

SHOW ME: CHANGE
SHOW ME SERIES - Part 2
Dan Burrell

Good morning Life Fellowship. It is good to see you. My name is Dan, and I am one of the teaching pastors here, and we are in the book of James this morning. If you would, please turn in your Bibles to James Chapter 1 and we are going to read our Scripture in unison this morning in just a couple of minutes. As you are turning there to James Chapter 1, I want to remind you about next week which is the July 4th weekend.

And since we know that many of our folks are already on vacation, and more will be going this week, we decided to combine both of our services into just one service next Sunday. So at 9:15 we will all gather together for a service. It may be a little crowded, and I get that, but at the same time it will allow us to observe communion together as a church family. We have come out of the pandemic and we are getting ready to re-launch a lot of things in the late summer and fall, so we thought it would kind of be a good way to bring about unity. So that is next Sunday and we look forward to seeing you here. We will be in James Chapter 2 next week as we continue on in our series.

Also I just wanted to mention since this is the last Sunday in June, I checked to see how we were doing on our Cuban mission project this month. It is always been kind of our custom and tradition I think that a lot of folks have waited to give, but I just wanted to remind you that this is a particularly urgent need. There have been two mission country hot spots that we have focused on this year, the first being Myanmar (Burma). Actually I was there a year ago in January with a couple of other folks from our church, and Rick Wilson has a ministry there. What they are now going through is just absolutely heartbreaking. In fact one of the villages that we ministered to last year doing an all day long discipleship session has now been completely leveled. Some of the people that we have photos with on our Facebook walls are now living in the jungle as the Chin tribe is being persecuted greatly by the people that are in charge now. So please remember those folks. We sent \$17,000 there earlier this year to help them buy rice and beans for some of the orphanages that we support there. Thank you for your giving, and I hope you will continue to do that in the future.

The second hot spot county we have focused on this year is Cuba. We have 40 pastors there that are very dependent upon us for support. I heard from one pastor this week that the need is tremendous there. And I think it is a good reminder for us from time to time and one of the reasons why it is important to give to missions is that I whine when the air conditioning in my car does not cool me down fast enough this time of the year. And that is really pathetic when I stop and think about the people in Cuban who get a handful of rice and a handful of beans for two people for thirty days. And any food other than that they have to scrounge up themselves. There really isn't much food they could buy if they had the money to buy it.

It is very, very sad and there are children there who are losing their eyesight because of malnutrition, and I am griping because a waitress is over extended because there are not enough people willing to work there in spite of the fact that their pay per hour is more than the Cuban people can make in a month. You know it is pretty sad to

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realize how we can get very self-centered and giving allows us to kind of focus on others' needs. So I wanted to mention that to you.

So let's go to James Chapter 1. We are going to do something different before we get into the passage this morning. If you look on the wall you can see what we have put up there. And what happens to us sometimes is like what happens in our own houses when we notice a cobweb that has obviously been there for quite some time but we get so used to seeing it that we just don't notice it anymore. Well, these aren't cobwebs, but they are part of what we should be doing. *'Let's us hear from you today, God through your Word and through your Spirit.'* Our theme during 2021 has been, *'Let us engage the Scripture, let us engage with the Word of God.'* And so I want to do that this morning by having a time of prayer before we get started where we examine our hearts and our lives. And then also I would like for us to read the Scripture together.

So I am just going to go silent for about 30 seconds, which is a long time for me, and during that time I hope you will just prepare your hearts. You can say, *'Lord, I need to clear out all the debris and I need to focus on you and your Word. And I want to hear from you like the verse on the wall says. I want to hear from you and please give me one thing that I can take out of here in an hour that I can use this week for my good and your glory.'* So think about that and then ask the Lord to show you what it is He has brought you here to accomplish today. So let's pray.

Now Father, in the quietness of this moment whether here in the room or even at home as some are watching on the internet, we pray that your work would do something in us today that would make us more like you. And Father, that we would remove those distractions from our hearts and our minds that would prevent the words from taking root and bearing fruit in our lives. So Father, I pray that beginning with me that you would allow me to be an instrument of your Holy Spirit. Help me to say those things that need to be said, and to forget those things best left unsaid. And Father, help us each to find something this week that we can apply from this passage that will glorify you and will be good for us and that will encourage others for we ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.

All right. James Chapter 1 and we are going to begin reading in verse 19 and read through the conclusion of the chapter. Sometimes we read responsively where I read a verse and then you read a verse, but this morning we are just going to read each verse together. Even at home I would urge you to read aloud as well as you are watching this. So here we go together beginning in verse 19:

***“Know this, my beloved brothers; let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.*”**

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But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world." May the Lord add His blessing to the reading of His Word and as we apply it today.

So we began last week in James Chapter 1 and as we were unfolding this I got through the first part of the passage. Hopefully some of you this week continued your study and got to the second part because there are three themes in James Chapter 1. And the idea that we are emphasizing throughout this series is 'Show Me.' In other words there ought to be a practical impact, there ought to be fruit that is demonstrated, there ought to be consequences for our relationship with Christ. And part of what James is saying was to the Jews that were reading this letter as this was written specifically to Jews. These were the Jews of the Diaspora, they were those who had originally come to know Christ, probably most of them there in Jerusalem and then they were dispersed all across civilization as the Romans completely annihilated the Jewish capital city and laid it to waste. And these people fled everywhere.

So James, in an unusual way, because he was one of them, and also because he was the half-brother of Jesus, sends this letter out to be read in the congregations that had sprung up in Rome and in Greece and the northern part of what we know as Israel, Syria, Iraq and other places. And as this letter was being read, James was saying specifically while all Scripture is written for us this Scripture specifically was written to those Jews who had grown up in a culture that was filled with religious symbolism. It was filled with a ritualistic approach to God. The intent was heavy on the Law and trying to earn or demonstrate or prove one's piety, one's holiness, one's righteousness. And so all of this cultural baggage was still part of the early believers there, and James was saying he wanted them to understand something. Their relationship with Christ, the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives ought to be bearing fruit. And it was not a fruit borne of their own effort but a fruit that was borne of the transformative work of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God that lived in them, and was part of them.

As James is unfolding this, he said, *'In the midst of this, you should be showing some things. There ought to be some evidences.'* And he started out by saying, *'Show me your joy. Show me your joy when you are going through these trials, these difficulties, these hard times, this time of persecution that some of you are facing. Show me in the midst of that your joy.'*

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And not only that, and we didn't get a chance to go into it deeply last week, we just kind of glanced off of it, and it was not only to show me your joy during your trials, but also show me joy during your temptations. When that human nature emerges and you find yourself slipping into sin, you get angry, you are upset, you have doubts and you are fearful, confused, and all those things that come with being human, all those things that come with having Satan around us, who walks about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. James said to watch out for those moments because even in the middle of those, you can have joy, in the middle of those you can be showing your fruit, in the middle of those you can be showing who it is you really serve.

So it starts off with the trials and tribulations and then it goes into the temptations, and now it is going to say, 'Show me what you are going to produce when you are dealing with the truth.' And it goes into this idea that we need to focus on the Word of God, focus on the Scripture, to look clearly into what God's Word says. So show me your joy during the trials, show me your joy during temptations, and now James is saying to show me your change whenever you are engaging with truth. And whether or not we realize this, every time we open the Word of God, we are dealing with truth; we are dealing with objective reality that God Himself has set in order and placed in and of itself.

With this idea in mind, I want us to look at this passage and kind of unfold it, because it is very, very important that we learn to demonstrate those natural byproducts; we should be examining ourselves, looking for the byproduct of a walk with God. So this morning we are going to look at 'Show me the Change, Show me the difference that the gospel makes in your life.'

As we get into this passage we are going to just kind of meander through it for a little bit, but as we do I think there are some really important conclusions that we need to draw at the end of it. Let's read verse 19 again: "***Know this, my beloved brothers.***" And I want to pause here on these first five words because first of all I want you to see the word, 'know.' This is a directive, it is a declarative, and as I mentioned last week there are 62 times in the book of James where there are very clear directives, there are very imperative statements, meaning, '*here is what you should be doing, here is what you need to pay attention to, this is the action you should take.*'

So James is a real practical guy. He is my kind of guy. I am a guy always looking for clarity. Tell me what to do, tell me what you expect, and I will measure and evaluate that, but I just need to know these things and then I will do my best to achieve them. Now understand that we will achieve nothing apart from Christ if God is not living in us. Anything good thing that happens to pop out is a coincidence because God has created a certain element of knowledge about good and evil that some will accidentally pursue, but the goodness that comes out of us that is real, that is legitimate and that is eternal is because of the transformative work of God in our lives when the Holy Spirit lives in us. It is the change that matters.

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And James is saying that he wants us to pause and think about this. This idea of 'know' actually in other places it is translated as the word 'reckon.' I like that word because it reminds me of my grandpa. If I would say, '*Grandpa it looks like we are going to have a good crop this year,*' he would say, '*I reckon so.*' We may think of it as kind of an old country term, but actually it is not; it is even older than a country term. It literally means 'reconcile yourself to this.'

When my grandpa would say something like, '*I reckon so,*' it meant he had thought about it and he agreed. He had given some thought to it. It comes from the word that we would use for reconcile, and when we talk about reconciling it may be used as a math term. Now I hate math and I didn't do well in it. I hate balancing my checkbook, but I know if I am going to take care of our finances then at the end of the month I need to look at our expenses and our income and hopefully we will not be in the red. And we reconcile our checking account and our credit card statements and we want to account for every penny and every dollar. And when we get to that accounting level where every penny and every dollar is accounted for then we have reconciled our statement.

And that is what God is asking us to do, to live the thoughtful life. Not living a casual, haphazard life like a person who doesn't pay any attention to their bills and their credit card statements because they are going to overdraft and overdraw and spend more money than they have and go into debt. That is a sloppy way of living, and yet many Christians do that. We look at the Word of God and we don't reconcile ourselves with it. We look at the Holy Spirit of God and we don't change anything. We stay stagnant or we stay superficial and think we will worry about that later. And the believer has been called to look into truth and to do something about it. And looking will create change in us.

James says, "***Know this, my beloved brothers.***" I just want to point out again that half the time that you have a directive in the book of James; only 31 times out of the 62, he is talking about us in a collective sense. In other words he is not saying, '*Okay, you (this person) or you (just the men) or you (just Jews).*' Instead the word 'brothers' is broader than that, in fact some translations actually say, '*brothers and sisters.*' Obviously James is speaking to Christians and he is speaking to the Jewish Christians, but the application is much broader than that. And as I said last week, it is kind of a southern term. It is 'y'all.' In other words this applies to all of us. If you say you are a Christian, if you say you are a Christ follower, then this applies to you. It means we ought to pay double attention to it. This is the Scripture specifically written to us.

And then James makes it real personal after that. After he says, "***Know this, my beloved brothers,***" he says, "***let every person.***" So he takes the broader and then he focuses it down to everyone individually so they will pay attention. It is to every single person. In other words this is something that we not only do collectively as a body, but we do individually as people with personal relationships with Christ.

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And then James gives us a three point outline. I like the fact that James apparently went to a good homiletical school and he gives us a real clear three point outline. He says number one: “*Be quick to hear.*” Number two: “*Be slow to speak.*” Number three: “*Be slow to anger.*” So there are three things; those are three imperatives by the way. And they are very personal imperatives. He said when we look into Scripture we are to pay attention, give thought, and follow along carefully because we should be having a time of self-evaluation. And he starts off by telling us we are responsible to “*be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger.*”

If we just stopped right there we would have a whole sermon. I read this week that the average person speaks about 18,000 words a day. If you were to transcribe those into a document it would become about a 54 page booklet every day. If we multiply that by a week we would have a 350 to 400 page volume of words. And then if you take that over a year you would have 52 volumes of them on your shelves. And then multiply that by the average age of 70 and you would have 3,500 plus volumes of your words. In other words, you and I are speaking a library, and the question we ought to ask ourselves is ‘*are they libraries of quality content or are the libraries of nonsense?*’ I am afraid for many of us we would have to say we are glad those books have not been published. This would not be good for me.

And by the way, when you look at that some of you are already thinking that 18,000 words a minute, ‘*Dan, come on. We know you are taking up more than your share.*’ And that would be true. My typical sermon is about 7,000 to 9,000 words. My mom actually transcribes them for me and she usually makes notes like, ‘*Pastor Ben had eleven pages but you had fifteen pages.*’ I may do it in the same amount of time but I just talk faster. But the question is, whether you are doing 14,000 words or 18,000 words, or 25,000 words a day, are you giving some thought to those words? And most of us, including me, would admit that we should be more thoughtful for what we say.

The Bible says that our words reveal the issues of our heart and our life. We need to be mindful of this. We need to be aware of this. And what James is saying here from the get go is this: ‘*Not everyone who calls themselves Christian acts like a Christian. In fact not everyone who says they are a Christ follower is a Christ follower.*’ We know there are two categories and some are people that just have a false counterfeit faith. In Matthew Chapter 7 it talks about the guy who said to Jesus that he had cast out demons in His name and he did all these good works in His name. And Jesus looked at him and told him that He did not know him and to depart from Him. He could claim all these things but he did not have a genuine relationship with Jesus.

I will say that I believe that at the Day of Judgment at that moment there will be many people who went through the motions of Christianity. They may have gone to church, they bowed and prayed, they gave money, they did this work or that work in their own way but they never had a relationship with Christ. And they are going to realize that their whole life, every word they spoke, everything they did was meaningless and

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fraudulent. They had a counterfeit faith that did not have at its core, at its roots, a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and they had not acknowledged their need for a Savior, repented of their sins and trusted in Him alone for eternal life. And at that point it will be too late.

I would ask every person under the sound of my voice this morning to stop and ask yourself this: do you really know for sure you are a child of God? Are you really in a relationship with Jesus Christ? The other aspect of that is this - there are some who are in a relationship with Christ but they don't produce any spiritual fruit. They are inviting the judgment of God, they are inviting the pruning of God, and they are like the fig tree that bears no fruit. We need to examine ourselves at that point as well and say, *'there is something wrong. My relationship with God is so superficial, so immature, so broken that I am not producing fruit. So either I am not a believer or I am an immature or broken believer, and either way I need to address that.'*

James is saying we are not to try to work in our own strength but rather to let the Word of God, let the gospel take root in our hearts and in our lives. He tells us to think about this, reckon on it, consider it and get serious about it. God gave us two ears and one mouth and one of the ways in which we are going to start listening better is to be talking less and listening more.

I am not a great counselor. Some people are just born to counsel. Mike Kozlinski who is our partnering counselor loves counseling and he loves digging deep. I will do it, I don't mind doing it, and please don't think I am coldhearted for not doing it, but I just know my spiritual gifts. I can talk all day, I can teach, I can administrate and organize, but God did not give me this passion for counseling. When I do it I often find this to be the case, that is there is a conflict going on between a husband and a wife or between two different people and many times what happens when I ask the question of why they are here one person will start speaking.

They may say something like, *'well so and so said this, or this event happened, or they did this or that,'* and they will go into ten or fifteen minutes of other things that have gone on. And then when I ask the other person why are we here they will say that what he said or she said wasn't right and it didn't happen that way. And all they do is address that one first issue. I might ask them what else did that person say and they will say, *'I don't remember.'*

And what they do is fixate, rather than listening. And we have to be really careful about that. One of the things I have learned to do is to tell the two parties up front, *'make sure you listen to everything that is said because before you get to respond, before you get to tell your side of the story, you are going to have to tell me everything that this person has said.'* When we realize we are accountable to listen it changes the way we engage the story. And you and I are going to be held accountable for what we do with the Word of God. And if we are held accountable to this, I think we ought to be listening

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carefully to it. We ought to be paying attention to it. We ought to be taking note of it and focusing on that. But what happens a lot of times is we cherry pick, we disagree with it, and in the end we make the Word of God of no impact in our lives. We will talk about that a little bit more, but as we go into this I want you to understand that God is preparing us to have the Word of God take root in our hearts. And He is beginning by saying this, *‘Shut up and listen. Don’t talk so much that you can’t hear from me. Focus, be careful.*

Now look in verse 20 where it says: ***“Slow to anger, for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”*** Maybe you are wondering why James would stick that in there. And this is important because as we get into this we are going to see that God understands our nature how we are sometimes filled with anger, self-righteousness, self-importance and pride, so we need to be really careful.

Let’s go back to verse 19 again and draw a principle. The first principle is this – change toward holiness requires us to be thoughtful on how we govern our thoughts and actions. If we are going to see change, if we are going to show God the change, and show the world the change, it requires us to be thoughtful on how we govern our thoughts and our actions and how we respond to truth. And as we do that it takes a discipline to listen carefully for God and what He is saying to us.

That’s why I wanted to start off with a little bit of silence this morning. I don’t know about you but to me it seems like I constantly struggle with cluttered thoughts. I have a hard time just sitting still and listening for God. Now if I do it on purpose I have a little more success, but even then it requires some discipline. I found this in worship this morning. I sat over there for worship and the next thing I knew I noticed that this needed to be changed and then I wondered where is so and so today. And then I realized I wasn’t thinking about worship at all; I was thinking about organization or pastor stuff. And this is not why I was in this room; I am in this room to prepare my own heart because often the Lord is doing stuff through me and in me while I am preaching to you. And I need to be aware of that and I need to empty myself so that He can fill me.

And sometimes we show up to church and it has been a tough morning. Have you ever had a tough morning? I talked to one of our folks this morning and they said, *‘Somebody set an alarm in my house and at 2:30 the alarm went off and I was in that deep unconscious sleep where I didn’t even know who I was. And after that I was awake for two hours because my adrenaline was pumped up.’*

Have you ever had tough mornings like that? It seems like it always happens on Saturday nights or Sunday mornings. The worst arguments I have ever had with my wife were usually on Saturday night or Sunday morning. Or you drive into church and the kids have been driving you crazy, you ran through a red light and your wife is yelling at you. You pull into the church driveway and now you are at church. So you get your

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smile on and you wave at everyone, you are greeted by people and you feel like a complete hypocrite.

Maybe you wonder how I know you have these feelings. It is because I have had those feelings too. By the way that doesn't mean you don't come to church; that means we need to pay attention to what the Holy Spirit may be saying to you and take some corrective action. Show me the change! The Holy Spirit brings these things to our minds, they are common to man, they are part of our sin nature, and the Holy Spirit takes that and causes us to be aware of it and then we 'reckon,' then we know.

How quick are we to speak when we should be listening? How quick are we to act impulsively? How quick are we to let a preconceived notion and attitude take charge and cause us to say something or to act in ways that are not representative of the truth we know the Scriptures reveal? I grew up in Missouri so my first twenty years were there, and then I moved to Florida because I had gone to college in Chicago and Florida was as far away from Chicago as I could get. I went for very spiritual reasons to Florida – beaches and blondes. I spent twenty years there and then I moved to Charlotte.

So for each third of my life I have been in three different places. So anytime something happens in Florida I pay attention, particularly in south Florida because we lived in Palm Beach County. And Florida is always in the news, have you noticed that? If you put your birthday and a Florida man in Google the stories you will see come up are absolutely insane because there are a lot of lunatics in Florida. I'm sorry to all of my Florida friends who are watching this but it is the truth and you know it.

And there have been a couple of things that have been in the news lately that most of us are aware of. A week ago there was a parade in Fort Lauderdale and it was a pride parade, a gay rights parade. And there is a very large gay community down there. And this happens all the time in Florida where people have a hard time distinguishing between the brake pedal and the gas pedal. I cannot tell you how many times I would turn on the news and see the rear end of a car sticking out of a swimming pool. For whatever reason there is something about Florida drivers that get confused and they would park their car in a swimming pool or in the front of a Subway sandwich shop. That seemed to be the most common spots where that would happen.

And every time the person would say, *'There is something wrong with my car. I pressed the brake and it accelerated. I don't know how that happened.'* But what happened was they had hit the wrong pedal. And this literally happened at this pride parade where some older gentleman who was a member of the gay men's chorus was in the parade in a pickup truck when he accidentally hit the accelerator instead of the brake and when he did the truck lurched forward, it ran over some people and tragically one person was killed and others were injured.

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That is not the story. Here is the story. The mayor of Fort Lauderdale, who is a gay guy himself, got in front of the cameras almost immediately and said this: *‘This was an act of terrorism. This was an assault on the LGBT community. This was intentional. This is the kind of hate stuff that is going on.’* Just a few minutes later someone said they knew the driver and this wasn’t a hate crime and this guy sings with us in choir. And the mayor, rather than saying he spoke too soon, he gave kind of a half-hearted explanation the next day and said, *‘Well, maybe that wasn’t true this time, but it could have been.’*

And the truth of the matter is he spoke too soon. Now we all get excited, we all get offended, and sometimes we speak too soon. The question is – do we pause and think about that tendency before we take action? And then this week everyone knows what else is going on in south Florida at Surfside. I have driven by this building multiple times. It was a big twelve story condo and two thirds of it fell down and there are 150 people or so missing who are probably dead. The mayor of that city has been coming out in front of the cameras every day and reporters ask him questions like what caused this. Was this building inspected? Are there any hopes for survivors? But this mayor has been exceptionally careful in what he says.

If I were ever a mayor I would hope to have the grace under fire that he has shown because he said, *‘We do not have the answers to those questions, but we are going to do our best to get them. I do not know the answer to that question yet.’* He has been very, very careful, very, very measured in what he has said so as not to give hope where there is no hope, or to take away hope where there could be hope, and not to give conclusions before the questions can be correctly answered. Now those are just headline examples, but I want to ask how many of us get careless with the truth in a moment of emotion, or anger, or pride, or disgust and we are inaccurate in our portrayal and presentation of the hope that lies within us.

The idea here in James of being quick to listen and quick to hear has a connotation to it that we need to lean forward, to lean into it. And I have found that as I have gotten older, I like to think I still have pretty good hearing, but I know that sometimes I get confused if more than one person is speaking, so I will lean forward and cock my head a little bit. Why am I doing that? I am trying to make sure I get the facts right. When it comes to the Word of God, when it comes to truth, when it comes to what God is saying to us, we ought to be inclining our ears to wisdom, inclining our ears to truth. We ought to take a breath, shut up and listen for what God is saying. And in order to do that, we have to be slow to speak. Wait until we have heard before we give the answer. So much of gossip, so much of outrage, so much of hate talk, so much of what we are saying today is unbiblical and untrue and it is because we speak too soon.

James is saying, *‘Show me the change. In order to get the change that you need to be showing you need to slow down, listen carefully, speak slowly and then don’t give in to anger.’* And that brings me to the second point - impulsiveness is an enemy of godly living. You know much of our lack of spiritual growth is due to anger in one of its forms.

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Remember that anger, the kind of thing that roils within us, this thing that stirs us up is demonstrated in many ways. And actually the root of anger is pride, and pride produces anger. We may call it other things. Sometimes it is selfishness, sometimes it is entitlement, sometimes it is arrogance, sometimes it is independence, sometimes it is stubbornness, but whether it is anger in its pure rage form or in defensiveness or arrogance or haughtiness or one of the other forms, whenever we act unbiblically it interferes with our ability to hear what God really wants us to know and do. So we need to be very aware that our tendency is to drop back into our sin nature.

I am looking forward to a lot of things about heaven. I am looking forward to good health and seeing loved ones that have gone on before, but I have to tell you that one of the things that I am really looking forward to about heaven is to get rid of my bad tendencies because they are myriad. How many times have I said something flippantly? How many times have I popped my cork? How many times have I done something and as soon as I say it, or as soon as I do it, or as soon as I think it, I am like, *'Come on, Dan, you know better than this. You ought not to have said that. You ought not to have thought that. You ought not to have done that. You know better than that.'*

Where did that come from? Let me tell you where it comes from, it comes from Satan. We live with a sin nature and even if you are a part of the family of God you and I will struggle with that, and we ought to be resisting it. The Bible says to resist the devil and he will flee from you. We ought to flee fornication. We ought to flee impure thoughts. We ought to flee certain things. The Bible says to take off the old man and put on the new man. The Bible says to mortify therefore the members of your body, your flesh, so that you can have victory over these things. The word 'mortify' means 'to put to death.'

There are some things we have to get serious about. I am that way about snakes. Last year I went out to my garden and when I pulled back a zucchini plant there was a 50 foot long black snake or so. You know like telling a fishing stories, but it was at least five feet long. I screamed like a little girl and I am not ashamed of it. *(Laughter)*. I yelled for my wife, and she knew before we got married that I was not a snake person. I asked her to come out and take care of this snake. *(Laughter.)* I am going to own it. I will take on a bear for her, I will take on a bull for her, but I will not take on a snake for her. There is not a hoe handle long enough for me to chop at a snake.

So I told my wife to get the hoe but instead she gets a shovel. How are you going to kill a snake with a shovel? She walks up to it, and then she chucked that shovel like it was a javelin, but she missed it and off it went. And I am thinking, *'that is just great because I know there is a 50 foot long black snake somewhere in my neighborhood, and it terrorizes me in my dreams.'* So now that my zucchini are producing this year I go out to my garden and every time I pull some leaves aside I just know I am going to see that black mumbo who is ready to strike me in the face. I just know this is going to happen.

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Now I know Jason is back there right now listening to this and he is going to lecture me when I come off the platform because black snakes are good snakes. But my philosophy is dead snakes are good snakes. (*Laughter.*) And you can send me notes telling me they kill rats and so forth but I would rather live with a million rats than one black snake, okay? This is good preaching and you need to write it down. This is important stuff.

But the bottom line is this, when we kill snakes in my yard we kill them junkyard dead. We want them gone. How many of us have casual, superficial relationships with sin that we tolerate, we know it is wrong, we know it will bite us, we know it displeases God, we know it contradicts the Word of God, and yet we continue to tolerate it. We continue to let it be the enemy of God, the enemy of our fruit, the enemy of the change we should be having.

Which brings me to point number three – sanctification is an ongoing struggle between our will and God’s will. It is an ongoing struggle. Sanctification is that act whereupon we become more like Christ. When you get saved that is justification. When you trust Christ as your Savior it is an act that God performs in your life once and for all. You are either saved or you are not. It is like being pregnant, either you are or you aren’t. We are justified; God gives it to us. We don’t earn it, we don’t achieve it, it is given to us as a gift from God.

There is coming a day where we will get glorified and God will declare us once for all free from the sin curse. And He will remove all the last vestiges of the sin curse in our life. But between that point and this point there is a journey, there is a walk. It is a journey and a walk that ought to be done in the Spirit and that only God can walk us through and that only God can give us victory in. And it is that walk of becoming more like Jesus.

Now here is where I want to go, and I want you to listen carefully with me on this. James was concerned, and I am concerned that we have a tendency to ignore the process of becoming godly in our lives, that we become comfortable in our sin, we lean into our relationship based on grace, but we fail to see the transformative work of the Holy Spirit as it takes root and creates change that makes us look, talk, think, and act more like Jesus than the world. And we have to be very, very careful that we are aware of the struggle that should be occurring between our will and God’s will, between what we say we are and what God knows we are, between what we do and what we claim to believe.

Now all of this passage comes down and hinges on verse 21. “***Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness,***” and then notice what it says, “***and receive with meekness the implanted word.***” That word ‘implanted’ means exactly what it sounds like. It means like you are planting a garden. Yesterday I went out in my garden again. It is not a big garden but I love fooling around in it. I have a patch where I am going to plant some green beans, so I pulled out all the weeds that had sprung up. Then I

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dug the soil deep enough to make sure that there was room for the roots to grow. And then I am going to put the seeds in and I expect the seeds to grow and to flourish because I prepared the soil.

And if you and I want to produce the fruit of godliness in our lives we have to prepare ourselves, prepare the soil so that the Word of God takes root. And if we are not listening for God, if we are not praying to God, if we are thinking about God, if we are not studying His Word then we will not produce fruit, because the implantation of the Word will be of no effect. Remember the Scripture about the seeds being thrown and some are too crowded, some spring up and then die down, some fall on rocks and never germinate at all, but there are some where the soil is prepared and it produces a bountiful harvest. My question for all of us to consider is what are we producing for the glory of God? What are we producing because of our relationship with Him and His Word?

The preparation of the soil hopefully is part of the reason we came to church this morning. We come to hear from the Word of God and there ought to be confession of sin. One of the reasons why we keep talking to you about next week being communion is because this week you and I ought to have a time where we get apart with God and prepare ourselves for communion. It should not be something casual like because it is the 4th of July we should have communion and we should just all be together. No, if communion is going to mean anything we ought to be prayerful as we think about it. Ask God to show you unconfessed sin. Ask God to show you habits and tendencies in your life that are displeasing to Him. Part of the purpose of communion is so that we examine ourselves in light of God's holiness and we take action on that. Meditation means to shut up and listen, it means just being still and being quiet. Prayer is asking God to reveal those things to us that we need to focus on.

Notice here that James talks about the spirit of meekness. What does that mean? That means we need a spirit of submission. You and I should walk before God with open hands saying, *'Lord, here am I. Fill me, use me, empty me, transform me and change me. I yield.'* If we were to read Romans Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 we would see that word 'reckon' and after the word 'reckon' in Romans 5, 6, 7 and 8 you will also see the word 'yield.' In other words when we know the truth about God and we know the truth about His Word our next response is to yield to it. And that is the tough part because that is when we surrender. It doesn't say 'reckon' then work harder. It doesn't say 'reckon' and exercise more self-discipline. It says 'reckon' and then yield.

Why is that important? It is because the work of change that God wants to do in our lives is not born of human energy but by His power. That is the transformative work of the Scripture. When we say, *'I love you more than I love me. I want your will more than I want my will. All to Jesus I surrender, all to Him I freely give.'* That is how to produce spiritual fruit. You don't grunt and groan, work and sweat, you yield and surrender and turn it over to Him and let Him transform you.

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Number four – change is the byproduct of truthful knowledge, spiritual submission and personal initiative. This passage is so rich it is worth a whole sermon series itself, and I challenge you to talk about it with your small group, to talk about it with your family, and talk about it with God in your personal devotions. Here we have this imagery of the person who looks in a mirror and has to decide how they are going to respond to what they see.

Remember in Bible days mirrors were made out of brass. Glass mirrors did not come until around 1400. So there was a long time before there were glass mirrors like we see in our bathroom. Their mirrors were polished brass. They had this in the tabernacle and in the temple. The laver that they looked into had water and the water kind of served as glass and the reflective part was the brass that had been polished. They didn't have all the sophisticated stuff we have today. There would have been ridges and wrinkles in their mirrors so you would have had to look intently into them.

There are two instructions in this passage, *'watch out for the person who takes a glance at his mirror and then walks away'* and then he says to *'look intently.'* And when James is talking about looking intently he is talking about looking intently into the Word of God. And that means to focus and examine. Both words are translated as 'look' in most versions of the Bible, but they are two completely different words. And here is the problem; many of us act like teenage boys when it comes to the way we look at the Word of God.

I used to be a school teacher, and I also raised a couple of boys. And this may not be every teenage boy but when a typical teenage boy knows he has to get up to go to school he will set seven alarms on his iPhone. And then he won't pay attention to any of them. Mom is downstairs and she realizes that the bus or the carpool will be there soon and she hasn't heard or seen anything of her son, so she goes upstairs to wake him up. At some point the teenager jumps out of bed, looks in the mirror in the bathroom, runs his hands through his hair, does a quick sniff of himself and says, *'good enough.'* Some of you with teenage boys know exactly what I am talking about, right? 'Good enough' and they go off to school.

At some point most of the ladies in this room approach this far differently. My wife is here so I need to be very careful, so let me just say this. My wife has three mirrors, she has the one like I have, and then she has one that has magnifying glass in it with lights around it. I looked into that one accidentally and I could see into my future. (*Laughter.*) I saw stuff I didn't even want to know was in existence on my face. My goodness, why do you ladies use those things? And then my wife has another mirror that she holds in her hand so she can see all sides of her with it. (*Laughter.*) I have to tell you that I am not interested in seeing every side of me, not at all. (*Laughter.*) I don't want to see behind me, it is not necessary; I am only interested in the front of me. So the time that it takes for me to get ready for something, while it isn't teenage boy worthy, I am not nearly as intent as my wife is. And the difference is between glancing and examining.

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The Scripture is telling us not to have a superficial relationship with the Word of God. Don't have a superficial relationship with the truth. Don't have a superficial relationship with the Holy Spirit. Dig down, lean over, look deeply and see yourself for where you are and then do something about it. Don't just walk away. Don't just have a casual attitude toward it. Make the change, confess the sin, eliminate the debris and do something about it.

And the Scripture is telling us that the change that we ought to be having is a byproduct of looking honestly into the Word of God, submitting to the reality that the Holy Spirit makes obvious to us, and then saying, *'I will yield. I will surrender. I will let the Holy Spirit change me.'* And when that happens we produce the fruit, we show people the change. The law helps us to see what we should become in light of what we are. The law is not a bad thing. The law reminds us of God and our need for Him.

Notice also James speaks of perseverance here. In other words we keep doing it, and to keep doing it is essential. And then the last thing is that blessings follow obedience. When we produce the right fruit, we are blessed by that. God honors that. And the perseverance that we have in looking and changing and transforming and surrendering and yielding means all those things will produce. We get to show the change and we can declare with a unified voice corporately and individually: *'We are different, not because of us. We are different not because we are good. We are different not because we are diligent. We are different not because we are disciplined. We are different because God is powerful and God has changed us. God has given us hope.'*

Now here is the problem. When we don't do this, when we just run our hands through our hair and think that's enough, when we don't change, do you know what we look like? We look like the world. Now buckle your seatbelts; I am almost done, but I don't want to miss this one. Here is where I am afraid the American church has gotten to. We have become so comfortable with our messed up hair and body odor, we have become so comfortable with the debris on our faces, with our unshaved attitudes, that we look around us and we think the world is much worse, and the world doesn't pay any attention to it so why should we? And we blend in rather than be different.

And, folks, the Scripture says there should be some change. There should be something different about us. Not because we are diligent, but because God is powerful. We ought not to talk the same. We ought not to look the same. We ought not to speak the same. We ought not to spend our money the same. We ought not to think the same things are funny. We ought not to go to the same places for amusement. We ought not to spend our time the same way. There ought to be a difference between how the believers navigate this life then those who walk apart from truth. If the Bible is going to mean anything there should be evidence of it in a transformed life.

I think there are too many in this time, in this culture, in this generation, in the American church who are more concerned about whether we are comfortable than

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whether or not we are committed to the biblical principles of holiness. That we somehow look at holiness and think, *'I don't want to be a Puritan. I don't want to be an oddball. I don't want to seem holier than thou. I don't want to be overly religious. I don't want to be a fanatic.'* None of us are in danger of that. We are not in danger of it. But if a generation of Christians got up and said, *'I want to be holy as He is holy. I want to find the things that break God's heart so that they break my heart. I want to see the things that give God joy so they give me joy. I want to remove the sin. I want to mortify the flesh. I want to get rid of the bad habits. I want to change the attitude. I want to fix my actions. I want to hear from God. I want to put off the old man and put on the new man.'*

When we can get to that point, I believe that God will bring revival. He will bring revival to our church. He will bring revival to our nation. He will bring revival to our generation. But as long as we are comfortable living, acting, talking and thinking like the world nothing is going to change and we are in danger of missing the divine opportunity that God has put in the church today to be salt and light that others may see Him in us and through us.

Let me give you these thoughts and then I am done. Number one – a lack of change in the life of someone claiming to be a Christ follower may be an indication of counterfeit faith. We have to ask ourselves the tough questions. I want you to consider this, if you can just live anyway you want to all week long and it never causes you a pang of guilt, if you can just day after day lie, curse, abuse, be racist, hit the porn sites, gossip, live in excess and then you come to church on Sunday to kind of get the spiritual side taken care of; and there is never any discomfort, there never is any conviction, I believe you need to examine yourself as to whether or not you are a legitimate follower of Jesus Christ. ***"Not everyone that says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."***

Maybe you are thinking that is tough and it makes you uncomfortable. Sometimes truth does that. We need to look deeply into the Word of God. I am not saying you will never sin, the Lord knows I do that. But I am saying that there ought to be a holy grief that comes into our lives when we walk apart from the truth that is God saying, *'Come on, show me the change. Show me the difference.'*

The second thing is this – broad declarations that the pursuit of godliness and holiness is legalism or unbiblical and should be avoided. Broad declarations that the pursuit of godliness and holiness is legalism or unbiblical and should be avoided. Some of you here grew up super conservative, some of you grew up Southern Baptist, some of you grew up as fundamentalists, and some of you may have grown up in really strict Pentecostal homes. I don't want to offend you because I did too. But there is a tendency once we understand God's grace and goodness to us that we emphasize God's holiness. And legalism is not a matter of what we do, but it is a matter of why we are doing what we do. And that is where the problem lies.

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If you are trying to live a holy life to prove yourself holier than others that is a problem and that is legalism. If you are trying to prove yourself worthy of God's love that is legalism and it is not good. If you are trying to prove yourself to be spiritually superior, or if you are trying to earn God's acceptance that is legalism and that is not what God is all about. But make no mistake; God wants us to live holy lives. He wants us to avoid sin. He wants us to be honest and upright. He wants us to be pure and moral. He wants us to speak the truth. He wants us to live lives of restraint. He doesn't expect us to go out and live like the world. If you are lying and cheating and drinking and stealing and cursing and fooling around with someone other than your spouse, if you are abusing your kids, if you are telling dirty jokes and nothing ever changes in your life, there is something wrong. And legalism is not freedom to live as we would, but rather a responsibility to live as we should. And when you love God a changed life should follow. And if the Holy Spirit isn't convicting all of us then it is time to look deep in the Word of God and ask ourselves some really tough questions.

Number three – an over exposure and an under response to truth is dangerous to spiritual health and growth. When we get used to living casually toward God, when His holiness is no longer a thing to be pursued, whenever we are comfortable in our sin, there is a *'warning, Will Robinson, warning.'* There needs to be on our part sensitivity to that Holy Spirit that lives within us that says, *'Show me the change.'*

And then finally – we need to be very self-aware of our tendency to self-deceive, personally justify, and arrogantly manipulate in order to get our own way. Here is what James says, *'Don't be like the guy who looks in the mirror and then walks away saying he is okay, because he is deceiving himself. Don't be that guy. Don't be the guy who thinks he is good with God when he is not. Don't be the guy who thinks God is going to tolerate this, because God does not tolerate evil. Don't be the guy who says he will take care of it later; be the guy who says it is offensive, this is what truth is, this is what I need to change.'*

And yet you and I know this because we all practice it. I am a master self-deceiver. I want to look at your sins and not my own. I want to grouch about other people and not about myself. I will justify *'yeah, but...'* *'Yeah, but I am tired.'* *'Yeah, but I am cranky.'* *'Yeah, but I am stressed.'* I will make all the excuses or I will simply say, *'I am going to get my way. I am going to manipulate.'* All of those dark realities are a part of our sin nature. And James is saying he is going to be honest with us and in the middle of trials and tribulations you can still show joy. But make no mistake we have an obligation, we have a responsibility in the midst of truth and we better show some change.

This is what He has called us to do. And if your toes aren't a little sore this morning then maybe I haven't done my job because I know preparing for this the Holy Spirit stomped on my toes right good. But in the end that is what I need. That is why James wrote it and that is why the Holy Spirit inspired it and that is why we teach it.

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Because in the end greater is He that is in me than he who is in the world. God wants us to be all that we can be, in Him, and through Him, and because of Him. If only we will recognize the truth and then show Him the change.

The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.