

Daily Readings

Please note: We begin the year by focusing our attention on the gospel of Mark. We are now half way through Mark. The rest of Mark's gospel focuses on the final weeks of Jesus life before the crucifixion. This is week six of our reading from Mark.

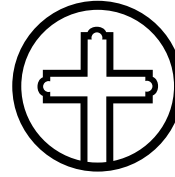
Monday, February 16 — *Read Mark 9:30-50.* Mark begins this section with Jesus again foretelling his death and resurrection. It is immediately followed by the disciples' argument over who is the greatest. Mark's message here is that the disciples are missing the point – the Kingdom of God is not defined by greatness, but by servanthood. Jesus reminds them, **“Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.”** In what areas of your life are you measured by servanthood?

Tuesday, February 17 – *Read Mark 10:1-12.* In chapter 10, the attention of Mark's gospel now turns to Jesus' journey to Jerusalem in the region of Judea. In the process, Jesus was confronted by Pharisees over the issue of divorce. They are using the letter of the law to justify the manner of divorce in their culture. Divorce was a dehumanizing process where women in particular were exposed to economic and social ruin. Jesus points to the value that God puts on each human life and how relationships should support who we are as God has created us to be. In what way have you used the letter of the law to support selfish ambition? Where is God calling you to ask forgiveness today?

Wednesday, February 18 – *Read Mark 10:13-16.* In this passage, Jesus blesses little children, claiming, **“...for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.”** Are you willing to submit to God as a child? Spend at least one hour today seeing your life through the eyes of a child. What did you see?

Thursday, February 19 – *Read Mark 10:17-31.* In Jesus' discussion with the rich young ruler, he warned of the dangers of riches. Then Jesus promised a hundredfold return to those who have sacrificed for Christ and the gospel. What have you sacrificed for Christ and the gospel? Even the poorest among us is rich by global standards. Is your wealth standing in the way of following Jesus?

Friday, February 20 – *Read Mark 10:32-45.* Here Mark shares with us another prediction by Jesus of his coming death and resurrection. Again, it is followed by an argument over power and authority. This time, it is James and John who want to know if they can sit at the right and left of Jesus in glory. Again, Jesus reminds them of the servant call of God's kingdom. When you read this passage, do you hear the servant call on your life? How can you make church, family, work and community a reflection of Christ's call to be servant of all?



TRIETSCH

STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, February 15, 2009

Love at Last Sight (Week 2)

Second Look — Seeing Conflict Clearly

Conflict finds its way into every relationship sooner or later. Effectively dealing with conflict can strengthen our closest relationships and help us grow in these relationships in ways we could have never imagined.

James 3:4-6

A bit in the mouth of a horse controls the whole horse. A small rudder on a huge ship in the hands of a skilled captain sets a course in the face of the strongest winds. A word out of your mouth may seem of no account, but it can accomplish nearly anything—or destroy it!

It only takes a spark, remember, to set off a forest fire. A careless or wrongly placed word out of your mouth can do that. By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony to chaos, throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke and go up in smoke with it, smoke right from the pit of hell.

James 4:1-3

Where do you think all these appalling wars and quarrels come from? Do you think they just happen? Think again. They come about because you want your own way, and fight for it deep inside yourselves. You lust for what you don't have and are willing to kill to get it. You want what isn't yours and will risk violence to get your hands on it.

You wouldn't think of just asking God for it, would you? And why not? Because you know you'd be asking for what you have no right to. You're spoiled children, each wanting your own way.

The Word from the Bible, the Message

The Book of James

It is important to understand the intent and purpose of the book of James to benefit from its teachings. The writer of James is not concerned with developing doctrine or theological claims. It is a collection of moral exhortations on the practice of the Christian life. To this end, James addresses a collection of ethical and moral issues as instruction for the early followers of Christ. This collection includes things the follower of Christ should do or not do, attitudes they should adopt and others they should reject. The mood of the letter is imperative and its purpose practical.

Some scholars consider James a letter of sorts to address particular problems in a particular locale. James is primarily a collection of practical instructions that could apply to most every church, family or organization. While these instructions are almost 2,000 years old, they are just as relevant for today's reader. While the society of the 1st century Roman Empire is quite different to the culture of a metropolitan suburb, the human nature to which James speaks seems to always

stay the same.

Outside the opening salutation, there is little in the book to indicate that it was intended as a personal communication. Instead, the author has merely collected and edited traditional materials for circulation among churches throughout the world.

James 3:4-6

The opening verses of chapter 3 turn to a new subject without apparent transition from chapter 2. The author has previously mentioned controlling the tongue in 1:19 and 26. Included in his remarks is the importance of listening before we speak. He now develops and applies the theme more fully. His main point — control the tongue, for through it, you also control the whole person. The second part of the argument (verses 6-12) is entirely negative. Not only is the tongue practically impossible to control, but the unbridled tongue leads to great disaster and self-perpetuating evil.

In verses 4 and 5, James includes two obvious examples to illustrate how the tongue, though small, is related to the control of the whole person. A bridle bit in the mouth of a horse controls its actions. Similarly, the small rudder of a great ship guides its direction at the will of the pilot. Clearly, James is guiding the reader to an understanding of how speech guides and steers our lives.

In verse 6, he makes the transition to a discussion about the inability to control the tongue. He uses the metaphor of fire to illustrate how the tongue works. He warns that a small fire or spark carelessly thrown away can set a whole forest ablaze. How many times have we seen careless words lead to great pain and anguish?

James 4:1-3

This chapter covers a wide range of subjects and appears to be loosely organized. But the basic theme running throughout is submission to God. This thought is brought into clear focus in verses 7-10, with the accent on God's exaltation of the humble in verse 10. In 2:14-26 the exhortation was aimed at those who think that religion consists in mere belief without good deeds. Chapter 4 is directed against those who are morally lax and still hold to worldly pleasures.

James begins this section with a word about the human tendency to focus on unmet needs and desires. The strife mentioned in verses 1-2 stands in contrast to righteousness and peace in 3:18. The author uses strong words to make his point: wars, fighting, and even killing. James does not detail the needs or desires that go unchecked; neither does he give us much instruction on how to deal with them. We assume that these unmet needs are selfish desires, but James does not rule out hurts, insecurities or fears.

No matter what the case, an honest assessment of our unmet needs, coupled with faithful submission to God, frees us to deal with the problem at hand rather than attacking those we love.

It has already been said that God freely bestows gifts on those who ask in faith (1:5-6). Now the negative form of that teaching is stated: No one who asks wrongly — that is, simply to gratify passions — can receive anything. Here it is not lack of faith but wrong intention which cuts off the receiver from the gift (1:8).

Ten Rules for a Successful Marriage

By Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, from Gateway to Happiness

- 1) Keep your main goal on “giving” rather than “taking.” When your goal is to give your partner pleasure, you will always find opportunities to meet your goal. As a byproduct, you too will gain since people tend to reciprocate positive behavior.
- 2) Be careful to remain silent when your spouse insults you. By ignoring slights and insults, you will prevent many needless quarrels. The momentary unpleasantness will quickly pass.
- 3) Give up unrealistic expectations. People come into marriage with many expectations, which are not consciously expressed. By giving up unrealistic expectations, you will prevent frustration and anger. Don't expect your spouse to be perfect, and don't make comparisons.
- 4) Avoid labeling those things which are not to your liking as awful. Try to find a positive perspective to things.
- 5) Think of plans on how to motivate your spouse to want to do what you want him or her to do. If your first strategy is not effective, keep trying different strategies. Remember that tactful praise is a powerful motivator.
- 6) Realize the meaning of your communication is the response you actually get. Clarify your goals. If your method of communication is not achieving your goal, change your approach. By keeping an eye on the main goal, which is to have a happy marriage, you will not become side-tracked.
- 7) Be willing to compromise. Be willing to do something you would rather not do in return for similar behavior from your spouse.
- 8) Don't blame or condemn your spouse for mistakes. Plan on the best method to prevent the mistakes from re-occurring without arousing resentment or hurting your spouse's feelings.
- 9) Live in the present. Whatever went wrong in the past is over. Focus on improving the situation in the present.
- 10) Keep asking yourself, “What can I do to have a happy atmosphere in the house?”