

Now I know you all might have thought that because it's Mother's Day, I'd have a Mother's Day related message. And in some ways our passage from James could be a reminder of an aspect of our mothers. When they were scolding us. So consider this message a reminder of the times when your mother scolded you.

Today in our sermon series on the book of James, or as I like to call it "Jim Time, we will look at the last few verses of the first chapter. In these verses we will find out ways seek out pure faith.

There was a Danish theologian from the 19th century named Soren Kierkegaard. He is known for his exploration of themes like faith, ethics, anxiety, and our own relationship to truth. He came to believe that truth could be subjective because our truths were a result of our own individual deep engagement with the world. Among his many quotes, I thought you might all enjoy this one, especially on Mother's Day. "Believe a girl, you will regret it, believe her not and you will regret it'

Now in addition to this tidbit of wisdom, he also identified what he described as two kinds of religion -- Religion A and Religion B. Religion A is "faith" in name only. A faith that, according to Paul in 2nd Timothy was one "holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power. On this type of Christian, Paul said, "Avoid them!?" Religion A is the practice of attending church without a genuine faith in the living Lord.

Religion B is a life-transforming, destiny-changing experience. It is commitment to the crucified and risen Savior, It establishes an ongoing personal relationship between a forgiven sinner and a gracious God.

Religion aka Faith. Which one do you have? Do you have Religion A or Religion B? Do you have Religion A or a faith that means nothing. Or do you have Religion B, a faith that not only changes our lives for the better, but the lives of those around us. I think Jesus, James, Paul, and Kierkegaard would all agree, any faith has to be faith in action, or it is no faith at all.

Let's talk about practical ways to live out faith.

The first thing to develop is the skill of thinking first and speaking second. Vs 19 “Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.”

These instructions on thinking and speaking were for each and every person James was addressing. "Wherefore, my beloved brethren..." James follows this with four imperatives for living out our faith. "Be quick to listen." I'm going to throw out a math words problem for you.

How many mouths did God give us? How many ears did God give us? So how much more do you think we should listen than talk? Twice as much. We should listen twice as much as we talk.

When we talk too much and listen too little, we communicate more than the words coming out of our mouth. We create this atmosphere that tells whoever we're talking to, that what we think is much more important than what they think. Not only should we be listening to what others tell us, but we should also listen to what God is telling us. A continual talker cannot hear what anyone else says, but also, they may not hear when God is trying to say to them.

The next imperative tells us to be slow to speak. Many people love to speak. I love to talk. And yet there are times when we should, but do not keep our thoughts to ourselves. You've heard the KISS concept described as "keep it simple stupid," but perhaps it needs an addendum that says, "keep it shut stupid." As I said a few weeks ago, I'll say again today. If you can't say anything nice...

The third imperative tells us to be slow to anger. Anger can close our minds to God's truth. A consistently argumentative attitude is not conducive to a humble treatment of truth. Solomon had something to say about this in Prov. 14:29 He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalts folly.

James go on to say that uncontrolled anger "does not produce God's righteousness". We cannot be the kind of person after God's own heart when we cannot control our tempers. And don't you think it's going to be hard for someone to be won to Jesus by one with a hot temper.

James ties it all together in verse 21. “therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness.” Rid yourself can also be translated as lay apart. The Greek word for this, apothemenoi, was used to describe someone taking off their clothes. The author of Hebrews uses this word in chapter 12:1 when speaking of throwing off any excessive weight, such as unnecessary clothing, to make us ready for the race of faith.

Rid yourselves, lay apart, take off things in your life that are contrary to the nature of God. Because church family, these things will keep you at a distance from God. These things will keep you from fulfilling the great commandment of Jesus...”make disciples”, these things will result in an unhealthy church environment. These things will keep us from the transformation that God desires for us.

Along with these four imperatives, James has yet another way we can practically live out our life of faith. Don't Just Read It, Do It! James says this in vs 22, “But be doers of the word and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.” It is not enough to just "listen to the word". It's not enough to just read the word.

James makes it crystal clear. Those who congratulate themselves on being just hearers of the truth are deceiving themselves. If they assume that this is all that is needed, they are sadly mistaken.

“Deceiving” as used here in James is a verb that means “to cheat or deceive by false reasoning.” This deception comes from some thinking they've done enough by merely listening to God's Word, no further action required. James sets the record straight by comparing such a person to a someone who looks at their face in a mirror, leaves and forgets what they looks like. Now this person's look in the mirror is not just a glance; it's a look of careful observation and attentive scrutiny

This is a person who thoroughly studies the word, understands it completely, knows what this word is asking to be done, but just doesn't do what is being asked.

Now good news, not everyone is like that. And James is ready to talk about the one who looks intently into the word and "continues" in it. A doer of the word. A person who will be blessed in all they do. The one who, according to David in **Psalm 1** meditates in God's law day and night. The one who learns to be faithful in the little things and eventually graduates to be trusted with the big things.

This reminds me of the story of a man who walked the streets of Philadelphia looking for work. He stopped at the office of a well-known businessman named Stephen Girard. Who just so happened to charter the first bank of the United States. As it turned out, Mr. Girard indeed had a job for him. "You see that pile of bricks out there?" said Mr. Girard, "Carry them over to the other end of the yard and stack them up."

The man completed the job before nightfall and Mr. Girard gave him his pay. The man was so excited and asked if there would be more work the next day. Mr. Girard said "Yes, come in tomorrow and carry those same bricks back to where you found them." The man showed up the next day and got straight to work. Over the next week Mr. Girard had the man carry those bricks back and forth. What was Mr. Girard doing? Was he crazy?

What Mr. Girard was doing was learning if he could trust this man to do exactly what he was told. Now he knew he could give this man a new and bigger responsibility. Mr. Girard told him to go downtown and bid on a large quantity of sugar. The people at the auction didn't recognize him. Of course he was a total stranger. So how could they trust his bid? Still his bid was accepted. The auctioneer then asked who would pay the bill. "Mr. Girard," said the man. "I am his agent."

When we are doers of the word. When we show ourselves to be faithful in little things, God will know that we can be trusted with big things.

How are you feeling right now? Ready for one more pearl of wisdom from James. Walk the Walk, Don't Just Talk the Talk.

Doing this means bridling the tongue. Now James is going to go deeper on this in chapter 3. But he offers this teaser in vs 26, "If any think they are religious and do not bridle their tongues they deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. Why does he say this and why is this important?"

Because words hurt! And who here thinks that a church is immune from hurtful words? How many dozens of people right here in Kingman won't darken the door of a church because of something someone in the church said to them. Perhaps that church was St. John's.

Not only do words hurt, but they can do damage that lasts a lifetime. Church family let's not allow unwise words spoken in anger or ignorance prevent another person from having a lasting relationship with God.

Listen to this poem by Eleanore Livingston Root. "Be Careful My Tongue; You are little, but strong; So often your words Are somehow all wrong. You don't want to hurt; And yet there's a sting; And so I must guard you, A worrisome thing. How often I've wished That I could recall Some harsh word you've spoken, Not meant at all. And though I'm forgiven And have peace of mind I know there are sores That such things leave behind. So "God, guard my tongue In each word I say, So they may be pleasing To Thee, Lord, I pray."

We've arrived at the last verse of this chapter where James finally lets us in on what Religion B is all about. Vs 27, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world."

At the time these words were written, orphans and widows had very few avenues of economic support. Unless a family member was willing to care for them, they were reduced to begging, selling themselves as slaves, or starving to death. By caring for these powerless people, the church put God's Word into practice.

People of Religion B don't just talk about what they should do, they do what they should. They don't just talk religiously; they act it out in their lives. They think first and speak second. They do it and don't just read it. They don't just talk the talk they walk the walk. Church family let's be people of Religion B. People who are constantly seeking pure faith.