the dangers of those things we love too much—wealth of whatever sort—stands clearly to us all.

The requests of James and John to receive the prominent seats of glory in the coming kingdom may seem presumptuous to us (Mark 10:35–45). Yet, they may express the longings of our own hearts as well. We all like the spotlight and the glory! However, Jesus injected a dose of reality by asking these disciples if they were “able to “drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with” (v. 38). Incredibly, they said, “We are able” (v. 39). But Jesus indicated that their request was not his to grant. The seats at his right and left hands in glory are “for those for whom it has been prepared” (v. 40). Then Jesus pointed out the nature of true greatness: “whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all” (v. 44). This is lived out in Jesus’ own life, as he said: “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (v. 45). Jesus exemplified what it truly means to be great in God’s sight by living a life of service and giving—even to the point of giving up his life.

One way Jesus served others was by his healing ministry. In Mark 10:46–52 we read of blind Bartimaeus who was healed by Jesus’ word. The blind man cried out for mercy (not healing), undeterred by those who would silence him. Bartimaeus responded when Jesus called him to come to him. He conveyed his request for sight to the One he believed could grant this request. And Jesus healed him. Jesus said, “Go; your faith has made you well” (v. 52). Bartimaeus’s response is to follow Jesus “on the way.” In a nutshell, this healing is a paradigm for Christian experience. Faith is the means through which Jesus heals us of all that hinders us from the fullness of life God wants us to have, which includes our relationship of love and trust in God. Faith is the means to salvation, especially the salvation given as a gift in Jesus himself. Our faith does not cause our salvation or healing. It is the means God uses to give us the gift of salvation and healing. Like Bartimaeus, our cry is for mercy. Jesus, the divine physician, heals us and opens the way to new life for us, now and forever. This connection of the story of Bartimaeus with the story of salvation is especially appropriate on Reformation Sunday.

The beginning of the story of Ruth reminds us of the devotion Ruth showed to her mother-in-law, Naomi, after the death of Naomi’s husband, Elimelech (Ruth 1:1–18). Despite Naomi’s entreaties, Ruth (a Moabite) went with her mother-in-law back to the land of Judah (Bethlehem) and would not leave her. She showed a single-hearted devotion to Naomi, even as she lived as a stranger in a strange land. Ruth adopted the God of Naomi and her faith. In the Jewish rabbinic tradition, Ruth is seen as an example of hesed, or faithfulness and loyalty, built on a relationship of love. Ruth’s love and care for Naomi meant she took responsibility for her mother-in-law and pledged never to leave or forsake her. The result of Ruth’s subsequent marriage to Boaz is that she is part of the lineage in which Jesus eventually was born (Matthew 1:5). Ruth’s story is part of God’s covenant faithfulness in sending Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah. On this Sunday near All Saints’ Day, Ruth—the outsider, the Moabite—enters the kingdom as one of God’s saints.

The return to studies in Mark picks up with Mark 12:38–44. Here Jesus denounces the scribes who, in their pride and hypocrisy, are condemned for devouring “widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers” (v. 40). The “double life” of professing religious faith while engaging in harmful practices is a besetting danger. This is the split between profession and practice, between “talking the talk” and “walking the walk.” The term hypocrite comes from the Greek word meaning “actor” or one who is playing a role or hiding one’s true
self to give another, outward appearance. Those who are given special standings as religious leaders and who do not live in accord with the precepts of their religious faith are among those Jesus says will be condemned. In contrast, the passage continues with the story of the humble widow who put into the treasury all she had and was said to have contributed more than all those who gave out of their rich abundance. Here was a poor woman who gave her whole livelihood to contribute to the temple treasury, a sincere example of full trust and commitment. This she did without ostentation or show, in contrast to the scribes Jesus had denounced. The widow expressed a devotion unmatched by those who gave more actual money—but did so without the engagement of their hearts and lives that the widow exemplified. The attitude and motives for giving are more important than the actual amount contributed.

Jesus foretells the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in Mark 13:1–8. While tensions with religious leaders and their institutions continued, Jesus looked beyond the present to the coming time when “not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down” (v. 2). Mark 13 has been called the “Little Apocalypse” because of its predictions about the future and the ultimate coming of the Son of Man. In looking to this end of history, Jesus warned about those who may try to lead his followers astray by claiming to be him, and he issued predictions about “wars and rumors of wars” (v. 7) to occur prior to the end times. Throughout history, people have tried to pin historical events to the things Jesus said in the first eight verses of Mark 13. They have sought a “sign that all these things are about to be accomplished” (v. 4). Yet such efforts have proven futile. There have been those who have sought to gather others to themselves by saying, “I am he,” and they have led many “astray” (v. 6). A better perspective is to take Jesus’ words as being important to hear in every stage of history—not just as a prelude to the apocalyptic period. Since we do not know when history will end, when Jesus will return, or in what ways the end of history will unfold, these apocalyptic warnings point us to the continuing need for vigilance, faithfulness, and fidelity to the gospel, so we will not be led astray. When we hear of wars and rumors of war, we ought to remember Jesus’ word and focus on what is sure, which is the ultimate triumph of God in Christ at the end of history. Jesus’ words are not meant to be a blueprint for historical events leading up to the end. Rather, they are
continuing words of warning and exhortation, to keep us focused on a single devotedness to God’s kingdom here and now and to God’s coming reign.

This vision of the eternal kingdom established by the eternal God through the eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ, is the end toward which we move. It is the purpose and meaning of human history.

A breathtaking vision of Jesus Christ as “the ruler of the kings of the earth” (Revelation 1:5) and the eternal praise that will be given to him is in Revelation 1:4b–8, the passage for Reign of Christ Sunday. The writer of Revelation introduces the book with powerful descriptions of the ultimate reign of God in Jesus Christ. Those redeemed are they who are loved and “freed” from sins by the blood of Christ and who are made to become “a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father” (vv. 5–6). The redemption brought by Jesus Christ in this world has its effects into the next world, where Christ receives glory and exercises “dominion forever and ever” (v. 6). This passage also designates God as the “Alpha and the Omega,” the “first and the last” (as letters of the Greek alphabet; cf. 21:6; 22:13). God the creator (Alpha) is also the One who brings the consummation of human history (Omega). The eternal nature of God is highlighted as the One “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (1:8). This vision of the eternal kingdom established by the eternal God through the eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ, is the end toward which we move. It is the purpose and meaning of human history. The magnificent news for the church today is that God in Christ brings us into the people of God to participate in God's purposes in history. God's ultimate triumph is sure. The end of history pulls us forward. So all our efforts for the gospel of Jesus Christ will find their meaning and fulfillment in our eternal praise of the one who has “glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (v. 6).

Donald K. McKim
Making the Connections

This section of *Joining the Feast* includes the focus scripture story for each Sunday that can be told during the children’s time during worship. Notice that some songs are used by several age levels but not in the same session. If you are interested in including a prayer, poetry, or artwork from an age level, speak with the leader in advance. May your congregational worship be enlivened by these suggestions to join worship and learning.

Carol A. Wehrheim

September 2, 2018  James 1:17–27  Proper 17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connections</th>
<th>Age-Level Source</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Worship</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Begin prayer times throughout the season: <em>The Lord (God) be with you. And also with you.</em></td>
<td>(K)1–2, multi-age</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learn about church year with diagram on Color Pack page</td>
<td>3–4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Music</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>“I’ve Got the Joy, Joy, Joy”</td>
<td>(K)1–2, multi-age</td>
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<tr>
<td>“You Shall Love the Lord Your God”</td>
<td>3–4, tween, multi-age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to and discuss “Fight with Tools” by the Flobots</td>
<td>youth</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Presentation of the Focus Scripture</strong></td>
<td>multi-age</td>
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<tr>
<td>Story from multi-age on next page</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sermon</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Consider meaning of widow and orphan in Jesus’ day</td>
<td>3–4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding “the Word” as Bible and as Jesus Christ</td>
<td>tween</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compare verses 22–25 from different Bible versions</td>
<td>youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visual</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green fabric, Christ candle</td>
<td>(K)1–2, 3–4, tween, multi-age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make bumper stickers about being doers of the Word</td>
<td>tween, multi-age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare a collage depicting genuine religion</td>
<td>adult</td>
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</table>
When the Christian church was just beginning, people gathered in each other’s homes to learn about Jesus and worship God. Church leaders and teachers wrote letters to these first Christians to teach them more about God’s word and being a follower of Jesus. These letters were read aloud to all who gathered. Some of these letters became part of the New Testament in the Bible.

Imagine you are a Christian who lived long ago as you listen to part of the letter written by a disciple named James:

Every good thing comes from God, the creator, who does not change. My brothers and sisters, be quick to listen, but slow to speak. Also be slow to become angry. An angry person doesn’t show God’s love. Stay away from unhealthy things and let the word of God deep inside you grow.

Be doers of God’s word and not hearers only. People who hear but don’t act are like people who look in the mirror and then forget what they look like. Instead, study God’s word and try to do what it says to do. Don’t listen and then forget, but do what you hear. You will be blessed in all that you do.
When the Christian church was just beginning, people gathered in each other’s homes to learn about Jesus and worship God. Church leaders and teachers wrote letters to them about following Jesus. This is part of the letter written by a teacher named James:

Every good thing comes from God, who does not change. My brothers and sisters, be quick to listen but slow to speak. Also be slow to become angry. An angry person doesn’t show God’s love. Stay away from unhealthy things, and let the word of God that is deep inside you grow.

Be doers of God’s word and not hearers only. People who hear but don’t act are like people who look in the mirror and then forget what they look like. Instead, study God’s word and try to do what it says to do. Don’t listen and then forget, but do what you hear. You will be blessed in all that you do.

Color the pictures of the doers. What could be done to fix the other situations?