

Cultivating a Heart for God's Word Part 2 – Be a Humble Learner

Epistle of James

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to the first chapter of James, continuing a series, continuing the book of James but continuing a three week series that we started last week and the title of the message then and now, the main title is "Cultivating a Heart for God's Word." It's three parts. That's the main theme, I think, of verses 19 to 27, is how we can have a heart that responds to the word of God and that results in holiness and life change. It's cultivating a heart for God's word and then there are three sections, three key imperatives that we need to understand and last time we saw that the first subset of this section, cultivate a heart for God's word by being a diligent listener. We looked at verses 19 and 20 where he says, "Be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger." So cultivating a heart for God's word is the focus and this morning the theme is to be a humble learner. To be a humble learner, that's our theme for this morning. We cultivate a heart for God's word by being a disciplined listener and then being a humble learner.

The metaphor of cultivating a heart for the word really comes out of the section that we're going to look at this morning because we're going to talk about the implanted word. The implanted word, the word that is in seed form put in your heart and is growing. So I think James is encouraging us to cultivate our hearts so that our hearts would be good soil, good soil for the word of God; that we have responsibilities as believers to labor to make our hearts ready to receive the word. And last time we saw part of that tilling of the soil, as it were, is learning just to listen. To discipline ourselves to stop speaking, slow down the speaking and start hurrying up to listen, and today we're going to see that being a humble learner is continuing that treatment of the soil.

You know, we understand, those of us who, well, I don't really put myself in this category, but those of us who, I guess I am still trying to, but to garden, to grow grass where you want it to be, the kind you want it to be. You know, certain things grow naturally but they are usually weeds, right? They grow well. Not in every situation, I mean, some places only moss will grow. Some places the weeds just thrive. Most everywhere the weeds thrive. How do you get the fescue grass to grow or the Bermuda? You have to work at your soil. You have to keep treating the soil so that the grass will thrive.

I remember in learning some years ago that if you want fescue to look as pretty as it does, and it can be incredibly beautiful, yards, people that have really good, pretty fescue yards, it's just something, you have to regularly apply lime to it, that's because the pH balance of the soil is so critical and it tends, fescue doesn't grow well in acidic soil so the acid level has to be balanced out by the alkalinity in the lime, so you have to treat the soil if you want the grass to grow. It doesn't matter if you put the seed and the fertilizer down, if the soil is not good, it's not going to grow. So James is encouraging us to do some soil treatment, to labor so that our hearts would be a fertile and receptive place for his word to be implanted, for the Lord's word to be implanted so that it will bear fruit.

Last time it was be a disciplined listener, this time be a humble learner. We'll read verses 18 to 27. We're going to focus in today on verse 21. That's our text this morning but let's read, begin reading at verse 18.

18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures. 19 This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. 22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; 24 for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. 25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. 26 If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. 27 Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Let's pray together.

Father, we ask now that you might work through your word to even continue tilling up the soil of our hearts and to make each heart receptive. Grant us your grace to humble ourselves before you and before your truth and to be changed. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Cultivating a heart for God's word by being a humble learner. Verse 21,

21 Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

The key verb or the main verb in that verse is the word "receive." It's the only imperative in the verse though some of the translations make it sound like there is more than one imperative, in fact most of them do. This is one of the things I really like about the NASB and why I use it, is it tends to be more one for one with main verb and participle. In reality in verse 21, you have "putting aside all filthiness" is a participle. A participle is a helping verb. It's not the main verb. It's important but it's secondary or supporting the main verb and the main verb is "receive." That's the imperative. The command is "receive the word implanted." That's the main point of this passage.

Now, in order to receive the word implanted, you have to lay aside or put aside so what we're going to see is that the main point of this is how we can be humble receivers or meek learners. That's what he's calling us to do. The imperative is to receive. It's not to bring something, it's to acknowledge you don't have something that you need and receive, and for us to become people that are receptive to the word of God where the word of God takes fruit and bears fruit, we must labor at being humble learners.

You know, a Christian is a disciple. A disciple. That's one of the key words in the New Testament. Jesus chose disciples. He calls us to be disciples, to make disciples. In a disciple, the root idea of the word "disciple," in English we see the word "discipline" there, but in Greek the word is "mathetes" and the word that that it is from is "manthano" which means "to learn." A disciple is one who learns. A disciple is a learner. A disciple is a lifelong learner. To be a follower of Jesus, he says, "Come and follow me. Be my disciples." He says, "Come and learn from me." And a disciple never stops learning. Just because you're helping other people learn doesn't mean you stop learning. You are to continue learning all the way to glory and if you stop thinking you need to learn, you are imperiling your own walk with God. Christians are called to be humble learners all the days of their lives and this is what James is exhorting us to.

We noted last time that I think the flow of thought that leads him to this idea of cultivating a heart for God's word is he has been talking about in verse 18, the good gifts of God, verses 13 to 18, the good gifts of God culminating with our regeneration which we read that verse, "He brought us forth by the word of truth." Those who know Jesus Christ, who have repented of their sins, placed their faith in Christ, that's the outward expression of the inward act of God where he brought you forth. He caused you to be born again. And what a great distance it is from being lost to being saved. But James as he celebrated this part and said, "Think about that. Think about God's goodness, how he took you from being an unbeliever, a person wrapped up in yourself, and he has transformed you into a child of God. Glory in that but," it's like verse 19, he turns the corner and says, "don't rest on your laurels. You haven't arrived yet." The Christian life is a life of continual pursuit of God through his word. It's a life of sanctification that he is calling us to. We are justified but that doesn't stop the process. Salvation continues as we continue to be sanctified. So he's calling us to focus on our need for the word and preparing our hearts for the word. So we are called to be a disciple, a learner.

Now, as we look at verse 21, we'll consider this verse under three points. Three points this morning that will help us to cultivate a heart for God's word by being a humble

learner. The first thing we need to understand, that James wants us to understand is that we have, this is our first point: we have an ongoing malady. The first point: an ongoing malady. Malady is a disease, an ailment, an unwholesome condition, a pathology, that though we have been born again, we have still an ongoing malady. We have a condition that needs to be addressed. This is what he's talking about when he says, "putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness." I mean, these words are strong. James doesn't mince words. He doesn't soft pedal things. He doesn't soften the message. He just hammers us.

Now, what's interesting is he's talking to believers here. It's really clear in the context. I mean, in verse 18 he has told us we were born again, "He brought us forth by the word of truth." He says, "This you know, my beloved brethren," verse 19, "my beloved brethren," verse 16, he's talking to believers. And then he says, "Listen, what you need to do on a daily basis is you need to lay aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness." He's saying the word picture is of taking off a garment. The verb "lay aside" means "to put away" and the picture is laying aside a filthy nasty article of clothing. I mean, you've got something that is nasty. That's the word here, "filthiness." The root idea is dirt. Soiled garment.

So he says we have soiled garments, we have nasty clothes that we need to put away, and then he adds to it with this phrase, and this is where the NASB, this is why it's good to read multiple translations because sometimes you'll find the ESV is better and here it is, in the way it translates this word or this phrase, "all that remains of wickedness." The NASB I think misses the word there. It really would be better translated as the ESV does, "rampant wickedness." So the idea is putting aside all filthiness and rampant wickedness. The NIV says, "evil that is so prevalent." The word, it's a word that they are trying to decide which word it is, which exact adjective, and the NASB takes it as one that's like a remainder but I think that the right word is a word which means "abundance." The word "wickedness" everybody agrees on, but the word before it, I think the right word is "abundance and superabundance" is the idea. It's a very strong word. It means "an overflowing."

So the ESV says "rampant wickedness." It's like he's saying, "Lay aside all filthiness," think of how he could have said that. Hey, lay aside all sin. That doesn't seem as bad. Still, that's not good, but "lay aside all filthiness." Do you see how James is just intense? The Spirit of God working through this man, using his personality to give us a perfect revelation from God and yet we can see his personality.

"Lay aside all filthiness and rampant wickedness, overflowing wickedness." What he's saying is, "Listen, though you are born again, you have an old nature and the old nature has not been changed. Your heart has been changed but the old man is irredeemable." That's why it will die with your body. It cannot enter into heaven. Now, you have a new nature inside that is connected to that old nature and your soul has both of these going on within you. That's why we are told to walk in the Spirit so that you will not carry out the desires of the flesh. The desires of the flesh are going to remain there and James wants us to see those desires for what they are because we can get accustomed and comfortable

with sin and he's saying, "Listen, your sin is filthiness." Whatever it is you struggle with, whatever it is I struggle with, if we saw it rightly, it is absolute filthiness. It is disgusting and it needs to be put away.

Now, some of us have sins that we more readily see that way: sexual sins, perversions, stealing, uncontrolled anger. Everyone can look at those things and say, "You know, those are nasty." But the reality is that worry, fear, those things are just as filthy in the sight of God and James is saying, "Listen, you have to make a determination on a daily basis to put that aside; to see it for what it is and to deal with it." This is a theme that we see throughout the New Testament, that as believers we have a calling to lay aside the old man.

Ephesians 4, turn back over to Ephesians for a moment. We're going to take a few passages that show this. Same verb, actually, that we have here translated "put" in James 1:21, "putting aside all filthiness," you have that same verb in Ephesians 4:22 and verse 25 of Ephesians 4. The Apostle Paul says, "that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self," that's the same verb here, "to place away from you." To "lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth." You lay aside the sin, you lay aside the filthiness, and that needs to be a regular commitment. If we are going to make our hearts receptive to the word of God, we have to make a commitment on a daily basis to fight against sin. If you're not going to fight against sin, your heart is not going to be receptive to the word of God, and to the degree that you stop fighting against sin, your heart will become more and more dull to the word of God. So this ongoing malady, James wants us to see we have a condition, a pathology, where our hearts, our old nature is here and it wants to destroy us. It wants to choke out the life of God in us.

Turn over just a couple of pages past Philippians, you have Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians 3:8. He has just talked about in verse 5, "consider the members of your earthly body as dead," this is Colossians 3:5, "consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside," and he adds, "anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self." You see the same idea here, same words.

And you even have it in 1 Peter. Go past James, back to our passage in James, the book after James is 1 Peter. He says in 1 Peter 2:1, "Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word." You see, exactly like James. "Put it aside, lay aside the filthiness and the superfluous evil," and James says, "and humbly receive the engrafted word." Peter says, "lay aside all malice and deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander and be like newborn

babies, desiring the milk of the word." Do you see that? The two things go together. You have to put aside and seek the word.

So the ongoing malady that's obvious that the New Testament teaches us is as believers we still have an old man that we must fight against. It can't be rehabilitated. You cannot rehabilitate your sin nature. There is only one thing you can do, crucify it. It must die. Paul said, "I die daily," 1 Corinthians 15:31. Jesus said, "Take up your cross daily and follow Me." We must die to sin, in fact, really the Christian life is a perpetual cycle of death and resurrection. That's what it's meant to be. The lusts of the flesh, the sins of the flesh, rear their ugly heads. We put them off and die by the cross, the power of our union with Christ. His death is our death. The reign of sin no longer is there. It does not have authority over you. It may feel like it does but it doesn't so you die to that. In his crucifixion, in his resurrection, you walk in newness of life. The Christian life is a perpetual call to death and resurrection because that's the only thing that will deal with the malady, the ongoing malady that we have.

So James's language is intense, though. Back to James 1. "Putting aside all filthiness." The idea is that you have on some clothing that is just so nasty. Haven't you been dirty like that even recently enough to remember and think how good it was to get out of that nasty dirty stuff? Not too long ago we were working up in the attic of the house. Thankfully it was a couple of months ago so it was a lot better in May than it would be in July, but up in the attic, and there's like, there is stuff that I don't even want to see what might be around here. You know, there could be some kind of animal, a little mouse or something, spiders, and so all the dust in the attic. And so you come and you're sweating because it's hot and you come down and you're just a cake of dirt, nasty, filthy dirt. It's not like you want to go sit down and just hang out in that. "Let's go out for lunch." What do you want to do? You want to get clean. You want to take off those nasty clothes and put on some good clothes. James says that is how to live the Christian life. See that the sins that beset you are filthy garments that need to be put away. So fight against them.

The aorist tense, the verb, I said it's a participle, "putting aside all filthiness," but it's an aorist participle which pictures a point of time, a moment, but it's important to understand that the aorist is used in different ways and so I think what you have here is you have a point of time, decisive moment, but life is a series of moments. It doesn't mean that you do this one time in your Christian life and you're done with it. No, it's that you die daily. So you at moments of your life, you encounter the flesh rearing its head and what do you do? You make a determination to lay it aside. And then it comes up again and you make a determination at that moment to lay it aside. We're going to see that the imperative command "to receive the engrafted word" is also in the aorist tense so the idea is lay it aside and receive the word at each moment. So life is a series, seeing as our Christian life is a series, a succession of moments where you make that decisive decision to deal with your sin.

James says we have an ongoing malady. If we're going to be a humble learner, we have to understand that we have an ongoing malady. When you know that you are diseased, when you know that you have something radical wrong with you, it creates in you a humility

and a willingness to be helped, doesn't it? So that's where he starts. Realize the malady, an ongoing malady. Secondly, not just an ongoing malady but an all-powerful remedy. An all-powerful remedy. The all-powerful remedy is "the word implanted, which is able to save your souls." This malady is great but the remedy is greater and he emphasizes it in the way that he says it, "the word implanted, which is able to save your soul." As negative as he was, as intense in his negative language, he's equally or even more intense in his positive language. You have filthy clothes, you need to get out of them. You have a word which is all-powerful which is able not only to get you out of those clothes but is able to save you all the way to heaven.

You have an all-powerful remedy, the word implanted. It's a word picture. Just like "putting off" was a word picture, "laying aside the garments," James's vivid way that he speaks, the implanted word, the word implanted. This word pictures a seed germinating and growing, springing up. So it's not that you just receive the word, he could have just said receive the word, right? That would have been powerful enough. Receive the word which is able to save your soul, no, receive the word implanted. When the word comes into your heart, it takes root and it begins to grow and so he wants us to see that word picture; what we need is the word implanted, growing in us.

And isn't it true, the Scripture is clear the word is alive. It's not stagnant ideas, philosophies. I mean, it is a worldview in the Scriptures but the word is not merely that. It's so much more. Hebrews 4:12 says the word of God is living and active. The word of God is alive so the word of God comes into your heart and it takes root. It's alive. It is growing. It is moving. It is powerful. The same word that he puts into our ears, into our hearts, it is a powerful word. James says, "which is able." In fact, the word translated "able, which is able to save your souls," is a participle as well which means, it's from the word "dynamai," the verb "dynamai." We get our English word "dynamite" from that, "dynamos." It's about having power, being able, being capable. The word of God is capable. It's completely capable to save your souls. The word of God has all the power necessary to do the work. That's what he's saying. The idea is accomplishing power, achieving power. Whatever needs to be accomplished or achieved, the word has the power. It is able. It's not a hope in the dark, whistling in the dark and just hoping against hope. No, the word of God is powerful.

We see this in a number of places in the Scripture. I mean, Romans 1:16, "the gospel is the power of God unto salvation." That is, the message of Christ and the word of truth is the place where the power of God is manifested. And God's power was on display when he made the world and God's power is on display most clearly today in the Gospel, in the word, so that when you take the word to yourself, you are taking power inside of yourself, the power of God. So though that filthiness and when you look at the filthiness we can be discouraged, we can feel helpless and hopeless and truly we are helpless, but we are not hopeless because of the power of the word of God. So it's an all-powerful remedy. Whatever the malady, no matter how far it has spread and diseased our soul, the word is able to search it all out and to overwhelm it and to heal us. It's able to save. The word implanted which is able to save your souls. He doesn't say it's able to help you deal

with your problems. It is. He says more than that, doesn't he? It's able to save your souls. He means it's able to bring salvation and to take salvation all the way to its full extent.

You know, in a sense there are three tenses to salvation, someone has observed. When a person is saved, what does it mean? Well, you are saved from the wrath of God. In the past tense of salvation, "I was saved when I placed my faith in Jesus Christ. When I realized he died for my sins and I realized I was hopeless and helpless apart from him and I repented and placed my faith in Christ, I was saved from the wrath of God. I was saved from hell to heaven." That's the past tense of salvation. The future tense of salvation is, "I will be saved." In fact, if you think of it this way, the three tenses are kind of helpful, this formula, "I was saved from the penalty of sin. I am saved, I am already saved from the penalty of sin." That's the past tense, you see. The future sense, the future tense is, "I will be saved from the presence of sin." And the present tense of salvation is, "I am being saved from the power of sin," and it's the word of God that does all of it. The word of God causes you to be born again, to repent and to place your faith in Christ to be saved from the penalty of sin, and it's the word of God that when the shout comes and Jesus calls you home, it is the word of God that will take you away from the presence of sin, and it is the word of God that will save you on a daily basis from the power of sin.

So that's what he's exhorting us to. We said, "the word is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to dividing joint and marrow, soul and spirit," Hebrews 4:12, "and is a discernor of the thoughts and intentions of the heart." The word of God is a scalpel that goes into the heart and cuts away that which does not need to be there and delivers and heals. It wounds and it heals at the same time. Romans 12:2, "do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." There is a continual pressure of the world to conform you. That's the malady again. It's continuing to try to conform us into its mold. But how do you fight that? You be transformed by the renewing of your mind, the word of God.

The word is everything that we need. It is sufficient. It's the most wonderful truth. The word is able to save you from the penalty of sin and it is able to save you from the power of sin. That's one of the things that Jess mentioned, we're going to have a counseling conference in a couple of weeks, his father-in-law, Melissa's dad, Dr. John Street will be here. Those of you that don't know him, he is the President of ACBC, that's the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, the organization formally known as NANC, National Association of Nouthetic Counselors. If you're in nouthetic counseling, that's what ACBC now is. They went with that new name. I always thought it was kind of weird because ACBC sounds a little bit too much like an old rock group that you'd rather not think about. But anyway, one of the guys when they chose that name, I forgot who it was, I think it was Brad Bigney, got up and he said, "ACBC, the highway to heaven." So anyway. But John Street is the President of ACBC and he's also the Chairman of the Department of Biblical Counseling at the Masters College, Masters University. So the MABC, Master of Arts Biblical Counseling, he's over that in the undergrad program.

But biblical counseling is about the power of the word and the sufficiency of the word. It has the idea that really all emotional psychological problems, though there are a subset

and our bodies can affect us, there can be organic causes, but predominantly overwhelmingly the issues that lead people into psychoses and neuroses and things that the world uses, really is just unbelief and sin, and the wonder of that is, the good news of that is that the word is the answer for so many of our problems. And really even when you find there is some kind of organic element, usually that's just a part of it, it's still the spiritual root. That's where you get set free. So that's what that conference is going to be about, biblical reconciliation, how to take the word and apply it to relationships that are in trouble.

We have an ongoing malady, we have a sin nature that needs to be fought against, that needs to be put to death, we have an all-powerful remedy, the word of God. So it's an ongoing malady, the second point was an all-powerful remedy, and the third point is: a one ingredient recipe. A one ingredient recipe. The command is "receive" but the essential quality that we have to have in receiving is there when he says, "in humility receive." So the key ingredient, the one ingredient is be humble, humbly receive. If we're going to make progress in putting to death the malady through the remedy, we have to have this one essential ingredient, to be humble. In fact, the word can be translated meekly.

The ESV and the King James both translate it "in meekness receive." Receive with meekness, the word of truth. Both words approximate different elements of it. Humility speaks of we can't be proud, we have to put away pride. That's certainly part of what this word is saying but the word "meek" is another helpful word. This word is often translated "meek." It's sometimes translated "humility," sometimes "meek." But the word is defined by the New Testament Dictionary of Theology as this idea of meekness or humility that this particular word is talking about, it's not primarily an outward expression. It could also be translated "gentleness." Meekness, gentleness, humility is the idea here. But if you think about the word "gentleness" and that's a description of an outward attitude. Do you see what I'm saying? Someone is gentle, that's talking about when you bump into them, when your life bumps into them, they respond with gentleness, not harshness. Do you see? But we're looking at it from the outside with that word.

Meekness sort of does that too. The root idea of this word as defined by the dictionary I was talking about, it's not an outward expression of gentleness but an inward grace of the soul. It's an inward attitude that is not natural to man. It's a grace, a work of grace. Someone can appear to be meek and not talk much, like I said last time, but that doesn't mean they are meek or they are truly biblically humble. They may be very prideful and fear man and just don't want to embarrass themselves, or they are so proud they don't even think that you're worth talking to. No, this is an inward grace of the soul where the soul accepts God's dealing with me as good. All of God's dealings with me, I accept them as good, and therefore I do not dispute or resist in any way what God is doing. That is meekness. That is the kind of humility James is talking about here. So the idea is that I realize that God is at work on me and that whatever he does is good and I'm not fighting it.

Now, how does that relate to receiving the word implanted? You know, I said that the word is living and active like a two-edged sword from Hebrews 4:12, God wants to do surgery on us with his word on a daily basis, and he brings out his scalpel, his word, and he brings it to bear on us and we must meekly allow him to work. The opposite of meekness is to push it away. "I don't want you doing that!" One of the challenges that we have is what we're going to see through the Scriptures is that God uses other people to use his scalpel most effectively on us. He will work on you and me in the quietness of our own hearts, reading our Bibles, meditating on Scripture, we are supposed to be doing that, absolutely. He will do that and that's a vital part of the Christian life, but there is an analogy. You know when you hurt yourself, some things you can take care of yourself. You get a splinter in your hand, sometimes I've got that in my hand and I can take a needle and work on myself, in some ways I'm more comfortable with that. Hey, I know it's going to hurt and so I feel good about that. But there are some things, other things like that I can do, but you get to things like having my wisdom teeth cut out, I think it's time to let somebody else wield the knife. Taking your appendix out. There is some story from 100 years ago where a man, a doctor took his own appendix out with like mirrors and stuff. I think that guy is just crazy. Well, the deeper issues have to be, it seems that the Lord has to use someone else to take his word and apply it to you.

Now, the thing is when God brings his word as a knife to bear to you, it's going to hurt and, therefore, you must be meek to allow it to do its work. When it hurts, and how do you do that? You know that God is at work in it. I mean, think about taking your child to the doctor to have stitches or to have a bone set, and the doctor is going to hurt him, but there is an understanding, the parents are able to put the child there, hold the child's hand, tell them to hold still because they understand that good is coming through this. And so they submit to it and the child senses, especially if it's a little child, mom and dad are okay, even though this hurts like crazy, this must be okay. So they hold still, and if they don't hold still, what happens? You can't take care of them. But if they hold still, the work can be done to heal.

That is what we are called to, to realize that God is at work in hurting me because the word hurts, especially when it is dealing with deep seated stuff. It hurts but the word and it's coming through someone I don't know. I mean, the doctor, the kid doesn't know the doctor. For us, maybe coming through somebody we know, we know them too well. We're like, "They've got no business cutting on me in this way spiritually. I know problems you have. Why are you coming at me?" No, the person who wants to have a heart that's really going to be receptive and growing in grace, bringing the word to fruit, is someone who is willing to hold still and let that person wield the word, not because they are wielding it but because Jesus is wielding them and he can take a crooked stick and hit a straight blow.

That's the confidence that we are called to exhibit in relationship with one another and if we're not going to have that willingness to receive the word from other people, if you're just going to decide that you only are going to deal with your issues and I said that you've got to do with your issues and you have to be in the word as a part of life, but if you're only going to receive from yourself and the Lord, it's just you and the Lord, there will be

things in your life, operations that need to happen that will never happen this side of heaven. If you are not meek, you will not experience the blessing that God wants you to have in areas of your life. You are just cordoning off areas that will continue to grow in filthiness and disgusting ugliness. You can cover them up, try to hide them, but they won't be healed unless you meekly receive the implanted word. Receive. The idea of that word "receive" is "to receive and welcome; to embrace it."

So the word comes, in the way that God works, he speaks through other people. He just does it. I started on this last time and I want to follow up on that. I got ahead of myself a little bit because this is really more this week's message. The Lord has chosen to speak his word through people. He didn't have to do that. I mean, every book in the Bible that you have, I just mentioned James's style, we're talking about James's personality because James, you can see his personality as you read. It's different than Paul. It's different than Peter. He works through people to speak his perfect word and the Bible is a perfect book. Now, our ministry to each other is not perfect but our confidence is the God who inspired the Bible is going to work through one another and we are supposed to test the Scriptures and make sure they are telling us what is true, yes, but that we basically have an attitude to be willing to learn from every other Christian that wants to speak into my life. It doesn't mean I do whatever they say, I test it by the Scripture. You be like the Bereans. The Bereans were more noble minded than those in Thessalonica because they received the word with eagerness, they received the word with eagerness and then they tested what Paul was saying by the Scriptures. They searched the Scriptures to see if what Paul was saying was true but they received it with eagerness. "Come and bring it to me! Come bring the word to bear on my life!"

So this means what should our attitude be when we come to church on Sunday? We should come eagerly asking the Lord, "Do heart surgery on me. Lord, do what you've got to do." We should come expecting him to do that. When we go to Bible studies, every Bible study, we should come expecting him. And listen, one of the problems we have is we sometimes don't want to sit under people we don't like. Show me your meekness by sitting under someone you have difficulty with. God will bless that because we rub each other, you know, some things we like, "I like the way this guy teaches better than that guy." Okay, maybe you should go to that church. I'm not saying that if you feel that way about me, you can go to that other church. There are a lot of other good churches out there. Not that many as there used to be. But seriously, so I like this Bible teacher better than that Bible teacher and I can listen to him but I can't listen to him. Well, maybe the Lord is just wanting to challenge you to humble yourself and learn how to receive from this other brother, and you realize that cultivating that meekness to sit under the word and not react too quickly to the things maybe you don't find as delightful or enjoyable, you overlook those and you are looking for the sword of God to work on you. The cultivation of that meekness is 90 percent of the battle.

So we put ourselves under preaching, we put ourselves under teaching, and we put ourselves under one-on-one ministry. Mostly informal ministry where we just talk to each other. It's not like it has to be a counseling relationship. That's appropriate in certain circumstances but the word should always be being ministered among believers. So when

a brother is sharing something with me, a concern or he's just talking about what he's learning, I should willingly joyfully enter into hearing and receiving the word implanted. "Lord, give me something from what this brother is sharing right now." And maybe I'll have something to give him too, but too often what we're doing is we're thinking of what we want to say. We're already thinking of giving when we should be receiving. It takes meekness to receive. It takes humility. It takes an awareness that even though I can see his problem better than I can see my own, I know I've got filthy clothes on and I've got a sin nature that needs to be put to death. I need more truth.

And the Lord has just ordained it that the biggest things that happen are going to happen through other people and the way that you see this, you even see this in the way he gave us his word. I mentioned this last time, he didn't drop the Bible down from heaven. He could have done something sensational like that to show, "This is my eternal word." Bam, it comes out heaven and everybody testifies, "Yeah, it came out of heaven. Look at that." Or he just could speak out of heaven. He doesn't have to use an intermediary. Is he limited? No, he can speak out of heaven. He's done that. He did that three times in Jesus' ministry. "This is my Son with whom I am well pleased," at the baptism. "I have glorified it and will glorify," when Jesus says, "Father, glorify thy name," he speaks out of heaven in John 12. And then at the transfiguration, he says again, "This is my Son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him." God speaks out of heaven. He spoke out of heaven at times in the Old Testament but those were the rare exceptions.

What he basically did was he spoke through men. He gave his word to men and he gave us his book by giving it to men. They didn't dictate this book, it wasn't that an angel was speaking to them and they just wrote it down. No, God worked through the lives of human beings. It's much more wonderful than dictating it. He created all of the circumstances in James's life. We said he is the half-brother of Jesus, apparently dealt with envy, dealing with his brother. Didn't worship him. Didn't see him as the Messiah all throughout Jesus' life. Not until the resurrection and Jesus appeared to him directly did James come to faith. But God used all of that and all of the circumstances in his life to produce a man who would write this book to a group of people at a point in time and it would be the eternal word of God for all of us and still be alive and powerful for you and me today. And that's more amazing. Superintending, guiding everything. Sixty-six books written by more than 40 different men and yet though you can see the personalities are different, one consistent message. One glorious message.

It's the word of God and it's the word of man but he spoke through men. John Calvin says this, now listen carefully, "Nevertheless because Christ does not dwell among us in visible presence, we have said that he uses the ministry of men to declare openly his will to us by mouth." So you see that. Jesus doesn't appear visibly but he speaks to us by using men, "as a sort of delegated work, not by transferring to them his right and honor, but only that through their mouths he may do his own work, just as a workman uses a tool to do his work. I am constrained once more to repeat what I have already explained. He could indeed do it either by himself without any sort of aid or instrument, or even by angels; but there are many reasons why he prefers to do it by means of men." He could do it anyway he wanted to, Calvin says, but he chose to speak through men.

And he goes on in this section to explain it's because it creates in men the greatest humility and for God the greatest glory. He says this, "This is the best and most useful exercise in humility, when he accustoms us to obey his word, even though it be preached through men like us and sometimes even by those of lower worth than we. If he spoke from heaven, it would not be surprising if his sacred oracles were to be reverently received without delay by the ears and minds of all, for who would not dread the presence of such power, who would not be stricken down at the sight of such great majesty, who would not be confounded at such boundless splendor if he spoke from heaven like that? But when a puny man risen from the dust speaks in God's name, at this point we best evidence our piety and obedience toward God if we show ourselves teachable toward his minister, although he excels us in nothing." God is humbling us by causing us to need to be taught by others and it's not just the pastor, it's every other Christian that speaks the word to us. He is inviting us to meekness to receive his word and when you and I make that our commitment, we are cultivating a heart that will receive the word to great fruitfulness.

How do you cultivate meekness? Well, you realize how much you need, how bad the malady is and you realize how powerful the remedy is and you realize that the one thing I've got to have is meekness, but one of the ways that you cultivate meekness is to look at Christ. Just to keep looking at Jesus. The song that was sung earlier, "The Lamb of God," you think about the fact that Jesus' title, the Lamb of God, he came in meekness and gentleness. His attitude in coming was as Paul says in Philippians 2, "He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped." He did not regard his station, his honor, his position as something to hold onto, to insist that you respect me, is the idea. He didn't regard that as something to be grasped, "but He emptied Himself. He took the form of a servant and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." Paul says he didn't hold onto his glory and so when people came up to him and they didn't honor him as they should because nobody ever honored him as they should have, Jesus was not harsh. He was humble and meek.

Now, humility and meekness at times can exhibit itself in anger, righteous anger, as was appropriate at the moment where it was most necessary for the Pharisees, the unbelievers, but in general his attitude was one of approachability, tenderness. You see it in, in fact Calvin has this, he says somewhere else, he said, "If you want to be meek, consider the coming of Christ." Look at his lowliness. Look at the humility of the circumstances into which he was born. Look at the manger, a feeding trough for his first bed. No fanfare. No reception. Only some shepherds, the lowest class of people told by the angel to come. The angels aren't there with Jesus, they are off at a distance. Jesus comes in lowliness and humility.

So look at your Savior as Paul says in Philippians 2, "have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Keep looking at Christ and realize that I want to be like him. I want to be gentle and I have to have a disposition in my heart that says, "I need you to work on me on a regular basis, Lord, and you can use anyone, you can use this brother, this sister.

And though they may be at first out of balance in the way they are coming at me, I want to be gentle and humble and receive what they have because I know the instrument is not the focus, the hand that is wielding the instrument is the focus." For us in Christ, he is in charge of everything that happens to you so he's a willing instrument and I can trust him, therefore I can receive what he has for me. This is the key to helping us become people who really can build one another up and grow up into the fullness of what God intends for us in Christ.

Let's pray together.

Father, we praise you and we thank you. We thank you for being a God who has manifested yourself, unveiled your heart in the person of your Son. We see, Father, that you are meek, the Holy Spirit is meek because we see Jesus is meek, revealing the Trinity to us. Incredible power, all glory, perfect righteousness, holiness, transcendent majesty, and yet approachability and gentleness. God, help us be more like you. We pray that you would teach us the urgency of dealing with sin on a daily basis. Help us to hate the sins that beset us. Help us to see them as you see them, as filthiness and disgusting, that our hearts would be nauseated by them. And help us see the beauty of our Savior and the greatness of his salvation, that he is able to save to the uttermost the one whose hope is in him, that his death and his resurrection can become our victory more and more and more, but for that to happen to its full extent, we need to be meek and humble receivers of the word. Lord, help us lay aside our pride. Help us lay aside our vainglory. Help us lay aside our rights and realize that we are slaves who belong to Jesus. We are your workmanship. Do with us as you will and use the instruments that you have at your disposal, the people around us, to fashion us more and more into the image of Christ. And Lord, as you do that, we commit to give you all the praise and all the glory and we know that we are going to grow in joy and wonder as we see you do this. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.