

The Book Of James: Keeping It Real

James 1:12-14

Today, we are going to unpack two kinds of relationships with God. They are polar opposite from each other in every way. Their characteristics and consequences will both resonate with familiarity.

If we care to listen.

The writer James strips away any and all religious rhetoric in favour of raw revelation—so that the truth can have its full effect and set us free (John 8:31-32). This is the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit speaking and we must prepare our hearts accordingly to receive the truth with humility:

James 1:19-21

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

We must have a right heart attitude of deep humility before we open the pages of Scripture. Listen to these timeless words from Andrew Murray:

“When you have given God His place of honor, glory, and power, take your place of deepest lowliness, and seek to be filled with the Spirit of humility. As a creature it is your blessedness to be nothing, that God may be all in you. As a sinner you are not worthy to look up to God ; bow in self-abasement. As a saint, let God’s love overwhelm you, and bow you still lower down. Sink down before Him in humility, meekness, patience, and surrender to His goodness and mercy. He will exalt you. Oh! take time, to get very low before God.”

How many of us rush into Scripture with preoccupied hearts and minds, expecting to mine the gold that is God riches in His Word? Or we expect the visitation of God’s glory in a five-minute tip of a hat to our Creator? God is gracious—you know He is—and He knows our heart condition, for better or worse. But it is you and I who miss out on the transforming power of being still and bowing low with hearts wide open before our holy God:

Romans 12:1-2

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Give Him your time.

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: As our hearts should be open and ready to obey all Scripture, why is it especially important to give God more of our *time* before and while studying His Word?

James 1:12

(KJV) *Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.*

(NIV) *Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.*

The Book of James, throughout history, has been attacked for promoting works-based faith. This verse does it no favours. Not because it is false but because well-intentioned exegetes read into it an advertisement for martyrdom and its certain heavenly rewards.

Does God reward the faithful, the persecuted? Absolutely!

Read:

Revelation 2:8-10

"To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown.

But James 1:12 is even more than a promise to Christian Jews suffering and scattered. This verse is concise narrative of the first kind of relationship we can have with God:

Blessed.

Do you see it? James is simply describing what a *right* relationship with God looks like:

The obedient child of God is happy to endure the trials and temptations of this life through God's strength, knowing that their Heavenly Father loves them. They also know that this path of righteousness will lead them home to eternal life in heaven, where God will wipe away all the tears of the faithful (Revelation 21:4).

Beloved, the second kind of relationship with God is wrought with deception and dissension. It is relationship based on *blame*.

James 1:13

(KJV) *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:*

(NIV) *When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;*

Yes, this verse is clearly stating Who God is, and Who God isn't.

But hear me out: Shifting blame is no joke. The person who habitually hardens their heart before God—and who can no longer receive truth or be taught anything—usually resorts to blaming God and others for their misdeeds and sin.

So where did this wicked human tendency to blame shift begin?

Genesis 3:6-13

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

Beginnings, beloved. *Wicked beginnings.*

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: Do you recall a time when you resorted to shifting blame? Why do you think you did it? Was there a moment afterwards of regret and repentance? What did you learn about your heart condition?

*STUDY POINT: Find three examples in the New Testament of blame shifting? How did those passages play out? What were the consequences? Any takeaways?

James 1:14

(KJV) *But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.*
(NIV) *but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.*

Dragged away? Really? This is the simplest strategy in Satan's playbook—and the most effective. He dangles his bait before our fallen sin nature until we bite. Reeling us in and away from God is then, well, child's play.

But James employs a different metaphor now, describing the conception, birth, and growth of sin resulting ultimately in physical and spiritual death.

James 1:15

(KJV) *Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*
(NIV) *Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*

The tragedy of this kind of relationship with God is not only the awful consequences of sin, but the forfeiting of the crown of life for a threadbare dirty hat.

Matthew 7:13-14

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

~ Reverend Darren McClelland