

1. The verse from James is a hefty text. “We should not like the world.” So should we stop our social action, close Renew 88, stop employing a community pastor? To be honest, the text has often been read in this way, esp. in the past. People tended to create a high wall between Christians and the world.

The effect of this verse is strengthened by John 15:18-19, where Jesus says: ‘If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.’

2. In contrast, we all know the famous text John 3:16. God loves the world, so much that he even sent his Son to save it! So there is a tension here between the various texts about the world. Also compare the following verses:

John 3:16	John 3:19
John 17:18	James 4:4
Psalm 89:11	1 John 5:19
Colossians 1:16	John 1:10

God loves the world but also warns us against it. It depends on how we define what is meant by the world. I think that we are called to love the world as life created and ordered by the rule of God, but that we should avoid life in rebellion against God. When we read the Letter of James as a whole, we realise that he particularly speaks out against the church’s desire for power and money for their own sake. He is warning his readers against the world as a sphere of desires and temptation without God.

3. We can serve in the world if we see it with God’s eyes and live according to his norms. We need to find a balance:
  - We love the addicted person but we reject the addiction.
  - Jesus loved the sexually immoral but he rejected their practice.
  - We love those who believe in conspiracy theories but we don’t listen to them.
4. The danger is that Christians are seen as people who are opposed to all joy in the world. We might be seen as hostile to everything joyful, haters of the good life. That is not how Jesus and James mean their words. Yet Christianity has often been rather legalistic: people withdrew into monasteries; the Amish withdrew from society; the celibate for priests was imposed because sex was seen as bad in itself.
5. We should instead engage with all people, as long as it brings us (and them) closer to God. So we do not create two compartments in life, the religious and the secular part. We love the whole of life provided it is ordered by the rules of God. We shun the world as the place of rebellion against God. If God is the driving force, we can engage freely with all people he created and with his good gifts.

The Holy Spirit might already be at work in the world ahead of us.

But be careful: Don’t expect love in return. The world is likely to hate us as it hates Jesus.

We can be Street Pastor or Street Angel. Linda will tell us about this form of positive engagement with the world.