

**Conversations on
 James 1:17–27**

Discuss this passage in light of the commentary below.

Idea! Listen to “Fight with Tools” by the Flobots. Discuss: In what ways does this song connect with James 1:17–27? What does the Flobots’ call for courage, dedication, passion, and conviction have to do with God’s call to be “doers of the word”?

WHAT is important to know?

One not doing the Word is deceiving him/herself. This is like a person who looks into a mirror and then goes away unmindful of his or her faith. What is this deception about? On a practical level, someone might say, “I really believe in Jesus; I really believe in the resurrection,” but then give no evidence of such faith in dealing with his or her neighbor (2:18–19). It is not enough merely to hear the word. James promises that hearers will be blessed *in their doing* (cf. Luke 11:28; 12:43; John 13:17). The mere hearer is deceived; the doer is blessed. (*Aaron L. Uitti*)

- ✧ In verse 17, how do you interpret the phrase “with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change”?
- ✧ Based on these verses, what keeps people who hear the Word from doing the Word?
- ✧ What can you imagine about a group to whom a letter like this was written?

WHERE is God in these words?

Historian Jeannine Olson noted Calvin’s contribution to modern society through his creation of welfare institutions. The city of Geneva during the Reformation period had many poor, widows, and orphans. Calvin himself came to Geneva as a French religious refugee. In his *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* (1541), Calvin established the General Hospital and designated the offices of deacon and deaconess to supervise citizens’ works of mercy as the “doers of the pure religion” in care of the poor. (*Haruko Nawata Ward*)

- ✧ How does the work of Calvin described above connect with this text?
- ✧ What more might James 1:17–27 help us understand about the nature of God?
- ✧ What does it mean that God “gave us birth by the word of truth” (v. 18)?

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

Actions Speak Louder Than Words. James counsels us to a practical morality that is quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger. What we do matters, and what comes out of our mouths can make a difference, for good and for ill. But our actions speak louder than our words. Words may touch our emotional life and help us anticipate what is going to happen. But our actions establish the structures of meaning that build our worlds. Through faithful activity we create and re-create ourselves in trustworthy ways and help build worlds worthy of trust. Actions add value to our words and give them life. In this way, morality has the practical aim of creating relevance, meaning, and integrity in the world. (*Archie Smith Jr.*)

- ✧ Why is it sometimes hard to be “quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger” (v. 19)?
- ✧ Recall an experience in your life when actions spoke louder than words. Why was this so?
- ✧ How do actions add value and give life to our words?

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

The justly famous definition of genuine religion at James 1:27 is juxtaposed against a religion that is “worthless” (1:26), “barren” (2:20), or even “dead” (2:26), so the stakes run high. In a kind of dialectic of Christian existence, James understands pure religion as being inclusive of both social ministry and personal morality. One’s relationship to God means showing mercy (2:13), striving for peace (3:18), helping the needy (2:15–16), loving the neighbor (2:8), and recognizing the social justice of a fair minimum wage (5:4). In terms of personal morality, it means keeping from the “stain” (Moffatt) and being “uncontaminated” (Jerusalem Bible). (*Peter Rhea Jones*)

- ✧ How does the “justly famous definition of genuine religion” compare to your understanding of religion?
- ✧ In what ways is social ministry evident in your discipleship?
- ✧ What role does personal morality play in your faith journey?

Holy God, help us to be your disciples who put our words into action in your world. Amen.