



### 3. Listen, Speak, Act TRANSCRIPT OF VIDEO

My friend Sam Rufus who teaches “Creative Writing” often say this. “It’s true that a picture is worth a 1000-words, but, it takes words to say that!” Yes, words matter, more importantly my words and your words matter. Why? Because words can create or destroy worlds.

We are witnesses in recent times of how the utterances of influential men and their enablers who forward and retweet their words can lead people down paths of unimaginable and unacceptable actions. We find this ancient proverb so true even today. “*Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and they who indulge in it shall eat the fruit of death and life.*” (Proverbs 18:21)

Just like water which can be either a fount of life or a pool of death. Our words that flow out of our hearts and minds through our tongues or our social media devices have consequences.

As we journey with James the wisdom he imparted to the early followers of Christ remain timeless and applicable to us today. Here is his advice, “*My dear brothers and sisters, always be willing to listen and slow to speak. Do not become angry easily, because anger will not help you live the right kind of life God wants.*” (James 1:19-20)

I am sure we all want to live the right kind of life God wants. But, do we take James advice seriously? James begins by asking us to first listen and then take time to speak. For many of us, listening is just a step we take to react or to formulate our reply. Nothing else. But, we need to listen to “understand”. This involves taking some time before we respond.

After asking us to be willing to listen, James tells us to “Be slow to speak,” That is understand what is said and take time before you respond. That is an area I need to improve in, especially on social media when someone waves a red rag or pushes one of my hot buttons. I have both foolishly and angrily rushed in where angels fear to tread. In person or on a video call, I am much better in listening and taking my time to reply, than on WhatsApp. This is something, I intend to work on since reflecting on this passage of James.

James words sting when we read the next verse. “*Those who consider themselves religious*

*and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless.*” (James 1:26) This verse needs no explanation.

But, while James words sting, he doesn’t just condemn, he offers us counsel on how to

demonstrate pure religion. For that we must move from our being listeners and speakers to doers who act. James puts it this way. “*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*” (James 1:27)

There is both an inward dimension of keeping ourselves separated from the pollution of the world and an

outward one. That is, we begin by maintaining personal holiness. But, this personal holiness should not result in our separating ourselves from the world and becoming a hermit on a mountain. Instead, we must be involved in the trenches of injustice and distress helping people in need. This involves, in my view a dual intimacy – an intimacy with God and an intimacy with people.

The first and foremost step is intimacy with God or as Matthew put it, “*Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness*” (Matt 6:33a). Intimacy with God not only provides us all we need for our personal holiness but opens our eyes to the needs of others.

This dual Intimacy makes it possible to learn

about the material, physical, social

psychological and spiritual needs of others. Our intimacy with others and provisions received from God can help us make a little difference in their lives. That would be the best way to keep the “royal law” found in Scripture “*To love God and love our neighbour.*”

As we journey with James, may we all be patient listeners, who speak after understanding and reflection and then move on to act for the well-being of those in need.

May God bless us all, till we meet again.

## **CONNECT WITH US**

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