

“Becoming Men and Women of Action”

James 1:19-27

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When I was fresh out of college, I spent a year out west working for a camp and then moved to Charleston, South Carolina. I was undergoing a pastoral internship there with a pastor named Buster Brown. He was a great pastor and great man of faith. I was with a group of guys helping Campus Outreach get launched there although I wasn't on staff with Campus Outreach. I was working residential construction which was a great learning time for me personally. One of my good buddies was named Cody who I met in this mentorship program I was in and he and I were the only two guys that did not get engaged during that time so all my other buddies were spending more time with their sweeties so Cody and I hung out more as the boys having a good time together in Charleston.

When our time came to an end in the mentoring program Cody gave me a money clip. I'm from Milledgeville, Georgia and I had never had a money clip because I never had much money to clip. He had engraved on the money clip I Kings 2:2. I was not familiar with that verse at the time so I looked it up. In that chapter King David is about to go the way of all the earth and what is that way? It is the way of death. We all will die. King David is about to die and brings Solomon, his son, to himself as he says these words to him in I King 2:2, [2] *“I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and show yourself a man.”* David goes on to say more but that was what was engraved on my money clip.

‘Be strong and show yourself a man.’ You don't show yourself a man necessarily by your thinking or your feeling but you show yourself a man by your doing. Your conduct reveals your character. Your character reveals the reality of your heart. As we look at this passage in James, this is the truth that James wants to reveal to them – that you show yourself, a Christian, by your doing. It is not a dead faith that we have but a living faith. Christ is a living and active God and the Word of God is living and active inside of us so therefore we as believers should also live, act and do.

We are ones who put our hands to the plow and till the field. We are the athletes that run the race with perseverance. We're the farmer that puts his hand into the soil. We are the soldier that shows up for battle. The farmer who does not do will lose his crops. The athlete does not do will lose the race and no longer be an athlete. The soldier who does not show up will be relinquished from his duties. Again, it's in the doing that you reveal the character, the reality of your heart. That is what King David was saying to his son and what James is going to say. King David goes on to tell his son to show himself a man he is to hold fast to God's Word and by walking in the precepts – by doing.

Let's get into our passage in James as he writes this letter to his beloved brothers and sisters. James was the half brother of Jesus and the pastor at the church there in Jerusalem. He is probably writing this letter to many of his church who had been dispersed for a variety of reasons but the major reason was the persecution that they were undergoing. They were facing trials and temptations of all kinds as they had been dispersed throughout the known Mediterranean world as that time. As we look at this passage think of this as James the pastor who is strengthening his church even in the midst of a testing, tempting world filled with trials that they don't shrink back. You don't retreat or resort to inactivity but you show up and shine for Christ as you live for His glory.

James 1:19-27 says [19] *Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; [20] for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. [21] Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.*

[22] *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. [23] 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. [24] For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. [25] 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.*

[26] *If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. [27] 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.*

Prayer:

Father, I thank You so much that You are holy, holy, holy and we desire to be transformed by Your living and active Word as we study Your Word. We desire to be conformed into Your image, that image of holiness, Lord. We desire to be set apart, useful for the Master and in Your service. Jesus, we desire to be Your hands and feet and not just to have Your mind or a new heart but to men and women who will put our hand to the plow, like You have called us to do. May we get out in the fields of this world for they are ripe with harvest and labor, knowing that our labor in the Lord is never in vain. Father, open our eyes so that we may see great and wonderful things in Your Word. Renew our minds. Empower and fill us so that our hands and feet would go out into this coming week loving people well for Your glory. I pray that the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart will be pleasing in Your sight and anoint this time in Your Word, in Christ's Name I pray, Amen.

In James 1 we see that James is acknowledging the reality of the testing of their faith and that they are suffering many trials along with various temptations that they are undergoing as well. James is calling them to be men and women of action in a trying world. He is calling them to not shrink back, but to engage. He lets them know that they are to engage because of God's own will He has brought them forth from His Word that they should be this kind of first fruits of His creation as he mentions in James 1:18 which says, [18] *Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.*

This first fruit is a new creation – a reality of something greater that is coming. The first fruits of the harvest was a gift we would give to the Lord saying we know there is a great harvest coming so we'll give you these first fruits. The Lord has regenerated us as He has brought us from death unto life. He has given us newness of life and in Him we are new creations. In Him we represent to the world that there is newness that is coming. Things aren't as they seem. This world is filled with trials, temptation and is in many ways wrong side up, but there are greater things to come. We are to be those stars that shine brightly in the midst of a broken generation that reveals to the world the newness and the reality of what is to come – the work has already been started in us. How do we do this? We show ourselves. A city on a hill is to shine. We don't light the candle and hide it under the bushel. We are showing the world what this regeneration of Christ looks like as we live.

So, how do we become men and women of action in the midst of a trying and temptation filled world? There are three things I want you to understand from this James 1 text. From

James 1:19-21, if we are to be men and women of action, then one we need to receive the Word with meekness. In James 1:22-25 we are to respond to the Word with obedience. Then in James 1:26-27 we are to renounce self with a willingness to sacrifice.

So, let's start by looking at James 1:19-21. We are to receive the Word with meekness. James 1:19 starts out 'know this...' and he wants us to grasp what he is about to say and understand it. He wants it to get into our minds and sink down to our hearts so that we can be transformed by this. He is also reminding them by calling them beloved brothers, how much he loves them and how much God loves them. Because God loves them He wants to see them victorious and so does James. James tells them to be quick to hear. We want to be quick to hear the Word of God but we don't stop with the hearing for we need to be slow to speak and slow to anger.

This reminds me of the nursery rhyme I tell to my boys titled Wise Old Owl. It goes like this;

A wise old owl lived in an oak.

The more he saw the less he spoke.

The less he spoke the more he heard.

Why can't we all be like that wise old bird?

This is to remind my boys that sometimes they need to be quick to listen and slow to speak. When we're speaking often times we're not learning.

Next, we are to be slow to anger for the anger of man will not produce the actions that God wants. There is a time for righteous anger that will lead to righteous actions but that is not what James is talking about in James 1. He is talking about listening to the Lord and one another, letting it digest down into our hearts and letting our hearts be transformed by Him so that our actions are the right kind of actions.

In order to not have the anger of man, He tells us to put away all forms of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted Word. We are to put off those filthy wicked things of the world which is like taking off dirty clothing – getting rid of the filth that desires to entangle us. Hebrews 12:1-2 says [1] *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, [2] looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.* We do this so we can run in such a way to win the prize.

The world desires to cling to us so we need to be people who are active in putting off the filth and wickedness of the world. When I work out in the yard all day, I get sweaty and my clothes get nasty. Recently I was breaking down a washing machine because I wanted to use the tub of it as a fire pit and I have five sons so no telling what has gone through our washing machine. Our washing machine never lasts as long as they should when we have to wash as much as we do with five boys. You would think I grew up in the Great Depression because I try to salvage everything. So, as I was breaking apart the washing machine, I see underneath the agitator all this grime and muck that I didn't even know existed in this world. It was all the grime and muck that came from my family's clothing over the years we have had this washing machine. This stuff is nasty and my day is coming to an end and I don't go jump in our bed that has clean sheets with all the filth on me. No, I take off those clothes with that filth and stench and perhaps some of them really need to be burned rather than washed, but those are things that want to cling to me and then I clean up before I do what is next in my day.

This is a picture of us here – being men and women who are taking an active part in our sanctification to put off the things of the world so we can receive with meekness the implanted Word. If we are consumed with the wickedness of this world, it plugs our ears and we can't hear the Word. It's as if static is on the line. We cleanse ourselves as we take part in Christ in that sanctifying work so we can receive with meekness the implanted Word. We are not people who have already made up our minds about certain things and therefore God's Word has no impact on us. No, receive it with meekness, humility, as a child who is listening to his father and believes the things that his father is telling him is a reality.

The Word of God is implanted into the soil of our heart, our soul. If you are not meek and you're arrogant in which you have made up your mind in how you are going to live life regardless or if your head is filled with the wickedness of this world, then you're not going to receive the Word with meekness. In order to men and women of action that can fight the good fight in a world of trials and temptations, God is calling us to receive His Word with meekness. This implanted Word is able to save our souls, why? It is because the written Word points to the living Word and then the living Word comes and plants Himself into our very lives. Therefore, greater is He who is in us than he who is the world (I John 4:4). Therefore, we can put our hand to the plow, run our race and be good soldiers in the battle that Christ has called us to, because we have the One who is more than a conqueror in us.

John 14:6 says [6] *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* He is the One who saves our souls. So, you have to ask yourself, has He implanted Himself within me? Have I surrendered all to Him? Galatians 2:20 says [20] *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.* Can you say this of yourself, that you have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer you who live but it's Christ in you? Has He regenerated you with His Word? He is the One who sets me free. I receive His Word with meekness.

Secondly, I'm not just a hearer but I'm a responder and I respond to the Word with obedience. Again James 1:22-25 says [22] *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. [23] 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. [24] For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. [25] 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.*

This mirror is the Word of God. The Word of God serves as a mirror in us. The Word of God reveals the blemishes of our sin just as if we were looking in a mirror at ourselves, we see all our physical blemishes. There is a story about D. L. Moody who got a little boy ready to go somewhere as he cleaned him up and dressed him up. Then he told him to wait in the yard because he needed to go back inside to get something he had forgotten and told the boy not to get dirty. He comes out about one minute later and the boy has mud all over his hair, on his face and everywhere. I can relate to that having five boys of my own. Boys have a knack for getting dirty but that's okay for I appreciate that. Moody tells the boy 'you have mud all over you' and the boy said 'no I don't' and they went back and forth until Moody took the boy inside and put him in front of a mirror. The boy then said 'yes, I do.' It is because the mirror reflects the reality of what is going on. God's Word is the mirror to our souls that reflects the reality to what is going on in our heart and as it reflects the reality of our soul, we're told not to forget, but we are called to be people who act on what we just saw.

Sometimes I will say to my boys ‘go comb your hair’ and they will come back and it will look crazier than it did when I told them go comb it. Then I’ll say ‘did you react to the reality of what you saw in the mirror because your hair looks crazier now than it did.’ We understand the reality of looking in a mirror so we don’t wait till later to fix it, we fix it then. When we read the Word and God challenges us to repentance as He exposes the sin in our life or the reality of the areas of our weakness or to further grow in our strengths, let us be men and women who act right then, who don’t forget so quickly what this law of liberty has revealed, but let’s persevere in those actions He has called us to in that moment. May we be quick to obey. May we respond to the Word with obedience.

I love that James uses the phrase, the law of liberty, for God’s Word does not restrict us or restrain us but His Word sets us free because His Word reveals to us how to live and then His Spirit empowers us to do it. The one who is truly free is the one who has the power to live as he desires to live for he lives how God desires him to live. Psalm 37:4 says *[4] Delight yourself in the LORD, AND He will give you the desires of your heart.* These desires have been renewed by Him, formed by Him and conformed to Him. As we delight in His Word, His desires become our desires and it’s not just something we want to obey but we are free and empowered to obey. The law of liberty causes us to want to do certain things and then God empowers us to do those things through His Spirit working within us.

Therefore, don’t shrink back for our labor is not in vain. I John 4:4 says *[4] Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.* Realize that as we go to make disciples of all men. He has authority and goes with us and within us. So, we receive His Word with meekness and respond to His Word with obedience knowing we have the power and freedom to obey.

Thirdly, from James 1:26-27, we renounce self with a willingness to sacrifice. Again, James 1:26-27 says *[26] If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. [27] 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.*

This reminds me of Christ’s story of the Good Samaritan. There is this man who is broken down, beat up and left on the side of the road. The first two men, a priest and then a Levite, both look at him and keep going. Then a Samaritan comes by and sacrifices – he renounces himself in sacrifice for he not only helps this beaten down man, but pays for futures expenses this man might have in getting better. May we be people who live likewise, who when we see someone in need, we consider the one in need more important than ourself and don’t simply look after our own interests.

Christ was greater than any of us could ever fathom about being and I believe Christ was perfectly content at His Father’s side but Christ seeing us in our helpless state emptied Himself of all of those Divine rights of His throne and humbled Himself, taking the very nature of a servant, being born into the likeness of man, entered into our brokenness – renouncing Himself, willing to serve, willing to seek out those who were sick, dead and broken, willing to bring healing and life. We even see it with the model He laid before us with His Disciples as He robed Himself with a towel and washed their feet, even the one who was about to betray Him and therefore He calls us to do the same. He calls us to love our enemies just as the Samaritan man loved his enemy and just as Jesus loved His enemies. He loved me and you and we were once the objects of His wrath, His enemies, for we all like sheep had gone astray, seeking our own way and seeking to save ourselves thinking that we could. Romans 5:8 says *[8] but God shows*

His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Because of His great immeasurable love He gave Himself. He calls us out of a love from Him and for others, to be men and women who give ourselves for Him and others.

Many times as you read through the New Testament and you see Christ talking about His love, it is often followed with the words ‘so He gave...’ John 3:16 says [16] *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.* In Ephesians when He is talking to husbands He says in Ephesians 5:25, [25] *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.* We are to be people, who out of love, renounce ourselves, give ourselves with a willingness to serve. We don’t serve for our glory or fame. As I Corinthians 13, the love chapter, we could give our love to the flames, but if we have not love we’re just a noisy gong, a clanging cymbal. So, let the love of Christ compel us to renounce self and serve others – those in need, those whom God brings to our path.

There was a great missionary named C. T. Studd. He was a missionary in China and Africa. He had a great career ahead of him for he was a great British cricket player. Americans don’t tend to think much of cricket but it is harder than it looks. I went to England on a mission trip and struck out numerous times playing cricket. It is very different from our American baseball. He was also part of a group who decided to give their life to the Kingdom and he wrote this poem titled *Only One Life, Twill Soon Be Past.* In it, it says;

*Two little lines I heard one day,
Traveling along life’s busy way;
Bringing conviction to my heart,
And from my mind would not depart;
Only one life, ’twill soon be past,
Only what’s done for Christ will last.*

*Only one life, yes only one,
Soon will its fleeting hours be done;
Then, in ‘that day’ my Lord to meet,
And stand before His Judgement seat;
Only one life, ’twill soon be past,
Only what’s done for Christ will last.*

*Only one life, the still small voice,
Gently pleads for a better choice
Bidding me selfish aims to leave,
And to God’s holy will to cleave;
Only one life, ’twill soon be past,
Only what’s done for Christ will last.*

*Only one life, a few brief years,
Each with its burdens, hopes, and fears;
Each with its clays I must fulfill.
living for self or in His will;
Only one life, ’twill soon be past,
Only what’s done for Christ will last.*

*When this bright world would tempt me sore,
When Satan would a victory score;
When self would seek to have its way,
Then help me Lord with joy to say;
**Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.***

*Give me Father, a purpose deep,
In joy or sorrow Thy word to keep;
Faithful and true what e'er the strife,
Pleasing Thee in my daily life;
**Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.***

*Oh let my love with fervor burn,
And from the world now let me turn;
Living for Thee, and Thee alone,
Bringing Thee pleasure on Thy throne;
**Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.***

*Only one life, yes only one,
Now let me say, "Thy will be done";
And when at last I'll hear the call,
I know I'll say "twas worth it all";
**Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.***

***Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.**
And when I am dying, how happy I'll be,
If the lamp of my life has been burned out for Thee.*

May we too, like C. T. Studd, live a life that is burned out for the glory of God – that we live a life, understanding that it is fleeting, that it is passing and that receives His Word meekness, responds to His Word with obedience and renounces self with a willingness to sacrifice. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for Your call to action from James. We thank You that James is the half brother of Jesus, spending the majority of his life not believing, although seeing during that time, Jesus being a Man of action. After the action of the cross and resurrection, thank You that You redeemed and renewed James, giving him faith and the reality of the Savior. Then James laid down his life for the glory of God and the benefit of Your church. May we look to James as a model of faith and action and understand that in this broken world that the way through it is to be men and women who receive and respond to Your Word and renounce self. May our actions bring You great glory as we live our life that will soon be passed, in Christ's Name, Amen.