

Rhythms of Grace #9

Learning: the lifelong journey *w/c 1 November 2026*

"The journey to happiness involves finding the courage to go down into ourselves and take responsibility for what's there: all of it."
(Richard Rohr)

In the sermon on Sunday, I focussed on the first of our readings: Psalm 1. In reflecting on the psalm, we noted its focus on our right walking, our rootedness in God and in particular, the need for connection with the living water which the gospels reveal as coming from Jesus himself. I ended with Malcolm Guite's reflection on the psalm: *Beatus Vir*. You can find it at https://malcolmguite.wordpress.com/2020/05/07/beatus-vir-a-reflection-on-psalm-1/

For this study, we turn primarily to our second reading from the letter of James. He is writing – as the opening notes – to the young churches within the Jewish communities across the ancient world. Everywhere from Rome to modern day Iran, from southern Egypt to modern Turkey.

Read James 1:19–25

It is worth reading to the end of the chapter; verse 25 has talked of our 'doing' the law. Verses 26 and 27 then put some meat on this particular bone. The close of verse 27 takes us back to the opening of Psalm 1: the avoidance of sin and wickedness; for James, just 'pollution'.

For us what might be equivalents to the idea of *"looking after widows and orphans in their distress"*? Why do you think James avoids overtly religious language and puts it all in such simple, practical terms?

We often label people as quick-tempered. Less often perhaps would we categorise them as 'slow to anger'. It is clear that, when necessary, we should be angry but that we must only reach that position after due reflection, at the right time. Paul also had thoughts on our anger – see Ephesians 4:26. **Given such guidance, how do we learn to be angry in the right way?**

Writing on this passage, Tom Wright notes that *"James seems to have been facing the same problem that every generation since has done too – that of nominal belief – people who enjoy what they hear in church but don't let it make any real difference."* **How do we ensure that our faith doesn't slip away when we walk out through the church door? How might it become the very essence of who we are, not just a learned practice?**

For James, it is not sufficient that we turn our back on evil, we have to embrace the good. He uses the image of God's word being planted within us. Isaiah 55:10–11 paints a similar picture; mirroring Jeremiah's idea (31:33) of God writing his law on our hearts. **Why is it important that God's word and wisdom is within us rather than being an externally imposed code?**

We may see our faces in a mirror or screen many times a day. For those in James' time it would have been a rare occurrence – unless perhaps you were among the most wealthy in society. You might even forget what you looked like. James writes of believers forgetting – in a metaphorical sense – what they are like. **What can we learn from this idea?**

"Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn."
(Benjamin Franklin)