

JAMES

MARK IT UP

James 1:26-27 **LEADER** Discussion Guide

Week of 3/20/22

Icebreaker: Have you ever known someone who was self-deceived or self-unaware (not you, of course)? What was the problem with their deception?

Getting Started: Read James 1:26-27 as a group.

Select 2-3 questions that you think will be most helpful for your discussion.

1. What comes to mind when you think of the word “religious”? Is it a good thing, bad thing, or something in between?

There’s really no right or wrong answer here, but here are some thoughts to consider. This is a word loaded with meaning and often in a negative way. People pride themselves in being “spiritual but not religious.” Religion is commonly viewed simplistically inside the church as a set of rules and human performances that are void of relationship with Jesus. That understanding is challenged at least a bit by this passage, though. There is a good form of religion, but it’s important to point out how the “religion” here is not to earn God’s favor but is a grateful response to God’s favor.

Application: Do you think of yourself as being religious? Why?

2. What do you think it means for a person to “not bridle his tongue”? How could this be a self-deception of the heart? (*Consult Matthew 12:33-37 for more insight.*)

A tongue that’s not bridled can include gossip, slander, boasting, swearing falsely, deceit, etc., etc. Self-deceit is likely anytime we underestimate the danger and damage of our words. Jesus spoke about our words being deeply connected to the condition of our hearts. What we say reflects the condition of our hearts.

Application: What helps you “bridle the tongue”? What situation or habit makes it most difficult for you to keep a tight rein on your words?

This requires a bit of vulnerability, so it could be a good question to answer first...or at least be ready to be the first to address it.

3. There is a religion that’s “pure and undefiled”! What is it about “orphans and widows” that would make them the focus of attention here?

These groups are near and dear to God's heart (see, for example, Deuteronomy 10:18, Psalm 146:9, Jeremiah 7:6). They are the most vulnerable of society and most likely to suffer "affliction."

Application: Who do you know who could fit into these or similar categories of people? How are they being cared for?

We likely know people who lack a strong family structure around them, who lack resources, and who are suffering in some form. Maybe this discussion can help your group brainstorm ways you could care for (the word translated by the ESV as "visit," means to care for and help) such people around you. In a way that James would have never imagined, we now have the ability to help those far outside our geographic area. Ministries like *Compassion International* and others are well known for helping vulnerable, at-risk populations around the world.

4. There are two parts to this commendable kind of religion and the second is "to keep oneself unstained from the world." What do you think this means?

This calls us to live lives that are pleasing to God in the midst of many things that are not pleasing to God! We are called repeatedly in Scripture to be "set apart," or holy (2 Tim 1:9-10), in our conduct.

Application: How does this idea hit you? Do you think of the "world" (i.e., culture, society, etc.) as something that can be harmful? What does it look like for us to live out what James is saying?

This is arguably becoming a more radical idea in people's perception. Generally speaking, people in the church (broadly speaking, not specifically at Calvary) are embracing attitudes and values and practices that conflict with Scripture but are celebrated in the culture. The second question here could bring a variety of responses as Christians across the centuries have had differing opinions on what it means to be "in the world but not of it" (see John 17:14-16). Regardless of what one thinks, James' words here call us to consider how we both meet the needs of those around us (caring for widows and orphans) while we also keep ourselves set apart from the world.

5. We've made it through chapter 1! What has been a highlight, challenge, or encouragement of this series for you so far?