



# The Middle East Initiative

Pray.  
Learn.  
Engage.

## Being Doers

By Alison Stendahl and Gail Matheson

### Scripture

Study: James 1:12-27 and James 2:14-26

Reflection and Encouragement:  
Psalm 46 and Galatians 6:9

### James 1:12-27

*Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. No one, when tempted, should say, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. But one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death. Do not be deceived, my beloved.*



*Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.*

*You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.*

*But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.*

*If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*

### **James 2:14-26**

*What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill’, and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.*

*But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith without works, and I by my works will show you my faith. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith without works is barren? Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was brought to completion by the works. Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness’, and he was called the friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. Likewise, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another road? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.*

### **Text Exegesis**

“Be still and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.” Psalms 46:10

The Letter of James is a powerful statement concerning the nature of God and the moral expectations for those who follow Jesus and his teachings. Phrases such as “Blessed are the poor.” “Blessed are those who endure temptation.” brings our minds to the Beatitudes. God is the source of wisdom, generosity, guidance, constancy, and fortitude. God does not tempt us but rather temptation comes from within when we do not stay connected to God through prayer and humility.

“Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger” (Jas 1:19) God is asking us to be still, to be silent, to be attentive, to be thoughtful, to be reflective upon God’s word and to the words that flood our everyday lives. How many times have we spoken to one another or have been the recipient of hurtful words? If words can not be constructive, or be fortifying or be insightful, why need they be spoken? How many of us grow weary of the rhetoric that has invaded our political system or the words that have been spoken without thought to the consequences? Words flood our homes. Words flood our churches. Words flood our work place or social center. Words flood our minds. We need to gently push the words to one side and hear the voice of God, of compassion, of reason, and of constructiveness before we ever speak or spring to anger.

For those of us who are teachers and learners, we know that a skill, a new language or a new resolution does not become mastered without practice to incorporate the new learning into our lives. We must not be “hearers who forget but doers who act, for they will be blessed in their doing. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for the orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” (Jas 1:25, 27)

Martin Luther had trouble with the Letter of James because he viewed it as contradictory to Paul’s statement that faith not the Law was sufficient for salvation. Yet Paul and James are addressing different situations. James does not negate the power of faith for he believes that faith is essential and the precondition of good works. James stresses that the “implanted word of God has the power to save souls” (Jas 1:21). With this understanding James asks us to reflect upon our faith. “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.” (Jas 2:14-18)

When the implanted Word of God grows within us, we change. We become more conscious of our thoughts and our actions. We are not perfect, but we strive for perfection, as we practice the skill of listening. We wish to truly hear what is being said, and to discern the word of God, either directly or through God’s creation and creatures that surround us. We seek true Wisdom, sincerity, humility and constructiveness. I remember an Irish proverb. “God gave us two ears and one mouth, so we should listen twice as much as we speak.” We do not seek rewards or praise in what we do. We do not boast or brag. We do good works because our faith mandates this.

So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.” Galatians 6:9

## ***Relating the Text to Today***

At 92, the Turkish Republic is a young nation, and with youth comes growing pains. The portrait that is Turkey is a complex one, painted and crafted on manifold layers over time with a variety of materials, and it is worth a deeper examination than most would give it. To peel back the layers of the portrait, to learn the story, is to discover great commonalities

For many, it is more expedient to point out the flaws of a country rather than to do something to help those in need. James would probably tell us to stop talking and get moving, get working. Instead of listening to a sound bite, let's be quick to seek out more information about people, policies, history, and practices. "Humility comes from wisdom." We can be present with the people of Turkey by delving deeper and discovering their stories.

In our stereotyping of the countries of the Middle East, why are we so quick to lump everyone together before learning the whole story? When we hear of terrorism in Turkey, do we just dismiss it as something that happens in the Middle East or in northern Africa? Perhaps we are witnessing the aftermath of the continued decimation of the Ottoman Empire that was abruptly halted by Great Britain and France when they conveniently drew borders to mark off their spheres of influence and control. Perhaps the starting point of this current story is longer ago than we realize.

The region is progressively destabilizing, with Turkey slowly being dragged into the mire; this is partially due to its own unresolved issues of ethnicity and religious identity. Many Turks have noted the double standard of those in the West who grieve for lives lost in France or Belgium yet seem almost indifferent to lives lost in Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Burkina Faso, Somalia, and so many other places that appear to be "nations in an uproar." Mass influxes of refugees come from somewhere and for serious reasons. Amidst all of this, there are those attempting to follow James's directive to be "peace loving, considerate, impartial and sincere." Do you know these Gordian stories of Turkey and its neighbors?

Turkey is hosting nearly three million displaced people right now; that is a staggering number, it is an impressive number. It shows true compassion and answers the challenge of James when he says, "...if a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food...and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what good is that?" Turkey is doing what few other nations are doing in helping individuals who are fleeing those who would do them harm. While sitting in church on a recent Sunday morning, I was talking with a woman currently working with young people who happen to be refugees. We came to the conclusion that these students, teachers, nurses, chemists, musicians, architects, and writers are an incredible talent pool, but they have been reduced to a group with one label:

refugee, one story: victim. In addition to hosting refugees, there are programs in Turkey aiming to empower this talent pool before it is lost. Do you know this story of Turkey?

It would be easy to paint Turkey with a wide brush, throw up one's hands and walk away; however, that would be a mistake, an abdication of our responsibility to care for others in their distress. Let us "not grow weary in doing what is right...and not give up" on learning more about how we can be present with Turkey.

### ***Questions for Study and Discussion***

1. What do we know about the Turkish Republic, both its history and its current climate? How do we know these things? What sources do we utilize?
2. How can we become better informed about other nations, "quick to listen"; how can we encourage others to do so, so as to find out more than a single story?
3. What relationships in our lives can we tend in a manner that honors God? How can we look beyond the superficial and take time to know their stories?
4. How can we pray for the leaders of all nations that they may hear the voice of God, of compassion, of reason, and of constructiveness?

### ***Prayer***

God, ignite in our hearts a yearning to listen more, to know more, to do more, and to pray more. Amen

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