

## **“THREE KEYS TO SPIRITUAL MATURITY” JAMES 1:19-27**

James this morning is exhorting us. He says, hearing of the Word must be followed by obedience; truly accepting God's Word logically means doing it. This spiritual logic was given memorable illustration by Chuck Swindoll in his book *Improving Your Serve*<sup>1</sup>:

Let's pretend that you work for me. In fact, you are my executive assistant in a company that is growing rapidly. I'm the owner and I'm interested in expanding overseas. To pull this off, I make plans to travel abroad and stay there until the new branch office gets established. I make all the arrangements to take my family in the move to Europe for six to eight months, and I leave you in charge of the busy stateside organization. I tell you that I will write you regularly and give you direction and instructions.

I leave and you stay. Months pass. A flow of letters are mailed from Europe and received by you at the national headquarters. I spell out all my expectations. Finally, I return. Soon after my arrival I drive down to the office. I am stunned! Grass and weeds have grown up high. A few windows along the street are broken. I walk into the receptionist's room and she is doing her nails, chewing gum, and listening to her favorite disco station. I look around and notice the waste baskets are overflowing, the carpet hasn't been vacuumed for weeks, and nobody seems concerned that the owner has returned. I ask about your whereabouts and someone in the crowded lounge area points down the hall and yells, "I think he's down there." Disturbed, I move in that direction and bump into you as you are finishing a chess game with our sales manager. I ask you to step into my office (which has been temporarily turned into a television room for watching

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<sup>1</sup> Swindoll, *Improving your serve*, p. 170-71.

afternoon soap operas).

"What in the world is going on, man?" "What do ya' mean ... ?"

"Well, look at this place! Didn't you get any of my letters?"

"Letters? Oh, yeah - sure, got every one of diem. As a matter of fact ... we have had letter study every Friday night since you left. We have even divided all the personnel into small groups and discussed many of the things you wrote. Some of those things were really interesting. You'll be pleased to know that a few of us have actually committed to memory some of your sentences and paragraphs. One or two memorized an entire letter or two! Great stuff in those letters!"

"Okay, okay - you got my letters, you studied them and meditated on them, discussed and even memorized them. BUT WHAT DID YOU DO ABOUT THEM?"

"Do? Uh - we didn't do anything about them."

Such behavior is professionally absurd. It is, in fact, professional suicide! But how much less absurd are we when we hear God's Word without the slightest inclination to obey it? At the very least we are self-deceived. This is why James follows his call to be hearers with the command of verse 22: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." If we are going to profit from God's Word, we must accept and do it.

Everyday we train our selves to be either: lying or truthful; selfish or giving; angry or forgiving; impure or pure; irritable or patient; greediness or generosity; pride or humility; materialism or simplicity. What are you becoming today? Dawson Trotter founder of the Navigators once said, "You are going to be what you are right now becoming!"

MATURING SAINTS GROW WITH A **DISCIPLINED LIFE**. v. 19-21

v. 19 UNDERSTAND ANGER BEFORE YOU SPEAK

v. 20 SEEK GOD'S PLAN ABOVE YOUR OWN

v. 21 PROTECT THE HEALTH OF YOUR SOUL

MATURING SAINTS GROW WITH A **TEACHABLE SPIRIT**. v. 22-25

v. 22 COMMIT TO LIVING OUT YOUR FAITH

v. 23 AVOID HYPOCRISY IN YOUR LIFE

v. 24 END ANY CASUAL APPROACH TO YOUR DEVOTIONS

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MATURING SAINTS GROW WITH A **WITNESSING LIFE** v. 26-27  
v. 26 BY MAINTAINING AN UNOFFENDING TONGUE  
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### **MATURING SAINTS HAVE A DISCIPLINED LIFE. V.19-21**

v. 19 UNDERSTAND BEFORE YOU SPEAK 19 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath

In Psalm 64:3 Who sharpen their tongue like a sword,  
And bend their bows to shoot their arrows—bitter words,  
Here the tongue is called "a sword." This sword has certainly  
damaged, bruised, wounded, and killed more people than all the  
swords in all the wars since history began.

"Angry words, O let them never From the tongue, unbridled slip.  
With the soul's best impulse Ever check them,  
Ere they soil the lips.  
Angry words are quickly spoken,  
Bitter thoughts are rashly stirred,  
Fondest links of life are broken,  
By a single angry word."

In the old days we heard wise sayings like "Keep your tongue between  
your teeth" and "Think twice before you speak once." The Scottish  
people have some proverbs, too: "Keep your tongue a prisoner and  
your body will go free" and "A long tongue shortens friendships." My  
mother would also tell us, "Remember, one day you'll answer to God  
for every word you say."

Today you and I each spoke an enormous number of words. Talking at  
normal speeds through a normal day our words would fill a 150 Page  
Book. In just one years talk we have produced 132 X 400 Page Books!

Some facts about anger.

- The average man loses his temper six times a week. The average woman three times a week.
- Women get more often angry at people, men get more angry at things -- flat tires, machines, dull razors, etc.
- Single adults express anger twice as often as married adults.

- At home is where we are most likely to express our anger. Anger is most frequent and intense towards those we love, not towards strangers.

Anger is a very normal human reaction. Jesus got angry. In the Old Testament it says 375 times that God got angry. The Bible says, "In your anger, don't sin." There's a right way and a wrong way to get angry. There's a harmful way and a helpful way.

Four ways people commonly express their anger. These are learned responses. Everybody expresses anger in the way they learned to express it. Some of you learned it from your parents, some of you from television, from friends, your wife/husband. You've learned how you respond. Someone has given titles to the four typical responses. Picture yourself as one of these four.

**1. THE MANIAC:** explodes like a walking time bomb, a hair trigger temper, out of control. When he gets angry, she gets angry. Let it fly, throw things, cuss, yell, stomp up and down, throw a temper fit. A powder cage. A good example in the Bible of the exploder, the maniac, is Cain, who was the first murderer. Genesis 4:5, 8, "Cain became furious and he scowled in anger. And while they were in the field, Cain attacked [circle "attacked"] his brother Abel, and killed him." This type of person immediately regrets their anger, they're embarrassed, they regret what they've said and what they've done. They apologize. They're ashamed. We all know this type of anger.

**2. THE MUTE:** is the exact opposite. This is the silent type. Holds it, clams up instead of blowing up. They will not admit that they're angry. They conceal how they feel. This is the crock pot version of anger -- stewing and simmering and all on the inside. When I swallow my anger my stomach keeps score. This person is susceptible to high blood pressure, ulcers, headaches, tension headaches, backaches, all kinds of things. All kinds of illnesses can be traced to bottled up anger. There is a man, Dr. F. I. MacMillan, who wrote None of These Diseases, who has listed 51 types of illnesses that can be caused by bottled up anger, being emotionally upset and holding it in. A good example of this is Jeremiah, the weeping prophet.

Jeremiah 15:17-18 I did not sit in the assembly of the mockers, Nor did I rejoice; I sat alone because of Your hand, For You have filled me with indignation. 18 Why is my pain perpetual And my wound incurable, Which refuses to be healed? Will You surely be to me like an unreliable stream,  
As waters that fail? NKJV

Jer. 15:17-18 "I stayed by myself [Circle this. This is the key phrase of the mute.] and was filled with anger. Why do I keep on suffering? Why are my wounds incurable? Why won't they heal?" I'm holding it in and it's killing me! Have you heard anyone say, "That burns me up!" They're right. It's not so much what you eat that counts, it's what eats you. The anger on the inside.

**3. THE MARTYR:** is pro at pity parties. He is self punishing and passive. Whenever somebody gets angry he says, "It must be my fault. What's wrong with me?" His favorite words are "I should...must... have to... ought to..." The number one sign of a martyr is depression. Depression is just internalized anger most of the time. Anger internalized becomes depression. A good example is the prodigal son in Luke 15:28 "The elder brother was so angry he would not go in [circle this] to the party. So his father went out and pleaded with him." The problem with the martyr is he makes everybody else miserable.

**4. THE MANIPULATOR:** the Lee Lococco version of anger. When he was fired by Ford his famous line was, "Don't get mad. Get even." The manipulator approach is the key to most television plots. "I will figure out a way to get you back!" They retaliate in an underhanded way through sarcasm, jibes, indirect contact. This is the person who burns your toast, makes you late, forgets things you told them, or teases you hurtfully and then says, "Can't you take a joke?" Religious people often choose this form because it seems more spiritual than just exploding. While I will be very nice to you, I will cut you behind your back. That's the manipulator approach. Pretending to be nice, you try to get even. A good example is the Pharisee in Luke 6:11 "But they were furious and began to plot with each other what they might do to Jesus." Circle "plot".

Everybody gets angry, just in different ways. You are one of those ways. All four of these ways are learned and the good news is they can be unlearned. You can change. You can make a difference in your life, with God's help.

v. 20 SEEK GOD'S PLAN ABOVE YOUR OWN **"for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God"**.

v. 21 PROTECT THE HEALTH OF YOUR SOUL **"Therefore lay aside (lit. 'strip off') all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive (eagerly sitting at Christ's feet) with meekness the implanted word"** (James quotes 21 Old Testament books and alludes to 15 verses in the Sermon on the Mount in only 108 verses! taking

root and bearing fruit), **which is able to save your souls** (not from damnation but damage of sins).

- Ephesians 4:22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,
- Colossians 3:8 But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.
- Hebrews 12: 1Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,
- 1 Peter 2: 1-2 Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking,<sup>2</sup> as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,

### **MATURING SAINTS HAVE A TEACHABLE SPIRIT. V. 22-25**

v. 22 COMMIT TO LIVING OUT YOUR FAITH: But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves

v. 23 AVOID HYPOCRISY IN YOUR LIFE 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing (casual glance; like looking at your watch but not really seeing the time!) his natural face in a mirror;

v. 24 END ANY CASUAL APPROACH TO YOUR DEVOTIONS 24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

v. 25 BECOME A BLESSED DOER 25 But he who looks (new word expressing careful, earnest, steady gaze) into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does

- perfect is the perfection of the sufficient word
- liberty because only Christ can set us free

**I saw more clearly than ever, that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about was not, how much I might serve the Lord, how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man may be nourished.... I saw that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the Word of God and to meditation on it.**

**George Mueller of Bristol**

### **MATURING SAINTS HAVE A WITNESSING LIFE V. 26-27**

v. 26 MAINTAIN AN UNOFFENDING TONGUE "If anyone among you

thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless."

v. 27a CULTIVATE AN UNHARDENED HEART "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble,"

- Sodom was destroyed for violence, arrogance, indifference idleness and indulgence. Ezekiel 16: 48-50 "As I live," says the Lord God, "neither your sister Sodom nor her daughters have done as you and your daughters have done. 49 "Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. 50 "And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw fit. NKJV
- v. 27b PRESERVE AN UNSOILED LIFE "and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."

## HOW CAN I DEVELOP SELF-DISCIPLINE<sup>2</sup> IN MY LIFE?

1. LOVE YOUR CRITIC: Accept Correction. Correction helps make you more disciplined because it shows you what you need to avoid. Don't avoid criticism, accept it gladly. -Proverbs 15: 32 He who disdains instruction despises his own soul, But he who heeds rebuke gets understanding.
2. WHIP THE BIG ONES: Do The Hardest Job First. Doing that will prevent the hardest jobs from being left undone. Proverbs 22: 29 Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before kings; He will not stand before unknown men.
3. TRAIN YOUR BODY: Practice Self-Denial. Learn to say no to your feelings. Occasionally deny yourself things that are all right just for the purpose of mastering yourself. Learn to do what you know to be right even if you don't feel like doing it. Cultivating discipline in the physical realm will help us become disciplined in our spiritual lives. Ecclesiastes 5: 1 Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil.
4. START NOW: Start Small. Start with your room. Clean it, then keep it clean. When something is out of place, train yourself to put it where it belongs. Then extend that discipline of neatness to the rest of your home. Song of Solomon 2: 15 Catch us the foxes, The little foxes that spoil the vines, For our vines have tender grapes.

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Shelly Taylor, The Disciplines Life, p. 81-102.

5. WELCOME THE YOKES OF LIFE: Welcome Responsibility. When you have an opportunity to do something that needs to be done, volunteer for it if you have a talent in that area. Welcoming responsibility forces you to organize yourself. Lamentations 3:27 It is good for a man to bear The yoke in his youth.
6. CULTIVATE PUNCTUALITY: Be On Time. That may not sound very spiritual, but it's important. If you're supposed to be somewhere at a specific time, be there on time! Develop the ability to discipline your desires, activities, and demands so that you can arrive on time. Romans 12:11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;
7. REDEEM THE TIME: Organize Your Life. Plan the use of your time; don't just react to circumstances. Use a calendar and make a daily list of things you need to accomplish. If you don't control your time, everything else will! Ephesians 5:16 redeeming ("to pull from the market place") the time, because the days are evil.
8. FLEE INTO HIS PRESENCE: Worship brings us to the very presence of God. There we receive healing, cleansing, holiness, and purity. This was the message of Charles Wesley when he wrote:

"Jesus, Lover of my soul,  
 Let me to Thy bosom fly  
 While the nearer waters roll,  
 While the tempest still is high!  
 Plenteous grace with Thee is found,  
 Grace to cover all my sin;  
 Let the healing streams abound,  
 Make and keep me pure within."

Too often, in the throes of guilt and condemnation, we have turned and hidden ourselves from our source of healing and forgiveness. We have forgotten Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.  
 NKJV

- Condemnation has driven us away from the very Balm that would heal our souls!
- Condemnation will rob us of the blessed purification that will come through worship.
- Condemnation is a whirlpool that will siphon our spiritual vitality until we are consumed. The more we abstain from worship, the greater the separation between us and God. It is our blessed privilege as God's redeemed to draw near to Him in times of sin



and uncleanness and receive of the cleansing power that flows from His presence.

**PLUNGE INTO GOD'S RIVER OF LIFE THROUGH HIS SPIRIT:** By faith we can partake of the very river that flows from the throne of God. The Psalmist wrote of that river, "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God" (Ps. 46:4). This is an allusion to the water of Siloam whose several different courses ran underneath and through Jerusalem and supplied the city with water. Similarly the Holy Spirit provides us with renewing waters as we worship from our innermost beings. Through our worship, the river of God washes over our souls with cleansing and refreshment. When Ezekiel was caught up in this divine river, the waters rose from his ankles to his knees and then to his waist, until he could no longer walk in the current. During this experience, Ezekiel was told, "And it shall be that every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes. " (Ezek. 47:9 NKJV). As the river of God begins to flow during our times of worship, it brings life, abundance, and healing, washing over broken hearts and restoring parched souls.

# "THREE KEYS TO SPIRITUAL MATURITY" JAMES 1:19-27 ~ ~ NOTESHEET ~ ~

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- v. 24 \_\_\_\_\_ ANY CASUAL APPROACH TO YOUR DEVOTIONS
- v. 25 \_\_\_\_\_ A BLESSED DOER

## MATURING SAINTS GROW WITH A WORSHIPING HEART V. 26-27

- v. 26 \_\_\_\_\_ YOUR WHOLE SELF
- v. 27 \_\_\_\_\_ LIFE-LONG HOLINESS

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