

Take a Look in the Mirror.

James 1:19-25 CSB

July 5, 2026

The title of today's message is Take a Look in the Mirror based out of James 1:19-25.

I'm excited to preach this text today, because James 1:19 is actually the first verse I ever memorized.

When I was a kid, my dad signed me up for Upward Basketball. Did anyone ever play in an Upward league? For those unfamiliar – it's basically church league basketball. I'm sure Upward is doing real good these days, but in my town, it was the league reserved for those who were VERY mediocre at basketball.

As I got loaded into the truck headed to my very first game, my dad hands me a piece a paper and said "In order to play tonight, you have to have this Bible verse memorized."

A Bible verse? I don't even know my address at this point in life, much less a Bible verse. So for the next ten minutes I'm sitting in the passenger seat with the console light on trying to cram this verse into my brain.

Finally, my dad pulls up to Beaver Baptist Church where I dart out of the truck to make a sprint into the gym. I've got it memorized but I don't know for how long. And like a good soldier reporting for duty I found my coach and said it!

James 1:19 – *Listen brothers and sisters, be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry, for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.*

My coach looked at me a little confused before saying alright get out there and get some practice shots up. It was at that point I realized that nobody else was quoting any verses. I came to two possible conclusions: either these coaches didn't read the Upward Basketball rules very well OR my dad lied to me to get me to memorize a Bible verse.

Either way, that verse paid huge dividends for teenager Cory who loved to play sports. Being quick to listen to my coaches, being slow to speak to the refs, or being slow to anger when the game didn't go our way was always a good reminder. And I would also say it has had an even larger impact in my life off the court. And I'm hoping this whole text has the same effect on you today, that it makes a pretty big splash in your pond as well.

James 1:19-20 → Sets the stage.

My dear brothers and sisters, understand this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger, for human anger does not accomplish God's righteousness.

James 1:19-20 (CSB)

We learn three truths at the outset of this passage.

James is writing to believers. (My dear brothers and sisters) – This is a common phrase used throughout the book of James. He refers to his audience as brothers and sisters sixteen times across all five chapters. He is clearly writing to followers of Jesus.

James is writing to all believers. (Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger) – James doesn't care if you are a seasoned believer or a new believer, this passage is convicting for everyone.

If I were to poll the room and ask which of the following is your greatest struggle? A.) be quick to listen. B.) be slow to speak. C.) be slow to anger. Most of us would ask is there a D.) all of the above. Everyone has room to grow in these three areas.

James is writing to challenge all believers. (Accomplish God's Righteousness) – Here's the challenge: at your salvation, when you chose to follow Jesus, you were declared righteous. You stand forgiven and redeemed before God (hallelujah and amen) At the same time, when you were declared righteous you were also placed on this lifelong journey of now being righteous, living righteous.

And this is where the struggle begins. Because the Lord has to do a lot of pruning to get us from our old way of living to our new way of living.

This is the everyday battle for believers. But praise the Lord, God uses the book of James to give us a roadmap on how to do this well.

If you are going to live righteously, you have got to make it a priority to

Rid yourself of worldliness.

Therefore, rid yourselves of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, humbly receive the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. James 1:21 (CSB)

This idea of "rid yourself of all moral filth" paints a picture for us of throwing something off. James is clearly telling us we should not get comfortable living with our sin. We should make it a daily practice to continually rid ourselves of our old way of living.

We actually see this habit mentioned throughout scripture. Paul writes to the Colossians about putting off the old self. It mirrors the same lingo we find here in James. The author of Hebrews, as he writes to believers, tells them in Hebrews 12:1-2 that they should lay aside the sticky sins and the worldly weights that so easily entangle us.

Even Jesus challenged people to rid themselves of their old way of living. In John 8, a crowd brings in a woman who has been caught in adultery. Every one of them has a heart full of rage and a fistful of rocks, ready to condemn this woman to death. Jesus, with such grace and mercy, extends a sobering question to the crowd, “The one without sin among you should be the first to throw a stone at her.”

One by one the crowd began to disperse, until all that was left was the woman and Jesus. He then asks her a question, “Where are your accusers?” She responded, “There is none.” And Jesus tells her, “Neither do I, now go and sin no more.”

We know Jesus is quick to offer salvation, grace, and forgiveness to sinners – but Jesus is also quick to remind us that salvation is supposed to lead us to transformation.

I mentioned my dad earlier, my parents actually didn’t know the Lord until their early twenties. They were married living in a single-wide trailer at the bottom of the hill on their parents property. On Christmas Eve, of all days, there was flash flooding due to the rain – causing the levy to break and to flood my parents home. The water was up to four feet deep. The next day, my dad is in a john boat floating through the house trying to salvage any Christmas presents or wedding photos or anything else of value, but for the most part they had to start over.

Fortunately for my parents, some people from a church down the road, Smyrna Baptist Church, offered them some gifts and support to help them get back on their feet. And my parents, who were unbelievers, felt they owed the church to at least visit one Sunday to show their gratitude. So a few weeks later – they went!

At the end of the church service, my mom told my dad, “I’m going down front to talk to that pastor.” My dad was like, “You’re not leaving me.” So as the music began to play, both my mom and stepped out of their seats and made the decision that day to follow Jesus!

Here’s why I share that story: in that moment my parents had now been declared righteous by God, totally forgiven of their sins, and now they wanted to live righteous. They both had parts of their old life that they needed to throw off. One area was drunkenness. Alcohol was a big part of their life, but when they came home from church – they took their liquor cabinet and one by one poured it out in the backyard. They would never turn their nose up to someone else who had a sip of alcohol but for them – it was a stronghold in their life that God set them free from in an instance. They’ve been sober ever since.

At the same time, there were other parts of their life that didn’t change so quickly. For my dad, it was his foul mouth and his quick temper. Those did not change overnight. It was a long season in my dad’s life of ridding himself of the old Jerry and putting on Christ in his life.

There is a real churchy word called sanctification. Brilliant people have written tons of books defining and explaining sanctification, but here is my favorite definition I’ve hung onto over the years.

Sanctification is the process of becoming more like Jesus. More like Jesus is my words, in my thoughts, in my actions, in my desires, in my habits, or in my response to when I get in my wife's car and the FUEL LIGHT is on. In my whole life I want to be more like Christ.

Erickson writes in basically his version of Systematic Theology "Justification is an instantaneous occurrence, complete in a moment, whereas sanctification is a process requiring a lifetime for completion."

How does this process work? Fortunately for us, James doesn't leave us on the edge of our seat left to simply figure it out. No, instead James shows us the blueprint for sanctification, for ridding ourselves of worldliness and becoming more like Christ.

James tells us that in order to rid yourself of worldliness, then you must receive God's Word daily.

Root yourself in God's Word.

Therefore, ridding yourselves of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, humbly receive the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. James 1:21 (CSB)

These two commands: ridding yourself of worldliness and rooting yourself in God's Word are attached at the hip. They are tethered together working in tandem. You don't get one without the other. James tells us that if we are going to find success in ridding ourselves of our old life, then it will depend heavily on the daily discipline to make Bible deposits in our life.

Once again, this is not a new concept. It is riddled throughout the Bible.

The Psalmist says in Psalm 119.

How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping your word. I have sought you with all my heart; don't let me wander from your commands. I have treasured your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you. Psalm 119:9-11 (CSB)

Jesus says in John 17

They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. John 17:16-17 (CSB)

Peter says in 1 Peter 2

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all slander. Like newborn infants, desire the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow up into your salvation, 1 Peter 2:1-2 (CSB)

It is undeniable, a healthy rhythm of depositing God's Word into your heart is correlated with a healthy rhythm of ridding yourself of your old way of living. The Lord uses the Word of God to

shine a bright light into the depths of our heart to expose and to extract what should not be there.

I'll give you a very vulnerable example of this. Last week, we took the Lord's supper. Ben said something along the lines of "When we reflect on the forgiveness God has given to us, we also must reflect on the forgiveness we must extend towards others. We shouldn't harbor any kind of unforgiveness in our heart. I paused for a moment, reflected on whether I had any unforgiveness in my heart. I was all good. I took the Lord's supper.

Later this week, I was in God's Word, and the Lord used Colossians 3 to highlight that there was definitely some unforgiveness in my heart. I didn't realize it until I came across Colossians 3:12-17. It was like a spiritual gut punch. I had no idea I had any unforgiveness brewing and stewing in my soul, but apparently, I did. So, I sat there and prayed, confessing to the Lord where I missed it, thanking the Lord for His grace, and asking the Lord to help me to fully forgive. It changed my whole day. Thank the Lord for His Word, but it wouldn't have happened without the daily discipline to be rooted in God's Word – inviting Him to expose and extract what shouldn't be there.

Some of you may say, that's great for you, Cory – you're a preacher, obviously you love to read the Bible. What do you say to the people who do not love to read? Or what do you say to the people who struggle to read? Trust me you are in good company. I won't tell you what I got on the ACT, but I can promise you it wasn't pretty.

For some reading comes easy and for others it's a challenge. I get it. However, James doesn't care what you got on the ACT. James doesn't care how many words you can read per minute. James is simply clear about this one thing: If you are going to rid yourself of worldliness then you have got to be rooted in God's Word. There is no other way.

So, where do you begin? How can you build the habit of reading God's Word in your life today?

Read the Bible. James, Mark, Colossians.

Study the Bible. Mark it up. People who don't mark in their Bibles – not mad at them – I judge them a little.

Moving through God's Word but also the mining through God's Word.

This model actually comes from a sermon that Ben preached in the Spring on Ezra who Read the Word, Studied the Word, and Obeyed the Word – which brings us to our third idea today.

Lead yourself to obey God's Word.

But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. Because if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like someone looking at his own face in a mirror.

For he looks at himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of person he was. But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer who works — this person will be blessed in what he does.
James 1:22-25 (CSB)

Apparently, even the early church was prone to neglect the application of God's Word to their life. Even the first century believers struggled to be hearers and doers of God's Word.

James is reminding the church that simply hearing the Word is not enough. That only gets you to the fifty-yard line. You don't score the touchdown until you both hear God's Word and do God's Word. When God speaks to you, He expects for you to obey.

James gives us two examples, a bad example of this and a good example of this. The bad example is the one who is a hearer of God's Word but lacks any doing.

And I love this image we get from James as he compares the opening of God's Word to this idea of looking into a mirror. It's as if God uses the Word to clearly point out the "spiritual bad hair day" going on in our life.

Have you ever looked in the mirror and thought, "Wow, we have a lot of work to do this morning." When we open the Word, the Lord is going to speak to you, highlighting what needs some kind of alterations – whether it's fear, anxiety, pride, selfishness, greed, anger, or unforgiveness.

However, the person illustrated here is someone who hears from the Lord but makes no application. The person described has grown numb to the convictions and is now negligent to make any changes. It sounds as if they took really good notes but struggled to take any next steps.

How many times have you gotten in the car after Sunday Worship and said, "Wow, what a great sermon today!" only on Monday to have forgotten what you heard and to have failed to do anything with it.

James is waiving a yellow flag saying "Caution to the church. This is not the way."

Instead, we learn of a great example of how to humbly receive the Word of God. This is the person who looks into the Word of God with intent to change. They have a posture of expectation – that they are going to receive a Word from the Lord and that they are going to put it into action in their life. This isn't passive faith – this is an active faith. They are the poster child for being a hearer and a doer of the Word.

You have two options in front of you. Every day, when you step into your quiet time opening the Bible for your daily reading, or you step into your Life Group, or you step into your Sunday Worship – you are faced with the dilemma – how are you going to receive God's Word?

Will you take a look in the mirror? Will you obey what God has said?

Here is the summary from James 1:19-25.

If you are a follower of Jesus you've been called to rid yourself of all worldliness, to put off your old way of living. The way we do this is by the constant discipline to root yourself in God's Word, choosing to often open the Bible to spend time hearing from God. And finally, when you receive that Word – don't just hear it – you do something with it.

I want to invite you to respond in two ways today:

For some, the Lord has highlighted a next step you know you need to take:

- Maybe you have been wrestling with baptism or serving or plugging into a Life Group but you've yet to take that next step in obedience.
- Maybe there has been a struggle to rid yourself from parts your old life that you need to put off.
- Maybe there has been a struggle to be rooted in God's Word.
- Or maybe it's something I haven't mentioned – let today be a marker for change – to be a hearer and doer of what you have heard today. During this last song today, feel the freedom to be honest with the Lord about where you've struggled and ask for his help in taking a next step today. We'll have counsellors down front who would love to pray with you today.

For some, the whole message has been convicting because you have never made that decision to follow Jesus. You're like my parents 35 years ago, who knew they needed to place their faith in Jesus, who needed to step out of their seat to talk with someone about follow Jesus. Well I've got good news – you can do that today.

2000 years ago, Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead to offer you salvation. He made a way for you to be fully forgiven. Here's how you can do that:

You admit that you have sin in your life, that when it comes to ridding yourself of worldliness – you've got it.

You believe that Jesus truly died and rose again to offer you salvation.

You choose today to make Jesus the Lord of your life.

As we get ready to sing this last song, I invite you today to step out your seat and come talk with one of our counselors who can help you make that decision today.

I'll pray and you can move as the Lord leads you.