

## **“Reflecting on Reflections”** (James 1:19-27)(9.23.24)

### **James 1:19-27** (AMP)

<sup>19</sup> Understand this, my beloved brothers and sisters. Let everyone be quick to hear [be a careful, thoughtful listener], slow to speak [a speaker of carefully chosen words and], slow to anger [patient, reflective, forgiving]; <sup>20</sup> for the [resentful, deep-seated] anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God [that standard of behavior which He requires from us]. <sup>21</sup> So get rid of all uncleanness and [a]all that remains of wickedness, and with a humble spirit receive the word [of God] which is implanted [actually rooted in your heart], which is able to save your souls. <sup>22</sup> But prove yourselves doers of the word [actively and continually obeying God’s precepts], and not merely listeners [who hear the word but fail to internalize its meaning], deluding yourselves [by unsound reasoning contrary to the truth]. <sup>23</sup> For if anyone only listens to the word [b]without obeying it, he is like a man who looks very carefully at his natural face in a mirror; <sup>24</sup> for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he immediately forgets [c]what he looked like. <sup>25</sup> But he who looks carefully into the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and faithfully abides by it, not having become a [careless] listener who

forgets but <sup>[d]</sup>an active doer [who obeys], he will be blessed *and* favored by God in what he does [in his life of obedience].

<sup>26</sup> If anyone thinks himself to be religious [scrupulously observant of the rituals of his faith], and does not control his tongue but deludes his *own* heart, this person's religion is worthless (futile, barren). <sup>27</sup> Pure and unblemished religion [as it is expressed in outward acts] in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit *and* look after the fatherless and the widows in their distress, and to keep oneself uncontaminated by the [secular] world.

## **The word of God for the people of God.**

LET US PRAY.

Title: "**Reflecting on Reflections**"

INTRODUCTION:

Nowadays, we often hear the putdown, "He's just a narcissist!" This term has its roots in Greek mythology. Narcissus was a beautiful child and an extremely handsome young man. His father was a god and his mother was a forest fairy.

When he was very young, his mother brought him to a fortune teller. The fortune teller said that

Narcissus would have a long and happy life as long as he never looked into a mirror. Another version of the story, says that instead of looking into a mirror, the prohibition was "if he did not come to know himself."

Because of his exceptional good looks, many people were attracted to him and fell in love with him. One of Narcissus' rejected lovers went to the goddess Nemesis seeking help at revenge. Nemesis perceives this request as just and leads Narcissus to the pool where he falls in love with his own godlike image. Looking at his image in water, Narcissus pines away from unrequited love, and metamorphoses into a white flower. [In other words, he falls in love with himself, but can never be satisfied.]

This story is part of an article on [psychologytoday.com](http://psychologytoday.com). Here are the last two paragraphs of the article:

"Kohut, who broke from Freudian [psychoanalysis](#) to originate self-psychology, became aware of narcissism as a flaw in his patients' ability to make a traditional [transference](#). Some of his patients experienced him not as a separate person, but only as a reflection of themselves. Kohut attributed this to inadequate [parenting](#) ("mother absence") and lack of stimulation in early [childhood](#).

Since Kohut, narcissism became known as a disorder of the self (which required interminable [therapy](#)) and later was described as a personality disorder. However, narcissism has become so pervasive in our society that it seems like our society itself is disordered."

In the Foreword of the book, *The Man in the Mirror*, by Patrick Morley, the esteemed pastor, R.C. Sproul offers another aspect of looking at our reflections. This book has sold millions and is foundational to an international Men's Ministry of the same name.

Sproul writes, "If a dog is a man's best friend, perhaps his worst enemy is his mirror. Well, maybe his mirror isn't really his worst enemy; it merely reflects the image of his most formidable opponent. What opponent is more dangerous than the one who knows our deepest, darkest secrets? What opponent is more lethal than the one who can probe our most vulnerable points?"

Three hundred and sixty pages later, Patrick Morley starts his short conclusion with this paragraph: "Is it time for you to stop just going through the motions and get serious about your eternal destiny and earthly purpose? The examined life **is** worth living! Determine to let Christ explore every inner room of your mind. Christ wants to

empower us to break out of the mold of this world and lead an authentic Christian life. But it requires daily effort on our part.”

BODY:

This is in direct alignment with the Apostle James’ desire for the struggling Christians. Spiritual maturity is the major point of this letter. This first chapter is a continuous and connected thought, but we break it down into segments to wrestle with it. Or, think of it as taking smaller bites so that we can adequately chew on it and digest it.

Last week, we learned about persevering through trials and testings. I explained that the words used came from an application for a silversmith. The silver is heated by fire. The dross and impurities rise to the top where they are skimmed off by the silversmith. This process continues until the silversmith can see their reflection, their image, in the surface of the silver. You and I are being made complete, mature, and finally perfected when we look like our Creator.

In verses 13-16, James talks about temptations. In the Greek, the word for trials, testing, **and** temptation is the same word, a variation of peirazmos. So, how do the translators know which English word to use. James kind of explains that in the text: James 1:13–16 (NIV84)

<sup>13</sup> When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; <sup>14</sup> but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. <sup>15</sup> Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. <sup>16</sup> Don't be deceived, my dear brothers.

The difference is the intention. When the trials and testings are for our good, sanctifying us, they are from God. When they separate us from God, they are temptations. James says here that they come from within and we should not be deceived. In fact, three times in 11 verses, James warns against self-deception. Apparently, we are quite prone to it. We are likely able to see it in others, but have trouble looking within.

The opposite of this deception is discernment. Discernment comes from God the Holy Spirit. Paul prays in Philippians 1:9–10 (NIV84)<sup>9</sup> And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,<sup>10</sup> so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,

Then we may attain the Lord's desire for His children. 2 Corinthians 3:18 (NIV84) And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are

being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

What role does Satan play in this struggle? In the Lord's Prayer, a model prayer for us to use regularly if not daily, we pray, "...and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the Evil One." Remember that Satan is called the Deceiver and the Tempter. Matthew 4:3 (NIV84) The tempter came to him [Jesus] and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

In the Believer's Warfare Prayer, which is on our website, we pray for Satan's strongholds to be torn down and destroyed. He knows our weaknesses and vulnerabilities and adds fuel to the destructive fire. The Devil uses bellows to fan the flames, and sin gives birth to death.

So, James is exhorting Christians to avoid the dangers and pitfalls. He cares for them deeply – beloved siblings. We have two ears and one mouth. In verse 26 and later, James will expound on the dangerous powers of the tongue. We must start with an intentional act of listening. Slow down and be aware of what is going on. Use your mind and not your emotions. Is your intended response kind, accurate, and necessary? Anger can be very dangerous. Think about Road Rage.

Next, James addresses sin. This is translated various ways: all uncleanness; moral filth; filthiness; and sordidness. Think about the pursuit of purity. The main focus of those seem to be personal but James goes on to include effects on others: wickedness; the evil that is so prevalent, rampant wickedness; and the King James Version says superfluity of naughtiness.

James continues that we should be humble and meek because a prideful person is not able to receive the word of God. In the 18<sup>th</sup> verse, speaking in the past tense, he says we were given (from God) new birth. As I have taught repeatedly, this is being born from above, born of the Spirit, made a new creation in Christ. The instrument used is the word of truth.

The word of truth can be a general reference to God's law and the scriptures. Psalm 119:43 (NIV84) Do not snatch the word of truth from my mouth, for I have put my hope in your laws. 2 Timothy 2:15 (NIV84) Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

But there are two other places in the New Testament that use the word of truth in the same way as James. Ephesians 1:13 (NIV84) And you



also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the **gospel** of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, Colossians 1:5 (NIV84) the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the **gospel**.

This **gospel** is the good news of Jesus. It is implanted in our hearts and is able to save our souls. But wait, James is writing to Christians. They have already been saved by that definition and this is supported by what we heard in the 18<sup>th</sup> verse. So, how can this be?

My friends, there are three stages of salvation. We have been saved. We are being saved. We will be saved. In our second birth we were reconciled to God. That is our justification. Our **being** saved is our sanctification. This is the ongoing process of working out our salvation with fear and trembling as God works in us. Then our future salvation is our glorification, when Jesus comes again.

The Apostle John in 1 John 3:2 (NIV84) Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:12 (NIV84)  
Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror;  
then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part;  
then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

Let me pause for a minute and look at this farming metaphor of having this saving seed implanted in our hearts. **The soil must be disturbed to plant a seed.** Think about a plow cutting through the hard ground, turning over the topsoil and exposing what was hidden from the sun. This makes weeding much easier too. It also allows watering to be effective. The lifeforce within the planted seed is stimulated. Roots in the soil are established. The plant breaks the surface and is nourished by the sunlight in cooperation with the nutrients from the soil. Insects and the wind help pollinate plants and facilitate reproduction. New life magnifies and multiplies.

Disturbing the soil of our lives may get a little messy. We may get a little dirty in the doing. It will require diligent effort and we will shed some sweat; but, it will be sweat equity. We cannot control the weather and we must trust the hand of God. May the fruit of the Spirit produce an abundant crop.

Verses 22-25 address putting our faith into action. Christians, disciples of Jesus Christ, are doers.

Ephesians 2:10 (NIV84) For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

There are some common accusations made against Christians. It is said: we are judgmental; unloving; not inclusive; AND, we are hypocrites. None of those are true of true Christians.

Hypocrisy is a very common human condition that nearly everyone falls into on occasion. How about when a parent tells their child? "Do as I say and not as I do." When our actions do not align with our professed beliefs, then we are hypocrites. Your family members, co-workers, and neighbors will pay attention to the way you walk and will be quick to see if it does not align with your talk. Then you will bring shame upon the Lord Jesus and the Church.

This is an unsustainable way to live. In the secular world, if we continually violate our belief system, whatever that may be, in our daily living, it becomes a debilitating sickness. That person is at war with themselves. They will need counseling at minimum or it may require psychiatric intervention. It can result in health issues too.

James is calling on Christians to take a serious look at themselves. Are you who you say you are? If

you are honest with yourself, does your reflection ring true? He gives the almost ridiculous example of a person who looks intently at their own reflection but when they step away, they cannot remember what they look like.

James is saying that that person doesn't really know who they are. It seems absurd. But, the comparison is to a Christian who listens to God's word and does not obey it. Time and again I have quoted Jesus connecting loving Him and being obedient to his commands.

It does not matter how many bible verses you have memorized. It doesn't matter how many sermons you have listened to. Obedience matters. Disobedience mocks the Bible. Disobedience mocks the preacher. Disobedience is hypocrisy. Disobedience belies your faith.

Instead of a natural mirror, James calls on us to carefully examine our reflection in the mirror of God's perfect law. Psalm 19:7 (NIV84) The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. God's mirror has no distortion and shows reality exactly right.

Have you ever been in a house of mirrors at a carnival or amusement park? Sometimes they are called funhouses. The mirrors are often set up as a

maze and there is a deliberate effort to block your way and confuse you. Some of the mirrors are concave or convex and they distort your appearance; sometimes funny and other times frightening. Unfortunately, most people's view of themselves is similarly distorted and confused. And, it is no laughing matter; it is frightening. It can be a complicated issue. Not everyone thinks better of themselves than they should. It may be that they think worse of themselves than they should.

This is in stark contrast to the perfect word of God. When we are obedient to God, we will be able to successfully navigate the maze of this world. We will be able to discern which way to turn. We will be able to discern the truth and keep things in an accurate perspective. That person will be blessed and favored by the Lord.

James says that living by the law is liberating. Most people think of laws as restrictive and limiting, the opposite of freedom. Of course, living according to God's word frees us from the power of sin and death. Having the assurance of our salvation frees us to live with peace and joy. Christians can be free of fear and anxiety.

Religion has gotten a bad name. In an effort to win people for Jesus, I have said and others have said,

“Christianity isn’t about religion, it is about relationship. It is about a relationship with Jesus.” Well, I regret saying the first part of that now. Yes, thoughtless ritual, vain repetitious prayer, and man-made rules make a worthless religion. Doctrines, biblical commands, and God’s perfect law give life that when they are activated by the Holy Spirit, bring a soul into a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus.

James teaches that true religion, religion that is acceptable to God, is demonstrated in action. It is manifested in the taking care of the poor, the weak, the oppressed, and the vulnerable. This is consistent with the Old Testament teachings too. And, it is consistent with other New Testament writers.

The Apostle John in 1 John 3:16–18 (NIV84)

<sup>16</sup> This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. <sup>17</sup> If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?

<sup>18</sup> Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

CONCLUSION:

Chapter five of Man in the Mirror opens with this story:

“The most surprising thing about Tom’s call wasn’t that he was crying, it wasn’t even that he was fifty-eight years old and crying. But his candor really got my attention – Tom is one of Florida’s most prominent attorneys.

“My life has no meaning – no purpose,” he began. “It’s as though I’ve been chasing the wind all these years.”

He attended a prayer breakfast we sponsor every Thanksgiving. For the next six months he couldn’t stop thinking about what he heard. Tom found the message of Jesus intriguing and called to say he was interested in the whole story. We made an appointment to talk about it.

As Tom unfolded the story of his life, the vast array of accomplishments on his resume awed me. A man of stature, his list of credits revealed a Who’s Who in the legal field. I would have imagined him to be a satisfied man, were it not for the stream of tears that diluted the value of those achievements.

Tom had reached the pinnacle of professional success, yet still ached for a sense of purpose in his life. He attained the rung on the ladder every

young lawyer aspires to, but found the ladder only reached up into clouds of disillusionment. Success created more questions for him than it answered.

Tom spent a lifetime pursuing the god he wanted. Then, one day, he woke up and realized he didn't have the slightest idea who God really is. Aware of just how unfulfilled he was, and not knowing why, he had accepted an invitation from a friend to a prayer breakfast.

"Maybe God will have some answers," he thought.

What interested Tom most was the peace he saw in some of the men involved with the prayer breakfast. Over the six months that followed, he was surprised to learn these men attributed their sense of peace and purpose to a "personal" relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

"I've always attended church," he insisted.

"We're not talking about attending church, although that's important. What we're talking about, Tom, is a relationship with the living, personal God."

"We are not talking about working your way into God's favor, but acknowledging it's impossible to work your way in. The only way into God's favor is



to receive the free gift of eternal life that comes by trusting Christ with your life.”

“Well, I’ve been a faithful churchman for over thirty years. Are you trying to tell me I’ve wasted all those years? I just can’t believe you would even suggest such a thing!”

“Tom, if church has been such an important part of your life, why are we together today talking about your feelings of emptiness and lack of purpose?”

Tom is not alone. He lived for the first fifty-eight years of his life without giving much attention to why he thought, said, and did things. He attended church because it was the expected thing to do, not because of a deeply held conviction. Many men are like Tom – Just going through the motions.”

My friends, Tom led an unexamined life. He had never peered deeply into the perfect law of liberty. Do not be like Tom. Do NOT deceive yourself. Know the Word. Do the Word. Continue in the growing and knowing. Continue in the Doing and blessing others, for you will be blessed.

Reflect on your reflection.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.