

3rd May, 2026

The paper-version Service



To Begin: Find a Bible and a comfortable place. If safe, light a candle and read prayerfully through the service. If you have access to worship music, choose a song and listen to it as you begin or read, or even sing, the song from this Sunday's Service.

Opening Prayer: Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Hymn:

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Save me from its guilt and power.

Not the labour of my hands
Can fulfill Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All could never sin erase,
Thou must save, and save by grace.

Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress,
Helpless, look to Thee for grace:
Foul, I to the fountain fly,
Wash me, Savior, or I die.

While I draw this fleeting breath,
When mine eyes shall close in
death,
When I soar to worlds unknown,
See Thee on Thy judgment throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.

The Sermon by Sarah Giles

Read James 1:19-27 and Matthew 5:21-26 – Listening and Living

Do you have a cookbook that's absolutely falling apart? Maybe it's been passed down through the family, full of recipes that feel like part of your heritage. Hold that picture in your mind.

Next, I'd like you to consider some books from my bookshelves. The first is a Nadiya Hussain cookbook I bought after enjoying her TV show. It's pristine: I've looked through it once and it's been on the shelf ever since. The second is our shelf of about 30 *Lonely Planet* travel books – mostly read, some highlighted, some bought for trips that never happened, some used and some only aspirational. The third is my battered copy of Judith Butcher's *Copy-editing*, a handbook I use for my work. It's got bashed corners, Post-Its sticking out, and has seen better days.

Which is most like the condition of your Bible? That's a taste of what James is getting at in this passage. We're going to look at three key points.

1: Be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry (verses 19–21).

As a linguistics student, I studied Paul Grice's conversational maxims: guidelines for how to convey information well. They can be summarised as 'don't waffle, tell the truth, stick to the point, and be clear'. These are useful, but only focus on speaking. James starts somewhere different: listening. To be quick to listen is to value what others have to say; to be slow to speak is to avoid assuming that your contribution is worth more than theirs. This isn't only good manners – it's about recognising the value of the other person, who is made in the image of God.

On anger, James explains that 'human anger does not produce the righteous life that God desires' (verse 20). Even our righteous anger is still human anger, and on its own it doesn't produce what God is looking for. James says to take our anger to God rather than letting it run away with us.

James tells us to 'humbly accept the word planted in us, which can save us' (verse 21). The Bible isn't just information we agree with intellectually; it's a seed planted in us that will save us if we nurture it and allow it to grow.

2: Don't just listen — do what it says (verses 22–25).

To return to the cookbook: you don't get a cake by just agreeing with the recipe. You need to buy the ingredients and follow the steps. Similarly, we're not saved by

just owning a Bible or even by reading it, but need to put our faith in Jesus and follow him.

Although we are saved by grace and don't need to earn God's forgiveness, James is clear that those who've accepted God's gift are expected to live in a way that reflects our love for the giver. Rich Mullins put it well: 'Faith without works is like a song you can't sing – it's about as useless as a screen door on a submarine.'

James warns we're prone to forgetting what we've read, like someone who glances in a mirror and walks away without washing their face. So let's pick one practical change for this week – a relationship to mend, a place to be more honest, someone to check in with – and put a reminder in our diaries now to help us follow through.

3: Show your faith is meaningful through love and self-control (verses 26–27).

These last two verses are challenging. James says considering ourselves to be religious without having a tight rein on our tongues is worthless – not because the rituals of religious practice are wrong, but because they're secondary to loving God and showing that in how we live.

How do we demonstrate love? Caring for widows and orphans (verse 27) means looking after people who are emotionally and economically vulnerable, and who aren't necessarily polite and well-behaved all the time. Bringing traumatised people into your family can be messy and difficult, and people who do that – such as foster carers and adoptive parents – need support teams that stick around when things get hard. More broadly, we're all called to look out for the suffering, the lonely and the vulnerable, because our faith isn't only personal. The early church was communal: 'all the believers were together and had everything in common' (Acts 2:44). We're made for community, designed to 'spur one another on towards love and good deeds' (Hebrews 10:24).

Being 'unpolluted by the world' doesn't mean staying clean by not participating in society; it means using good judgement and self-control rather than going with the flow.

To summarise, you could say that James's message is like a line from an Elvis song: 'a little less conversation, a little more action'. James says we shouldn't just read, we shouldn't just talk, we shouldn't only listen, we have to *do what the Bible says*.

5th Sunday of Easter: *Almighty God, who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ have overcome death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life: grant that, as by your grace going before us you put into our minds good desires, so by your continual help we may bring them to good effect; through Jesus Christ our risen Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen*

The Lord's Prayer: *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.*

Blessing to be declared over yourselves, St Andrews and The Good Shepherd, the communities around us and our whole nation. 'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.' (Numbers 6:24-26 NIV).

At the Church of the Good Shepherd:

- Tea and Chat and Bowls: May 20th at 2pm in Church Hall & Church.
- Coffee and Questions: May 27th at 10.30am in Church Hall.
- The Community Cupboard, 2:45pm every Thursday in Church.

For Further information:

This paper and all parish details are on the website at <https://www.parishofmedsteadandfourmarks.co.uk>