

On the Way with Saint James (Part 8): The Pure and the Pretender

James 1:21, 26-27; 5:13-20

If you're new to church ...

Whenever adults or youth or kids go to a church conference or event or camp; usually there's a theme song. You sing it many times. You come home and it's stuck in your head. You sing it and hum it. You might annoy everyone else in your family with it.

It's like we've been at an 8-day training camp with Saint James, preparing to go on the pilgrim trail together. What has been the theme song? I don't know what the adults would sing. But I bet the kids' theme song that James would pick would be "O Be Careful Little Eyes."

[O be careful little eyes what you see,
O be careful little eyes what you see,
Da da da da da da da
Da da da da da da da
So be careful little eyes what you see.]

And then

O be careful little feet where you go
O be careful little tongue what you say

I used to *hate* that song. It felt like propaganda. Mom and dad are always telling me what to do. And now the church people have made up a song with the same message! Obey!

Still, James picked the song. And now, at the closing service of our 8-week training, he sings it one more time.

1. O Be Careful Little Eyes What You See

The first verse he sings is "O be careful little eyes what you see."

None of us has 20/20 spiritual vision. When we trip and fall along the journey, it's often because our eyes are not careful.

We look around. To see who's looking at us. We look at people's clothes and jewelry, their house and car. We look for ways to use important people. To grow our bank accounts, our egos, our power.

This kind of *seeing* (1:26) is deceptive, and worthless, James says.

He sings, O be careful, little eyes, what you see. Instead of looking around at things you want, and maybe asking God for some help getting them, be careful little eyes.

James says, instead, you should (1:27) keep on the lookout for orphans and widows. Be careful to notice the people right beside you who are spiritually, emotionally, socially, economically vulnerable and in distress.

How will you see them if your eyes are only looking out for more power, more luxury, more social standing for yourself?

Be careful, little eyes, what you see!

2. Be Careful Little Feet Where You Go

James also sings to us a second verse: O be careful little feet where you go.

We loved living in Korea. But in Seoul there's tons of air pollution. My solution was to just live indoors. I'm an indoorsman, so that sounded good to me. But my wife loves the outdoors. When the air pollution is bad, every breath you breathe outdoors is polluting your lungs, which pollutes your bloodstream, which pollutes your blood vessels, which can wreck your health and knock you off the trail and land you in the hospital or the grave.

James says, be careful, little feet, where you go. Check the pollution levels before you run carefree into the world's atmosphere. You've got to go there. That's where the people are. But be careful.

What is your strategy for being *in* Zurich's economy without being polluted by its burn-out culture, its perfectionism? How are you going to use the Internet, your smart phone, your TV, so that you don't pollute your mind, heart, and relationships? How are you going to work in wealth management and not let your feet run into a love affair with money? James doesn't say "don't go." He says be careful little feet where you go. Be careful as you go.

Be careful, little feet, make sure you go to the orphan and the widow. Those who are (5:14) sick—lonely, discouraged, depressed, burnt-out. Who can you make a lunch appointment with? Who can you drop by and visit on your way home from work? Who can you invite over for a simple dinner, not to impress them, but because you've got a place at your table, and they don't have anyone to eat with?

The air is clean when you go to them, because they can't give you wealth and power. It's good for your spiritual cardiovascular system!

I've talked to so many of you who teach German or English to refugees. Some of you serve meals to refugees in Zurich. Some of you have gone to Greece or Lebanon to serve refugees. My wife is going to Greece soon to share entrepreneurial skills among refugees.

Be careful, be intentional, where you go, little feet. Go and serve. There's hardly a safer place. Some of us need to go to those in need.

Some of us, though, (5:14) need to go to our elders, deacons, pastors, home groups, and say, "help me. Pray for me. Encourage me. Share a meal with me. I'm in need."

Why are you pretending you can make it down the pilgrim trail on your own? You can't make it to the end on your own even if you're a healthy Olympic athlete. You definitely can't make it alone if you're sick and limping!

James says some of us need to go to people we've hurt. 5:16 — Confess your sins to one another.

Friends, if you realize that you have hurt someone by our attitudes, words, or actions, go! Ready to apologize. Ready to make things right.

And we have to go to the people who have hurt *us*. Not to get revenge. But to make peace; to forgive; to set things right; and begin to rebuild trust.

If you haven't gone to someone to say "I'm sorry" lately; if you haven't gone toward someone in forgiveness lately — is your religion is worthless and dead? It might be. Be careful, little feet, to go toward people with confession, with forgiveness.

And lastly, James says be careful, little feet, to move toward people who need to be restored. 5:19-20 make it clear. We must move toward those who are struggling with doubts, who are tempted to believe lies, who are making a wreck of their hearts and lives and relationships—and we need to be present with them. Listening and praying for a chance to love and serve and warn and counsel them. To offer them a hand and pull them off the ground and get them back onto the pilgrim trail.

O be careful little feet where you go.

3. Be Careful Little Tongue What You Say

If we can't (1:26) put a tight rein on our tongues, our religion is worthless.

He said in 5:12 that we've got to quit with the little lies and half-truths. Master your tongue with honesty.

5:13— if you're in trouble, be careful little tongue to pray. The trouble in your life is a call to prayer. Just tell God what you're thinking and feeling. That you need help.

He says be careful to praise God if you're happy. Don't let a gorgeous sunset or a job promotion or a delicious meal or an act of mercy go by without saying "Lord, you are good, true, and beautiful."

See what James is doing here? We've got to realize that there is no part of our bodies—not our eyes, not our feet, not our tongues—that isn't meant to be his. We can't reach our goal until we're completely reserved for God's purposes: set apart so that we see, so that we go to, so that we speak to God and to one another, in grace and truth.

4. Jesus Saw, Went, Said, and Did

You know, I used to hate that song. All I heard was "be careful little eyes what you see; be careful little feet where you go; be careful little tongue what you say."

Do you know what part of the song I wasn't hearing? I wasn't careful to hear "for the Father up above is looking down in love!"

What I heard was "If you want the Father up above to *love* you and not punish you, then you'd better be careful what you see, where you go, and what you say."

Sometimes when I come home from a difficult day of work, I am Mr Grumpy Pants Papa. I look down at the floor and see Nerf darts and dirty socks everywhere. I look down at the children and see snot on their sleeves. I look down on my family, and I think "these people aren't careful with their hands or their feet or their snot." Sometimes I don't look down in love at my boys. I look down in judgment.

Some of you had dads who did this *all the time*. They withheld their love cause you weren't careful. And so sometimes we think God the Father is like that. That he's looking down in judgment and frustration.

But the song has it right. Be careful, because the Father up above is looking down in love.

Our Father up above has been looking down in love for a long time. His mood doesn't change like mine, like yours, like our dads' moods.

He looked down in love. He saw us knocked down, way off the pilgrim path, sick, orphaned, isolated, too selfish to confess, too angry to forgive, too proud to cry out for help, too lazy to help one another ...

And he looked down in love.

And he was careful with his great eyes what he saw. He saw our need. He saw what he could do for us, and not what we might be able to do for him.

He was careful with his great feet where he went. He went, in Jesus Christ, right into the valley of the shadow of death, where we had wandered off the trail. And he came beside us and lifted us up.

He was careful with his great tongue to speak a Word that would bless and not curse. His Son was what he said.

And today, Jesus still has the Father's eyes of love— he clearly sees our need. Jesus is still, today, the Father's feet. He moves by the Spirit right to where we've fallen off the trail. Jesus is still today the Father's mouth of love, speaking grace and truth and salvation, when all we expected was condemnation.

Instead of condemning us for our useless, dead, and hurtful religion, God the Father speaks Jesus. Sees with Jesus. Comes to us right now by Jesus, and offers us a new, full, real life—so new and full and real that it's actually useful for the people around us.