

“Mirror Scrimmage”

James 1:19-27

Series: Faith That Works Week 2. Listening and Doing

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You’ve heard the phrase “Mirror Image.” When two people look alike we say they are the mirror image of each other. They say when husbands and wives are married for a long time they begin to look like each other. What’s amazing is that, over time, pet owners start to become the mirror image of their dogs.

But today I want to talk about a “Mirror Scrimmage.” A scrimmage is a contest or a conflict between two people or teams. A mirror scrimmage is the argument I have every morning with the mirror. There can be only one reason for this: my mirror is broken. It keeps showing me the wrong picture. Every time, without fail, it shows me someone else. It must be zooming some other guy...and man does he look old!

Now the truth is my mirror’s not broken. “Mirrors don’t lie.” So where does the conflict lie? In me. In my head I have a different image than the one in the mirror. In my mind I am still 30. Yesterday I officially doubled that number. Now in the last thirty years there have been a few changes. Back then people could not appreciate my handsome scalp because it was covered up. God remedied that. Jesus says, “Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered” by God (Luke 12:7). Every once in a while I feel like saying, “God in case you’ve lost count I’m now down to 42.”

The mirror challenges my mental image. My mirror scrimmage can be summed up in one word: Denial. Instead of facing reality head on, I deny it. I create in my mind an image that makes me feel better. Now denial is harmless when it comes to hairlines. It’s more serious when it concerns habits. You may know someone who denies they drink too much. Others need to stop smoking or start healthy eating. Some are spending themselves deeper into debt. We need something which can breakthrough our denial and bring us into reality so we can make changes.

The Apostle James writes about the mirror scrimmage when he says,

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do. James 1:22-25

God’s Word is a mirror. It doesn’t lie. It reveals the honest truth about you and me. That truth is not easy to look at. There are things we don’t want to admit such as pride, lying, gossip, secrets, prejudices, judging others, selfishness, self-destructive behaviors and desires. We each have habits we want to stop. The Bible can help us. Yet when we read the Scriptures we often start to scrimmage. We may deny what it’s telling us to do. We

can deceive ourselves and think we are dealing with our problems. We can agree but not follow through. We can walk away and ignore what it says. We can blame the people, the circumstances, the company, the government, the economy. The result of all these is disaster. Or we can change. The mirror of God's Word can get us past denial. But we must listen to it and do what it says. Here is what Coach Jim tells us.

1. Listen Carefully.

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. For man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Therefore get rid of all moral filth and evil that is so prevalent, and humbly accept the word planted in you which can save you. James 1:19-21

Listening is a lost art. Now that we can text, talk and email at hyper speed we are quick to speak and slow to listen. We cannot truly hear each other unless we are willing to stop and listen. It's especially true when it comes to God's Word. When James says "accept the word" he uses the Greek word *decomai* which also means to welcome someone. When you welcome the Word, you welcome the Lord. If you want the mirror of God's Word to show you what changes are needed begin with an attitude of acceptance. Welcome and accept the Word planted in you.

James describes the Word of God as a seed planted in your life. To get large, plump juicy tomatoes you need to prepare the soil with tilling, mulching and fertilizer, maybe even miracle grow. To receive the Word, you must prepare your heart. To accept the Word of God, this passage teaches you to have four attitudes. I need to be:

a. Quiet. "Be quick to listen and slow to speak." The reverse is usually true. We are quick to speak and slow to listen. Often, while someone is speaking, instead of listening, we are thinking of what we will say next. This is why we don't remember people's names. What's true between people is also true with God. You and I begin by being quiet. We can't hear God if we're talking. So take a few minutes to get quiet.

b. Calm. "And slow to become angry." You don't hear much when you're angry, upset or irritated. These emotions make you feel defensive. They set up a wall or barrier. But when you are quiet and calm you are ready to hear what the other person is saying. The same is true with the Bible. If you are stirred up with strong emotions, begin by dropping all the anger, frustration, anxiety into God's hands. This helps you to be quiet and calm so you can hear God speak to you in the Bible. Don't say, "God, I've got five minutes. Talk quickly because I have to go. See you later." A hassled heart makes it hard to hear God. The Bible says, "Be still and know that I am God."(Psalm 46:10).

c. Clean. Next James says, "Get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent." The electric starter on my grill was not working. I replaced the battery. I checked the wires. I looked at the switch. Finally, I removed a wire and cleaned the metal leads. It fired up right away. Sin in my life can block my reception of God's Word. Let's be clear – it doesn't take away my relationship with God. You and I are saved by grace. But it does create distance in that relationship. James says get rid of two things: filth and

evil. Sin in my life is like earwax preventing me from hearing God's Word. If you feel God never speaks to you, maybe you have earwax – emotional, ethical, mental, spiritual earwax. James tells us get rid of the filth and evil, if you want to hear God. Confession allows us to come clean with God, clear away whatever sin is between us, and remove the spiritual earwax which keeps us from hearing God.

d. Humble. “Humbly accept the Word planted in you which can save you.” To be humble means to do what God tells me from his Word. These are the spiritual hearing aids. I hear God's Word when I am quiet, calm, clean and humble. Hearing is a good way to get the Word of God in your life. Yet we must also do what it says.

2. Look Intently Into the Mirror. James tells us to “look intently into the perfect law” (James 1:25). When we face the mirror scrimmage we must stop listening to the voice inside our heads which tells us everyone else is to blame for our situation. God's Word tells me to make the changes. I must accept Jesus as my Savior. No one can do that for me. I must read and study the Bible. I must take the time to pray. I must forgive and ask for forgiveness. I must give and serve others. Read the passages from the Letter of James in your bulletin. It will honestly show you the truth about yourself and give you the courage to make the changes you need.

Admiral Jim Stockdale was the highest ranking United States military officer in the Hanoi Hilton prisoner of war camp during the Vietnam War. He was tortured over twenty times during his eight years in prison. He kept up morale up and helped the most number of soldiers survive. It's an amazing story of courage and perseverance. When asked how he did it, Admiral Stockdale gave this paradox:

You must confront the brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be
AND AT THE SAME TIME Retain faith that you will prevail in the end,
regardless of the difficulties.¹

God wants to help you change for the better but you must clean house, throw off denial and look intently at the mirror of God's Word.

3. Live It Continually.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says
James 1: 22.

But the one 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. James 1:25

It is not enough for a Christian to hear the right things or say the right things. We must *do* the right things. That includes making up a plan and then sticking to it. Some feel constrained and constricted by God's Word. They want to be free. James teaches us the

¹ Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don't* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001) p. 83f.

only way to be free is to follow God's principles. Suppose a skydiver at 10,000 feet shouts to the rest of the group, "I'm not using a parachute this time. I want freedom!" All skydivers are subject to a law – the law of gravity. The parachute does not constrain him – it allows him to experience the freedom of soaring and living to tell about it.

God's Word is not a constraint. It's a ticket to freedom which prevents you from spiraling downward. In fact, if you follow God's Word, the opposite will happen – you will be blessed as you do it. A coach gives you practice drills. James gives us three drills. If you do them continually, they will pay off on game day – in the game of life.

Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. James 1:26-27

The first is **Prevent Hurt**. "Keep a tight rein on the tongue." This week, make a plan to avoid hurting others with your words. Stop gossip or lying. Get rid of cursing. Avoid saying angry, cutting or sarcastic words. Speak positively instead of complaining.

The second is **Provide Help**. "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress." Widows and orphans are vulnerable, helpless and in distress. Anyone in need needs your help. It could be someone who is homeless or hungry on the street, someone who is hurting on the job or in your neighborhood, someone who is struggling in your family. Come to the Packing Party next Sunday and fill shoeboxes with Operation Christmas Child. Contribute to our challenge to help the Victims of Hurricane Ian through World Vision. Increase your Giving by 1 or 2% of your income to God's Work at Woodside in 2023 on October 30. Join us on November 12 and 13 when we pack 40K Seed packets through Pack Hope.

The third drill is **Protect Your Heart**. "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." We are constantly receiving influence and input from the world. Some of it is good. But some of it can be spiritually toxic to your heart. Our devices can entice us and seduce us. Let's be honest – some of it is deceptive and destructive. People are working overtime to influence you through your devices – just check out any of the political ads right now. They get the voters so stoked up that I've had to do pastoral counseling after some of the recent elections when their side didn't win. That was true for both parties. There are 3 billion smartphones in the world. Users check their phones an average of 58 times a day and spend 5.4 hours on their phone a day. Now compare that to how often you pray and read God's Word and it's not too hard to see which mirror is influencing you.

James recommends we avoid the pollution. I'm not suggesting you cut out everything. Just make a plan to spend less time in front of a screen and more time in front of God's Word, less time plugged into technology and more time plugged into prayer, less time lounging on the couch and more time listening to your coach and lending a helping hand. Look into the mirror of God's Word. Let the Lord give you an honest

picture of yourself and then begin to do what it says. It will change your life and the lives of those around you.

Al was a creative inventor who amassed a large fortune and lived in luxury. His invention? Dynamite. Surprisingly, Al was a pacifist. He believed his invention would end all wars. Its destructive power, he thought, would scare nations to make peace. Unfortunately the opposite happened. His dynamite fueled the wars and made him rich.

Then, in 1888, Al had the opportunity to see himself in the mirror and he didn't like what he saw. That year his brother Ludvig died. A French newspaper made a mistake. Instead of printing Ludvig's obituary it ran Al's. He awoke that morning to see the announcement of his death in the papers. The newspaper called him "the merchant of death." It was a moment of conviction and a moment of grace. In that moment, Alfred Nobel decided to make a change. He drew up a new will in which he left 94% of his great wealth to establish five prizes – physics, chemistry, medicine, literature, and peace. Every year, the Nobel Prize honors "those who, during the preceding year, shall have conferred the greatest benefit on mankind." Don't wait until God surprises you with a mirror scrimmage. Start doing his Word today.