

APPLYING THE STORY

James 1

- Turn to James 1
- Say hello to our family in VTA & Carp
- I'll pray and then we'll read
- Read Jas 1:18-26
- WHY, WHAT, HOW, SO WHAT?

INTRO:

- 1) I have a friend who is pretty blunt and honest—but funny. He's one of my favorite people in the world. After he finished reading a book about a guy realizing the story he's been living is a bad one, he attempts to live a better one.
 - a) My honest friend text me and said, I just finished the book. My story sucks. How is yours?
 - i) It forced me to think about the Bible as the Story of God and to ask the question, "How can we enter into this story?" Because here's the problem, so much of life is ordinary.
- 2) I remember hearing of a story of John Newton (Abolitionist & author of 'Amazing Grace').
 - a) He said that when his wife of 40 years died, whom he really loved, it was difficult, but he was able to handle it with grace. But when his plans for the day were ruined, he couldn't function well.
 - b) Life is not usually lived in the big moments, but in the "daily littles." usually lived in the daily little's (the diapers, the traffic, the interruptions, the emails, the phone calls, the boss, the desire to be appreciated a little more, the word spoken that you wish you could take back).
- 3) The question is, "How can we apply scripture to our everydayness of life, or better yet, How can we enter into the extraordinary Story of God in the ordinariness of life? James says that there is a freedom/liberation and blessing that comes as a result of applying the word in our everydayness of life—of living out of this story of God. How do we do that?
- 4) James says, you've got to ACCEPT the word. What?! That's your answer o wise one? Read the Bible? I didn't say that. I did say, you have to receive the word, and it might be a little different from what you expected.

I. WHY WE MUST ACCEPT IT (1:18-21)

A) THE CONTRADICTION

- 1) It seems to be a contradiction at first when James says that you must receive the word of God.
 - a) In **v.18** he gives a couple of distinguishing marks of a real Christian.
 - i) A Christian is someone that has been 'born again.' This method of salvation is what sets the Christian faith apart from all other religions.
 - ii) The Christian way of salvation is not turning a new leaf—it is living out of a new life given by faith in Christ.
 - b) In **v.18 & 21** James also says that the distinguishing mark of a real believer is they have a new relationship to the word of God.
 - i) "Born again" by word of truth (v.18)
 - ii) "The word implanted" (v.21)
 - iii) Jonathan Edwards did some pretty extensive research on revival in the 17th century during the time of the Great Awakening.
- 2) Why then does he now say in **v.21** that you must receive the word of God?
 - a) There is a way to read the Bible, but not have it really affecting you.
 - b) When you read this section, it's pretty obvious that it's dealing with how we should apply the word of God in our lives, but then it is almost interrupted by some tangent that James goes on when he says in v.19...

"Know this by beloved brothers, let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger/ wrath, for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. (Jas 1:19)
- 3) Why does he use anger as the test of whether or not you are really receiving the word of God?
 - a) He IS NOT SAYING *that anger is sin in and of itself.*
 - i) Anger of itself is energy and can be helpful at times. In fact...
 - (1) We're told to be angry and not sin (Eph 4).
 - (2) We're told to be angry at injustice and evil (e.g. children)
 - (3) God Gets angry—Jesus gets angry, but gets angry well. His anger is slow-burning, righteous, justice, & protective.
 - b) The anger that he speaks of here is a selfish-sinful anger. The root of it is idolatry.
 - i) It's fast to speak the mind, not because you have violated the law of God's kingdom, but because you violated the laws of my of my kingdom.

(1) “Well,” you say, I don’t really struggle with anger. Yeah perhaps you don’t fly off the handle and have a ‘Blow-Up’ kind of Anger.

(a) Maybe the way you deal with conflict is not to blow up, but to ‘Clam-Up.’ You give the silent treatment, you want that person to feel your wrath, but you are too cowardice to say anything because your idol is acceptance.

B) WHY RECEIVE?

1) What’s the reason why we must receive the word of God on a continual basis?

a) Because God’s standard is different from yours & your culture.

i) What you and I call a “temper problem,” or “anger problem,” God calls wickedness & filth that is rooted in pride.

(1) Rooted in you being the king.

(2) What’s really gross is that we can be are tempted to use the church as your kingdom.

b) The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God, or the righteous life that God requires.

i) God is righteous—completely right. And because of that, you could hear James say,

(1) The worry of man, the flaky-ness, the unfaithfulness, the lying words, the cheating of man, the jealousy of man, the gossip of man, the self-pity of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

2) You’ve got to come under its authority.

a) Jonah is a great example of a man that knew the scriptures, read them and even quoted them (he was a prophet).

b) Yet when it was time to do it, he either interpreted them to his liking or he refused to do it.

c) He’s like Louis C.K. *“I have a lot of beliefs... And I live by none of them. That’s just the way I am. They’re just my beliefs. I just like believing them – I like that part. They’re my little believies. They make me feel good about who I am. But if they get in the way of a thing I want, I [sure as heck] do that.”*—Louie C.K.

— TEASER—HOW DO WE RECEIVE IT?

a) We’ll get to that in a second.

II. WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE TO ACCEPT IT (1:22; 26-27)

“But be doers of the word and not hearers only

A) WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STORY?

1. Care About the Poor (Social Morality).

- a. Reading the Bible, if we do not do it rightly, can get us into a lot of trouble. The Christian community is as concerned with how we read the Bible as that we read it Peterson (p. 81).
- b. In Luke 10:26, Jesus asked the scholar, 'How do you read it?' Not, 'what did you read?' Why does the scholar ask for a definition?
- c. Clearly, because he needs to defend himself against responding to the text personally. Defining neighbor depersonalizes the neighbor, turns him or her into an object a thing over which he can take control, do with whatever he wants.
 - i. But it also depersonalizes the scriptural text. He wants to talk about the text, treat the text as a thing, dissect it, analyze it, discuss it—endlessly. But Jesus won't play that game. The scholar has just quoted words of Holy Scripture that witness to the living word of God they are words to be listened to, submitted to, obeyed, *lived*.
 - ii. So instead of inviting the scholar to join him in a Bible study of Deuteronomy and Leviticus under the shade of a nearby oak tree, Jesus tells him a story, one of his most famous, the Good Samaritan story, concluding as he has begun, with a question, "Which of these three, do you think, proved a neighbor to the man...?"
 - iii. The scholar is impaled by the question: the words of Scripture can no longer be handled by means of definition, "Who is my neighbor?" The text insists on participation, "will you be a neighbor?"
 - iv. Jesus insists on participation. Jesus dismisses the scholar with a command, "Go and do..." Live what you read. We read the Bible in order to live the word of God.

2. Keep Yourself Pure/Un-polluted (Personal Morality)

- a. Notice when James talks about purity. He doesn't point out the despicable sins that we find so repulsive in the church building, he illustrates the respectable sins, pride, anger, and now **gossip, slander (v. 26)**.

3. The conservatives and the liberal churches find it difficult to can't keep these two together.

- a. This is CNN and Fox News holding hands—the liberal and conservative.
 - i. The story of God puts both together. To participate in his story means that you are becoming a doer of the word in personally and in community.

- b. James says, both are a part of what it means to participate in God's unfolding plan of redemption and renewal.

III. HOW TO ACCEPT IT(1:23-25)

Here we see how to find the liberty/freedom and blessing that the story brings. You've got to live it out, but before you live it out, you've got to gaze in.

A) YOU'VE GOT TO TAKE IT IN

- 1) (v.23-34) James gives the analogy of a man that looks into a mirror. (Maybe it would've made for sense if he would've said a woman looking into a mirror. There's a different level of intensity).
 - a) It doesn't say that they man failed to change anything. It says that he went away and forgot what he was like.
 - b) It says that the reason why we don't apply the word is because we forget who we are.
 - c) To put it positively, in order to live it out, you've got to first look in the mirror.
- 2) In v.25 James contrasts the man that forgot with the man/woman that looks intently into the law of liberty.
 - a) How could the law bring liberty? It shows you that you're guilty before God. Why is this man changed into being a doer after looking into the law? He experiences freedom.
 - b) There was one man that truly 'accepted the word.'
 - i) He lived the righteous life that God requires (v.20)
 - ii) He accepted the word—humbly but courageously. When tempted by power, comfort, He accepted the word.
 - iii) He was the one that was the friend of the poor and the broken.
 - iv) He was the one that was free from impurity and pollution.
 - c) When Moses was told to speak to the Rock and instead lost his temper and struck the rock, we're told in the N.T that rock was Christ—Christ was the one taking the anger of man, all the times that you've flown off the handle—he took the blows so that you can be forgiven.
 - i) The law came through Moses, but grace and peace came through Jesus Christ.
 - d) He took all of the righteous wrath and anger of God upon himself.
 - i) On the cross—all of the just anger of God was poured out upon Christ so that you don't have to endure it.
 - ii) In Christ righteousness and peace have met together have kissed.
 - iii) Jesus Christ accepted the word all the way to the end, so that you that have simply agreed with it, but not accepted it, can receive his righteousness.

- 3) When you look into that mirror and see that's who you are now, you now have the reflection of Christ by faith in him. What God looks at you, he sees the perfectly righteous life of his son, and when you begin to see that, it will change you it will cause you to live it out.
 - a) But the bible is a mirror. You've got to look in the mirror. Before it tells you what to do, it shows you who you are. A changed lifestyle flows out of a radical new understanding. A radical new understanding brings a radical new lifestyle. If you look at the bible and say, "I have to forgive" I have to try harder.
 - b) That's not what the Bible ever says you should do.
 - c) James say, If you can't be honest, kind, deal with anger, you've forgotten who you are. In Xanity, being comes before doing.

B) It says that **he looks intently** at the law of liberty

The way to continue, to persevere through (Meditation)—becoming a participant in the story.

1. **Psalm 1:1-3** Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers. **2** But they delight in the law of the LORD, meditating on it day and night. **3** They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do.
2. **Joshua 1:8** Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do.
3. Meditation is thinking a truth *in* and thinking a truth *out* until the ideas become big and sweet, moving and affecting, and until the reality of God is sensed in the heart.
 - a. Meditation is, strictly speaking, neither the Bible nor prayer; rather it is the Bible turning to prayer. Meditation is *Lectio Divina*—"Divine Reading." Meditation is a *formative* reading of the Bible rather than an *informative* reading. Informative reading aims mainly at breaking things down and analyzing them (e.g., "What does this mean? What does this word mean? How does this word affect the rest of the sentence?") Formative reading aims mainly at putting things together, seeing connections (e.g., "That's me!" "What would I be like if I really did this?" "What kind of God would say this?") In informative reading, *you* examine and ask questions of the text. In formative reading, *the text* examines and asks questions of you.
 - b. Meditation is the primary way in which we guard against the fragmentation of our Scripture reading into isolated oracles.

- i. Meditation enters into the coherent universe of God's revelation. Meditation is the prayerful employ of imagination in order to become friends with the text.— Eugene Peterson
- c. Meditation is where we let the images and the stories of the entire revelation penetrate our understanding.
 - i. By meditation we make ourselves at home and conversant with everyone in the story, entering the place where Moses and Elija and Jesus converse together. Participation is necessary. Meditation is participation.
- d. "We meditate to become empathetic with the text. We move from being critical outsiders to becoming appreciative insiders. The text is no longer something to be looked at with cool and detached expertise but something to be entered into with the playful curiosity of a child." -E. Peterson¹

2. George Muller provides a case study. “

- a. The difference then between my former practice and my present one is this. Formerly, when I arose, I began to pray as soon as possible, and generally spent all my time till breakfast in prayer. ...What was the result? I often spent... even an hour on my knees, before being conscious to myself of having derived comfort, encouragement, or humbling of the soul. Often, after having suffered much from wandering thoughts... I scarcely ever suffer now in this way... I began... to meditate on the New Testament from the beginning, early in the morning... searching, as it were, into every verse to get a blessing out of it.... not for the sake of preaching [to others], but for the sake of obtaining food for my own soul. ...After a very few minutes my soul had been led to confession, or to thanksgiving, or to intercession, or to supplication. ...When thus I have been for a while... I go on to the next words or verse, turning all as I go into prayer, ...as the Word may lead to it; but still continually keeping before me, that food for my own soul is the object of my meditation. ...It often astonishes me that I did not sooner see this point. ²
- b. The parallel with reading Scripture seems to me almost exact: if I am not participating in the reality—the God reality, the creation/salvation /holiness reality—revealed in the bible, not involved in the obedience Calvin wrote of, I am probably not going to be much interested in reading about it—at least not for long. Obedience is the thing, living in active response to the living God. The most important question we ask of this text is not, “What does this mean?” but “What can I obey?” a simple act of obedience will open up our lives to this text far more quickly than any number of

¹ Eugene Peterson, *Eat This Book* (Wm. B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI. 2006) 103

Bible studies and dictionaries and concordances. Not that the study is not important.³

B) **TO LIVE OUT**

- 1) Perseveres
- 2) That is how spiritual growth is supposed to work. God says, Remember the story, that you are a part of the story.
 - c. Stories get you don't they, stories of dungeons, un-scalable walls, and a hero who comes.
 - i. But this is the ultimate story: It is a ransom story where the true king comes back.
 - ii. But oh no, He is dying and weak and hope seems gone, but no the defeat is a triumph. J/C comes into your story, when you believe in Him, and he turns your life from a senseless random meandering and turns it into a drama-a drama of rescue. That is why everybody who is a Christian has a testimony.
 - d. But then not only that, He also comes into your story and makes it a drama. J/C puts you into His story of renewal. He says I'm creating an alternate kingdom with you included and someday I'm going to renew the entirety of creation.
 - e. It's only when I see myself in the story that my heart is melted and the self-justification which is at the root of my sin, is changed. How does that happen? You remember the story through looking into the mirror.
3. But it doesn't mean you shouldn't try hard.
 - a. If you are tempted to punch someone in the nose, you probably won't think it out. Ultimately if you want to change you've got to get the gospel into your life.
 - i. But at the moment just stop and say, "I could get arrested." You've got to scrap. The primary means is to remember the story through tasting the word, but you still have to work. Not just work, also believe. But you still have to work.
 - ii. Sometimes you don't like the person you are sitting next to. In the community of the church, it's the story that makes us feel like one (mission trip when I meet someone who is a Christian who has had the same story, it is the story that trumps all other stories (ethnic background, social background), it transforms my identity so that these barriers that used to be so big are no longer so big.

³ Eugene Peterson, Eat This Book (p.

- iii. He still says, you have to rid your heart of malice deceit and hypocrisy. Use the gospel on your heart, It will eventually turn you into one community, but you still must try hard.

3) **HUMBLY ACCEPT THE WORD** (PERSONAL)

- a) It includes not only sensational crimes but also everyday evils like a complaining attitude, a jealous spirit, a deceitful or gossipy way of speaking, or a rebelliousness against authority.
- b) Like numerous other biblical statements, this one makes clear that repentance is not merely a sorrow for one's sin but, more fully, a sorrow that moves one to make changes in one's life. Biblical repentance is a change of direction, a turning around, a choice to repudiate immorality and cry out to God, "I don't want to be like this anymore!"

4) **DO IT** (VOLITION)⁴

- a) *Humbly accept* would then mean not only to believe, but to act upon that word--for example, to accept that being quick to listen and slow to speak really is the best course in the midst of the conflict.

SEE THE REAL MAIN CHARACTER!!!

The bible is a grand story, from Genesis to Revelation, with Christ as the lead character. The more we hear that story, the more we find ourselves being written into it as characters. We discover ourselves not in the fading scripts of this age or in glossy magazine images but in the story of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. We are there with Adam and Eve, capitulating to the lie. We are there with Abraham and Sarah, hearing and believing the gospel and being justified. We are walking along with the disciples, not getting it, then getting it, then not getting it again, and then really discovering what his journey was all about. And we are there with the company of heaven, worshipping the lamb. It is the purpose of [reading] and sacrament to put us there, to kill our dead-end character and to write us into God's script.⁵

-Michael Horton (The Gospel Commission)

⁴ Audio file from Tim Keller, *A People Under the Word* (Redeemer Pres, Manhattan N.Y. 2012)

⁵ Michael Horton, *The Gospel Commission: Recovering God's Strategy for Making Disciples* (Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI. 2011) 169.