



## Designed for Growth

### Part 2

*James 1:19-26*

#### Take note of this... (*James 1:19*)

There are moments when we are tempted to give up wrestling with the daily demands, distractions, messiness, and clutter of life in the 21st century. This is why I laughed when I read the following: “Not only did I fall off the diet wagon, I dragged it into the woods, set it on fire, and used the insurance money to buy cupcakes.” I suspect most of us have felt that way at some point.

In the Epistle of James, located near the end of the New Testament, James writes in a manner that is hard-hitting, challenging, and intensely practical. He encourages his readers not to give up wrestling with the demands of daily living, but to persevere with the equipping and enabling strength that comes from time spent in the presence of God.

Throughout his epistle, James brings timeless truths into our everyday lives in a way that is perfectly straightforward, yet powerfully significant. Toward the end of the opening chapter, he does so again.

As James draws his readers into all that he has to say, he reinforces in their minds the principle that belief and behavior work together, writing, “take note of this” (1:19). It is almost as if he is saying, “You don’t want to miss this.” In order to fully appreciate what James is teaching, we need to take note of the context of his words and how they flow from 1:18: “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.”

James is reminding us that because we know what it means to have a heart touched by the love of God, drawn into a life-altering relationship with Him, “take note of this.” He

is about to say that our behavior comes directly out of our relationship with God. Belief and behavior work together. Your new birth must be seen through the behavior of a new life.

Concerning the practical living out of your faith each day, James makes the point that we should be “quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (1:19). Whenever you find yourself wrestling with issues at work, challenges with your children, problems at school, concerns about your health or a spouse with dementia—amidst all of that—you should be “quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.” James is reminding us that it is easier to behave in that manner and rest in the enabling grace of God when you have been spending time with Him, “humbly accepting the word of truth planted in you” (1:21).

When you experience moments of deep intimacy in the presence of God, resting in Him, delighting in Him, nourishing your soul, and being equipped by Him, you can more easily live out your faith because you are no longer relying on your own strength. Now you are dependent on His strength. Such teaching reminds us that authentic, credible Christian living, while growing and maturing in your faith, means belief and behavior go together.

#### Do not merely listen... (*James 1:22*)

As a part of his practical, hard-hitting focus in this passage, James then helps his readers to move to the next level: “Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourself. Do what it says” (1:22).

The key word here is “merely.” James is reminding us that an outward habit of merely listening is not enough. He then continues: “Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and after looking at himself goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like” (1:23-24).

James is telling us to be careful coming to God’s Word in a hurried, superficial manner, mentally running through a brief passage of

Scripture and then dashing off in a mad whirl of business and busyness. Instead, take your time, read it slowly, examine it, savor it, enjoy it, devote time to it, welcome it like a close friend. Then you will guard against deceiving yourself.

James is telling us there is a world of a difference between looking at a passage of Scripture just long enough to see the words, and delving deeply enough to see the truth.

#### He will be blessed... (*James 1:25*)

The final point James makes in this passage is also clear. “But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this—not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does” (1:25).

For James, obedience to the teaching of Scripture amidst the daily demands, distractions, messiness, and clutter of life is essential. It is not enough to simply read the Scripture, and then forget about it. Persevering with obedience, making informed, Christ-like choices, and sticking with them brings the blessing of God.

Yet somehow we are tempted to believe that obedience is legalistic, stark, and mechanical, somehow devoid of joy and blessing. James tells us the opposite is true: Christians seeking to grow in their faith will be blessed when we live in obedience to all God has called us to. It is also worth remembering that we do not simply apply and obey the Scriptures out of a slavish sense of duty. We obey the Bible because we know and love its author.

There is no such thing as becoming instantly mature, intellectually astute, morally flawless, and spiritually wise, a model of faithfulness and uninhibited faith. Those qualities come from the hard work of faithful, consistent obedience.

That is when belief and behavior work together. Perfectly straightforward, yet powerfully significant.