

TAKE TIME OUT – *Pastoral Retreat*

Half Acre, Horton Heath, Wimborne, Dorset, BH21 7JS
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Sunday Scriptures: 29th August 2021

Scriptures: NRSV

James 1:12-27 *Enduring the test of Temptation*

¹²Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him. ¹³No one, when tempted, should say, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil and He Himself tempts no one. ¹⁴But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it; ¹⁵then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when fully grown, gives birth to death. ¹⁶Do not be deceived, my beloved. ¹⁷Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸In fulfilment of His own purpose He gave us birth by the Word of Truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of His creatures. ¹⁹You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. ²¹Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted Word that has the power to save your souls. ²²But be doers of the Word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. ²³For if any are hearers of the Word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; ²⁴for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. ²⁵But 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. ²⁶If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. ²⁷Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this; to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Reflection:

James spells out what temptation is and where it originates from, namely our own desire that competes for our attention above all else that we might surrender to it. Temptation, by its very name warns us of lurking evil that will set us against God, His Word and His purpose. To give in to such temptation is to commit sin and committing sin results in the death of our soul, which is the essence of our being. God, being pure and good, cannot tempt us with evil, for evil cannot exist in His presence. Therefore, to give in to temptation is to create a hole in the protection of love that God has placed around us and allow Satan access to our very soul. Enduring the test of temptation requires self-control by which we keep ourselves pure in faith, our soul under the protection of God's grace, and gain the promise of eternal life. All that we have has been given to us by the loving grace of God; our gifts, talents, understanding and even our faith. The love of our heavenly Father does not change like the whims of the world, it is constant and sacrificial. Through His Son, Jesus, we have been given Truth, first-hand, not by hearsay, myth or legend, but directly from the spoken Word of God, as demonstrated by His teaching and example. There is no need for an interpreter or intermediary, Jesus has opened a direct line to our Father Creator enabling

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any who believe to enter into an intimate relationship with Him. James warns us not to be deceived by desire or worldly influence but to stand firm on the 'Word of Truth'.

What desire might be tempting us to surrender to it? Are we exercising self-control over our thoughts, feelings, words and actions? Have we opened up any holes in God's protective love around us that need repairing?

Attending to what others are saying is not always easy and largely depends on the content, tone and delivery of what is being said. Any public speaker is well aware of the limited concentration span of human beings! Our brain is constantly processing, evaluating, and sorting information from all our senses. Our attention can easily be distracted by a myriad of things: what to cook for dinner, the pile of laundry that needs doing, family relationships, work, finances, etc.etc.etc.. This is how we can often miss something important contained within the flow of words. Listening requires a certain amount of concentration and interaction with whom we are listening to. When someone is interrupted several inhibiting results occur. Firstly, the flow of thought as well as the speech of those speaking is stopped and as a result something important may be lost. Secondly, it demonstrates that those interrupting are thinking of how to respond instead of listening to what is being said and will therefore not 'hear'. We cannot take in what is being spoken if our mind is occupied elsewhere. Finally, both these reactions are likely to lead to misunderstanding and frustration in both the speaker and the listener, which in turn usually results in anger. When we become angry, the brain cannot process information or access it from its own stored files; hence we say and do things contrary to our nature and against the Word of God. The well-known saying, 'Act in haste, repent at leisure' comes to mind! James is pointing out this precise danger and challenging us to exercise self-control in listening attentively, speaking thoughtfully in a measured way, and controlling our emotions so as not to work against God. James urges us to keep ourselves pure by embracing the Word of God and living by its precepts, morals and social justice. We are to live in all humility and modesty, reflecting on what value we give to the ideas and perspectives spoken by others. Christians are charged with the pastoral care of one another, which requires honesty, sensitivity and empathy. In order to discern the Lord's presence in someone or something, we must first listen patiently to what is being said.

How good are we at truly listening to the thoughts, views and perspectives of others? What benefit do we gain or give if we know what God's Word says but choose not to apply it? If we are honest with ourselves, are we more likely to react, and even over-react, instead of responding in all humility?

We are challenged to be doers of God's Word that make a difference in the world. To know God and the Truth of His Word but say and do nothing with that knowledge is to give Satan a green light to subvert it. Jesus changes lives and God expects those whose lives have been changed to tell others of their experience that they too might be saved. God created us with a soul, a spirit that knows Truth from lie and good from evil. It is our soul that pricks our conscience when we behave contrary to the Word, will and purpose of our Creator God. The more we open our hearts to the Word of God and take note of the example of Jesus, the more likely we are to discern right and wrong. In this way the Holy Spirit will be able to achieve the fullest change in our attitudes, behaviour and witness. James instructs us not to prey on those weaker or less privileged than ourselves. We should not manipulate our own way or abuse the good nature of others like selfish bullies. We are to look in the mirror

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of Scripture to find ourselves and reflect the image of Jesus in the world. God has given us the ability to control our own desires for the benefit of those around us, if we so choose. God has made us capable of reflecting on what has been, what is, and what may yet come, to influence our behaviour for the benefit of the whole Body of Christ, if we so choose. When the commandments of God are forgotten and the teachings of Jesus are ignored, temptation will have its way, injustices will occur and sin will run a mock throughout His people. Righteous anger stands on the Word of God and destroys the machinations of evil – but when selfish anger erupts, due to a bruised ego by not achieving our own desires, the family of God, His Church, internally combusts. To keep the peace, promote harmony and develop inner purity, both individual and corporate discipline must be applied. We all get things wrong and let ourselves and each other down sometimes and we are all in need of forgiveness! However, humility in listening, to God and each other, keeps us moving forward as one body in Christ to build His Kingdom for His glory.

Will we choose to stand in faith and live in righteousness? Are we disciplined in resisting temptation and refusing to be used as tools for evil? Have we bridled our tongues to honour God's Word and keep ourselves unstained by the world?

We have the potential to change for the good of God's creation and His people, if we so choose. John Wesley put it succinctly into four 'All's'. "All need to be saved; All can be saved; All can know they are saved; All can be saved to the uttermost". We are capable of changing ourselves, changing each other, and changing the world, if we take time to be holy, follow the example of Jesus and remain unstained by the world. By looking only to God we will keep moving forward in building His Kingdom of righteousness. **Amen!**

Hymn/Song: Take Time to be Holy – MP 625

Take time to be holy, speak oft with your Lord;

Abide in Him always, and feed on His Word.

Make friends of God's children, help those who are weak;

Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek.

Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;

Spend much time in secret with Jesus alone –

By looking to Jesus, like Him you shall be!

Your friends in your conduct His likeness shall see.

Take time to be holy, let Him be your guide;

And run not before Him, whatever betide;

In joy or in sorrow still follow your Lord,

And, looking to Jesus, still trust in His Word.

Take time to be holy, be calm in your soul;

Each thought and each temper beneath His control;

Thus led by His Spirit to fountains of love,

You soon shall be fitted for service above.

Poem: STUMBLING ©Janice Morgan 2021-March

If I stumble who will catch me and save me from a fall?

If I shout in fear of falling who will hear my panicked call?

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Will a friend who walks beside me, grab my hand or simply flee?
May God help me!

When life is good I'm full of joy and generous with my giving
But when things turn bad I'm full of woe and not very forgiving
Will those I trust to hold me, hold me up or simply flee?
May God help me!

As I read the Word of God my mind is calm and full of grace
But then I deny mistakes and justify in order to save face
Will love come to correct me, or will lovers simply flee?
May God help me!

When I live and work for Jesus, my soul seems full and complete
When I live for selfish desires my heart grows dark and full of deceit
Will those who truly know me, help me change or simply flee?
May God help me!

Will all my life be lived in wrestling with the devil's deceptions?
Will I ever be able to break free from all life's subtle temptations?
What faith is there in me? Will I trust or simply flee?
May God help me!

There are so many things in life that cause my feet to trip and stumble
In all life's snares and cares and tares, only ONE can save me from a tumble
Jesus has come to save me, and God will never ever flee!
God helps me!

Prayer:

Father God, help me to endure temptation, in whatever guise it comes, and win the prize of eternal life with You; Lord Jesus Christ, help me to fight against the deceptions of the devil with the Word of God, as You did in the wilderness; Holy Spirit, dwell in me with the wisdom to discern the evil manipulations of Satan, both within the Body of Christ and without; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, teach me to be holy that I might live in Truth and righteousness all the days of my life. **Amen!**