CRAIG: Good morning.

CONGREGATION: Good morning.

CRAIG: Happy Mother’s Day. Yeah. There’s no right response back to a guy who says that. You just like, “Okay, yeah.” We’re so glad you’re here, whether join us in the big room or down in The Mill or online. We’re so just delighted that you chose to spend a little bit of time with us today. Given that it’s Mother’s Day, what I’m about to do is gonna seem super weird. But here’s how I wanna start our time in God’s Word today. I want you to grab a piece of paper. If you’re in the seats here, just grab...there’s some sermon notepads. Grab one of those or grab that worship card. If you’re down in The Mill, just ask...just raise your hand and some volunteers will bring you pieces of paper.

What I want you to do, at the top of this piece of paper. I want you to write down a name. Okay. This is the name I want you to write down. This is the name of the person who makes you the maddest. I know. It’s super inappropriate for Mother’s Day but just track with me for a second here. Okay. No, but I’m serious. I want you to write down the name of the person that you feel mistreats you the most consistently or it’s just the hardest relationship, the person who probably more than anybody else just sort of tends to make you angry. I really genuinely want you to put that name down. My hope is that it’s not your mom. Okay. But the reality is it might be. Those relationships are not always everything that we hoped they would be. And it may be that your mom is the person that your relationship with is strained the most. If it is the person sitting next to you, feel free to use an alias. Okay. Okay. You don’t need to give that away.

But here’s the reason I want you to do that. I want you to put down that person’s name because what God’s gonna give us this morning is a little bit like handing somebody a scalpel. Okay. God’s gonna give you a tool to deal with something important in that relationship. And I want you to start listening to what God has to say with some idea of where you’re supposed to apply the scalpel. Okay. It’s a little bit like, you know, when you go into surgery and you’re like just have your left knee operated on. There like circle your left knee and then they write this one and like put an X on your other one like not that one because you really want the surgeon to know what he’s supposed to do with the tool, where he’s supposed to apply it.

So that’s what I wanna us to do. I wanna us to begin what God has to said, begin looking at what God has to say with a pretty clear idea what it is or where it is that we’re supposed to apply that truth because what James is gonna say really is a powerful tool for dealing with hard relationships in a way that God wants us to. So if you wanna join me in James, we’re in 1:19. If you don’t have a Bible, please grab one from the seats in front of you. That’s our gift to you. James 1:19 begins this way, with some very practical advice for dealing with hard relationships. He says, “My dear brothers and sisters. Take note of this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.” And actually, love that last phrase. I love the way the NIV translated it. The literal text there says that anger does not produce the righteousness of God but kind of left that way left sort of word for word. It feels sort of abstract like, you know, it’s God’s righteousness, is heavenly righteousness.

But James is always dealing with real-life kinds of issues. And really, what he’s talking about there is not an abstract righteousness, but it’s a practical righteousness. He’s really talking about the righteousness that God wants to see played out in our relationships. One of the clear themes in the book of James is that real religion affects our relationships. Real religion affects our relationships. And what James is saying is what God desires is for heavenly righteousness to be expressed in earthly
relationships. That’s what God is looking for. He’s looking for heavenly righteousness expressed in our earthly relationships. Now, the problem is, heavenly righteousness is not the default setting for our relationships. Even as followers of Jesus, it’s not really the default setting yet. We’re in process. We’re in progress. But it’s not even the default relationship in the way that we deal with each other as followers of Christ. We tend to fall back into old ways, into worldly ways. And it’s certainly not the default setting in the world’s relationships with us. And for that reason, a lot of us deal with relationships. I think all of us probably deal with relationships that clearly are not righteous in the way God longed for them to be.

We experience mistreatment. We experienced abuse. We experience oppression or taken advantage of or hurt. We all have relationships in our lives where that kind of thing goes on. You know, our tendency at that point is to wanna make it right, to fix it, to change things so that people are treating us well so that we’re experiencing, you know, relationships that seem to take into account what Jesus prayed when he said, “May it be on earth as it is in heaven.” We try to make that happen in the relationships that are not working that way. But what James says here is like I get it. I know that that’s what you’re looking for. And honestly, that’s what God is looking for. But here’s the thing, trying to make your relationships play out that way, it’s never gonna happen because of your anger. Anger will never get you to that point. Anger will never bring heavenly righteousness into those earthly relationships that are so hard for you. Anger will not do that. If anything, anger tends to make those situations worse, right?

How many of you...Let’s just be honest with each other. How many of you have ever been in a difficult situation. You are genuinely being mistreated. You weren’t being treated well. You weren’t being treated right. You lost your temper and it got better, no. Yeah. If anything, our anger tends to make things worse, right? And that’s true. When people are mistreating us, honestly, it’s true. Even when we’re dealing with situations that aren’t really directly involving us...I struggle with this one, you know. I have two kids, and they’re great kids. But there’s two of them which means they don’t always agree on everything. And sometimes, you know, I’ve gotta a hearing conversations that turn into a heated conversation. And then, you know, it’s ramping up. They’re pretty mad at each other. And I’m kind of like, you know, I’m a neutral third party. So I can sort of hear. I know what she’s saying. I know what she’s saying, but you’re not hearing what she’s saying. You’re definitely not hear what she’s saying. And they’re kind of getting mad like they’re gonna work it out. They’re not working out. And honestly, when I finally decided to step in, my temptation and frequently the way that I fail is I step in and I’m mad. And so I come into that situation like, “Stop. Shut up. Oh my gosh, I can’t believe you’re saying this.” You’re saying this. And you’re not hearing this. And they’re like, “Whoa.” And see what’s happened, is I just made it worse because see, they’re still mad at each other. But now they’re also mad at me. And I’m kind of mad at them and it just kind of spirals. And that’s not what I wanted to do when I stepped in. I realized they weren’t treating each other in the way that I wanted them. I wanted to bring heavenly righteousness and earthly relationships. But I didn’t do that. I made it worse.

And God was really convicted me of that tendency that I have because it happens unfortunately a lot for me, whereas I was praying through this passage this week, studying it. And God laid a declaration on my heart that I’m now trying to use it before I step into anything. And here’s the declaration I wanna share with you guys. I think you might find it helpful. This is it. I may not have caused the situation, but I will not make it worse. You see the power on that? Is what I’m trying to use. I’m trying to say this in my own heart and just say it to the Lord before I step into a situation I think is not right, whether it’s directly involving me or even just involving other people that I don’t think are acting in the way they should. I first say, “I may not have caused the situation. This may not be my fault, but I will not make it worse,” because the reality is, the way that we speak into situations, the way we react to situations that are not right, can either set the stage for making them better or making them worse.

And so James says, “Hey, your anger is never gonna get you to heavenly righteousness in earthly relationships.” And it gives us some really practical steps for heading off the tendency to act out of anger. He says, “Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and therefore slow to become angry.” He says here’s how you kind of practice internal anger management. The first thing you do is you’re quick to listen, listen more because listening leads to understanding. And the more we understand what’s going on, the more likely it is we’re gonna be able to say something when we do speak that is useful. On the other hand, the quicker we are to speak, the less we understand, the less likely that we’re gonna be able to say something useful. And so he says, “Be
quick to listen.” The longer we listen, the greater the chance that we will have something worth saying. That’s an easy truth to understand, but it’s a harder truth to practice. But we begin with understanding, okay? The longer we listen, the greater the chance we will have something worth saying when we do speak.

He also says, “Be slow to speak,” because the sooner we speak, the greater the chance that we’ll make it worse. Speaking too quickly almost invariably doesn’t move it in the direction that we want it. The sooner we speak, the greater the chance it will make it worse. And so he says, “So be quick to listen and be slow to speak.” And as we begin to put these into practice, he says, “It leads to us being slow to anger,” which is important because anger does not lead to the righteousness that God is desiring in our relationships. But that’s internal anger management. And the reality is that anger doesn’t come just because of our internal stuff. Sometimes there are external forces that push us towards anger. And so James says, “Here’s how you need to deal with those.” Verse 21 he says, “Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent.”

And there’s one really important word there. And if you’ve got a Bible that you can underline it. I’d love to have you underline this most important word. And that word is “therefore.” Underline that word. We skip over it all the time when we use this verse. We kind of quote it out of context. We quote it dealing with things like pornography. We go yeah. You know what God says about pornography. He says, “Get rid of all moral filth,” or are we think about other kinds of sinful influences in the world. And we go, yeah. James says, “Get rid of all that stuff.” Don’t get me wrong. I absolutely, pornography is moral filth. It has no business in the life of a believer. And we need to get its influence out of our lives. But that is not what James is talking about here. James is not talking about things like that. James is talking about anger. He says, “Quick to listen, be slow to speak, slow to become angry because anger does not lead to what God desires, therefore, get rid of the stuff.”

Instead, he’s connecting it to anger. He’s talking about things that are outside of us that tend to stir us up towards anger. He says, “You got to get rid of that stuff.” Now, understand James’s audience was in the midst of some really tough times, okay? They had been kicked out of their homes because of their faith in Jesus. They’d been driven out of their city. They had been driven out of their country. And because of their status as refugees and immigrants, they were they were abused. People with money and power could take advantage of them using them to their own ends, kind of use them up and spit them out. They were in very difficult circumstances. And chances are you and I are not exactly the same place. Chances are that most of us don’t face exactly those kinds of circumstances. Some of you do. Some of you’re here today and you’re in exactly that status. You’re in a place as an immigrant or a refugee because you were driven from your homes and you find yourself here in this place. And this doesn’t feel quite like the land of the free that you heard that it was gonna be. In fact, you may find yourself being used and abused and depressed because you don’t have much of a voice here in which case you know exactly what James is talking about.

For a lot of the rest of us, we don’t face the same circumstances. But we can we can relate to the kind of thing that he’s talking about, being in those situations where we’re just being mistreated. You know, maybe for you it’s the co-worker who takes credit for all your work. Maybe it’s the boss who promotes his slacker nephew instead of you. Maybe it’s the teacher who consistently takes points off of your essays and your papers but they never explain why. And you go, “It’s unjust. It’s unfair.” Maybe it’s your HOA that always hits a chord. I’m not quite sure why. But in a variety of ways, we can understand what it’s like, what it feels like to be in that place where you’re kind of at somebody’s mercy. They’re not treating you in the way that you know is heavenly righteousness. And you’re frustrated by that. And here’s the interesting thing, is that when you’re in a situation like that there’s almost always somebody who rises up to pour gasoline on the fire that you’re already feeling. Maybe it’s the neighbor who is willing to tell you, not only why the HOA is bad, but here’s a bunch of things you didn’t know about the HOA that’ll really make you mad. Maybe it’s the gossip at work. Maybe it’s CNN. Maybe it’s Fox News.

There’s always these voices that rise up when we’re in the midst of unjust treatment, that pour fire, rather they’re not pouring fire they pour gasoline on the fire. Yeah. You have a reason to be upset. You have a right to be upset. It’s actually worse than you’re thinking. And they stir up that kind of anger. What James is saying is you can’t. You can’t allow those kind of voices to speak into your life. The word he uses for a moral filth is actually...I mean it’s a trash word. It’s a word for trash. And the word that he uses for moral evil or prevalent evil is a word that’s always related to how we treat other people. So he’s dealing here with anger. In
modern terms, what he really is saying here is because anger doesn’t accomplish the righteousness that God desires, you need to stop listening to trash talk that makes you treat other people like trash.

It’s a rough translation of the Greek. But it’s what James was saying. It’s not generic filth. It’s filth that’s related. And he’s using strong word there. He says that kind of talk, those kinds of voices speak into your life, its filth. And you need to have nothing to do with it because it stirs you to an anger that will never bring you to the place that God really desires. So he says, “Stop listening to trash talk that makes you treat other people like trash and instead, humbly accept the word planted in you which can save you.” So here’s the problem. Arrogance and anger are very closely linked. It’s really hard to be angry when you’re humble. And that’s why we have a tendency to surround ourselves with the voices that puff us up to go, “Yeah. You’re right to think that way. You’ve absolutely nailed it. You understand exactly what’s going on.” And so those voices, not only do they create anger, but they create an arrogance.

You know, maybe for you it’s that Facebook group you belong to. Maybe it’s a Twitter account that you follow. But it’s a voice that you allow to speak into your life that not only stirs anger, but it does it by telling you, “Yeah. You’re right. You’re right to think about this person. You’re right to think about those people like that.” And James says, “No, no, stop listening to trash talking instead, humbly accept the word planted in you which can save you.” Now, what word is he talking about? Well, as we said last week, James seems to use the word “word” to really talk about the Gospel message, the good news, the good news that God loves you. And that in spite of your sin, he reached out to you with grace and mercy. He sent his own son to die in your place. And as he rose from the dead, so too, by faith in him can we be raised to new life and new relationship with him.

That’s what James means when he talked about the word. It’s the good news. But you know, he says, “Humbly accepts the word.” There’s this very close relationship between the gospel and humility because you can’t accept the gospel apart from humility. Arrogant people cannot come to Christ because it is humility that allows us to say, “I’m a sinner.” I don’t like that about myself, but it’s the truth. I’m a sinner. It’s humility that allows us to say, “I can’t fix it. I can’t save myself. I can’t ever be good enough.” And even if I could stop ever being bad, I can’t fix the wrong stuff I’ve done.” That is a humbling experience. But it is in that moment of humility that God says, “Okay. Yes, you’re a sinner, and yes you can’t fix it. But I love you in spite of that. And I can fix it if you will let me.” And so there’s this very close link between humility and the gospel. And so he says instead of being stirred up to anger and arrogance he says, “Humbly accept the word.”

Now, he does kind of an interesting thing here. He says, “Humbly accept the word planted in you.” That’s an odd phrase. He says, “Humbly accept.” That seems to say you need to do this. But then he says, “Accept this word, this gospel that is planted in you,” which sounds like it’s already happened. Well, wait, which is it? Am I supposed to receive the gospel or am I supposed to accept the gospel that’s already here, how does that even work? So what James is saying is this. He’s saying, the gospel does a lot more than just forgive your sins. It does a lot more than just secure your eternity. The gospel...when you embrace everything that’s true about it, will change your present circumstances. What he’s saying is this thing, the gospel which saves us, should also transform us. You hear me? The same gospel which saves us should also transform us. The same gospel which draws us to humbly come before God and to ask for his forgiveness, to ask to receive by grace what we can’t achieve on our own, he’s saying that same humility needs to be played out on the rest of your life.

Those who have been saved by humbly trusting God must also learn to live by humbly trusting God. In the same way that we say, “I cannot save my life. I cannot save my soul. I can’t save my eternity.” He says, “Okay. That’s great. That word has been planted in you. But I need you to embrace the full implications of it.” If you can’t save yourself for eternity, what makes you think you can change your circumstances, what makes you think you can fix things that only God can fix? No, no, those who have been humbly saved by trusting God must learn to live by humbly trusting God. What he’s saying is this. He’s saying, “I know your circumstances are awful. I know that you’re being mistreated. I know that you’re being taken advantage of. I know that your lives are in danger. I know that you don’t have the resources that you need. I know that things are hard.” But if you think that you can fix it, you’re wrong.
If you think that human anger can be stirred up and then you can lead the charge and you can come against the people that are doing this and you’ll fix it. You’ll save yourselves and your circumstances. Now, you’ve forgotten all kinds of important things. He says, “The solution is not anger. The solution is not you trying to make everything right. The solution is to go back to the gospel because the gospel can secure your eternity, but it can also transform your present.” Hear that because it’s incredibly important. The gospel which secures our future, our eternity, can also transform our present when we begin to live as God calls us to live, embracing the full implications of the gospel. What he’s saying is that God can use that approach to life that can become a stage in which God can do what you cannot. So it begins to give us some very practical steps for how we live that way.

He says this, verse 22. Says, “Do not listen to the word and so deceive yourselves.” No, do what it says. Don’t just listen to the gospel, don’t just receive the gospel, practice it. Live in light of it. Anyone who listens to the word of the gospel 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. You notice that last phrase, “They will be blessed in what they do.” He’s not talking about the distant future at this point. He’s talking about our present circumstances. He’s saying, that if you live in light of the gospel, it will transform your present circumstances and not just your eternity.

In fact, at the end of verse 21 when he said, “Humbly accept the word planted on you which can save you.” There’s a little bit of a play on words going on there because the Greek word for “life” is the same Greek word for “soul.” And the literal Greek there says that humbly accepting the word can save your souls, save your lives, because they mean kind of the same thing. What he’s saying is again, humbly accepting the gospel and all of its implications transforms more than just your eternity. It can transform your present, but you have to live in light of it. So he says, “Don’t just look at the gospel. Receive the gospel, embrace all of its implications and begin living in light of that.” He says, “If you don’t, you’re like a person who looks at themselves in a mirror and then goes away forgetting what they look like.” Okay. How is the gospel like a mirror? Because when we look at the gospel, we see ourselves reflected as we truly are. The gospel forces us to acknowledge that who we are as we are sinners saved by grace. That’s who we are. That’s what the gospel says about us. We’re sinners saved by grace. We didn’t deserve God’s mercy. We didn’t deserve God’s love. We did not deserve God’s forgiveness. And yet, what did he do? He poured it out upon us. We are sinners saved by God’s grace.

And the thing is that when we look in the gospel, we go, “Yeah. That’s who I am. I didn’t deserve it. I treated God very poorly. And yet, what God did was love me and pour out grace upon me.” When we understand that about ourselves and then we look at the people who are mistreating us, we’re like, “Yeah. You’re a jerk. You’re the worst.” You understand, we’re people who recognize we were given grace, but we will not give it. He says, “When we live in those really hard relationships, we think about those people, when we talk about those people, when we treat those kinds of people in those hard relationships without grace and mercy, we’re like people who look at ourselves and then completely forget we look like. He says, “Don’t do that.” He says, “Look at yourself in the light of the gospel and realize you’re a sinner saved by grace, and now go out and do that.” Treat others as people who deserve grace and mercy, not because of what they’ve done, but because they’re beloved by God no matter how badly they might treat you.

So he says, “Don’t just hear the gospel. Do the gospel.” Don’t just talk about the gospel. Live out the gospel. When you do that, you’ll be blessed in what you do. God begins to use that as a platform to transform circumstances in a way that you and I can’t. He makes an interesting shift in the middle of this. He moves from talking about the word to verse 25 he says, “Whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom.” It’s an interesting statement. He’s a Jewish writer, and he’s writing to Jewish believers. And as soon as the Jewish person heard the word law, they would have immediately thought of the Old Testament, the Old Testament with all of the rules and the regulations. And it’s interesting. He calls it the perfect law that gives freedom which is not how we think about. Is it? Does anybody read the old testament rules and regulations and goes, “Yes, freedom at last.” No, we think exactly the opposite, right? We’re like, “Well, this is oppressive.”

Partly the reason that we think it that way is we don’t really understand the purpose of the Old Testament law. Now, I’m just
gonna dip my toes in some really deep waters here. I think it’s important that we understand how James is thinking about it. What James understands is that the Old Testament law points to Jesus. That’s the highest purpose of the Old Testament. It’s to point us to Jesus because the Old Testament law anticipated what Jesus accomplished. Hear that for a second. The Old Testament law anticipated, it pointed us forward to what Jesus actually accomplished, what he did. See, what we have in the Old Testament law is a practical illustration of what it looks like for heavenly righteousness to be lived out in earthly relationships. But, of course, we don’t do it. We don’t keep the law. We don’t bring that picture into our lives. We fail at keeping that law. We fail at bringing that heavenly righteousness into our own earthly relationships and because of that...that’s why we tend to look at the law, and go there is no freedom in the law because every time I look at it, I see guilt, yeah. But it’s not that the law is imperfect. It’s us who are imperfect.

So the law shows us that we need the Savior, and so it points to Jesus. The law also shows us how we can be saved because the law requires that sacrifices be made for sin to illustrate that reality, that the wage of sin is death. And the only way to pay for sin is death. But it doesn’t necessarily have to be you. It can be a substitution. And in that way the Old Testament law about sacrifice is pointed to Jesus who was our substitution. He took our place on the cross. And so the Old Testament law tells us why we need a Savior, it tells us how we can be saved, and the Old Testament law then in light of Jesus, begins to show us what a saved life looks like. It begins to show us what heavenly righteousness actually looks like in earthly relationships.

And when Jesus came, he didn’t just take our sin upon himself. He set us free from sin, but He set us free for transformation. And He said, “Come to me in faith. And it’s not just that your sins wiped away, but I send my holy spirit into your life and my Holy Spirit begins to change you from the inside out so that your life actually begins to express heavenly righteousness.” But the Old Testament is still a guide to us because the Old Testament shows us what that looks like. And the reality is that God has invited us to cooperate with him in his transformation of us. You hear me?

God is the business of transforming you. If you’re in a relationship with Jesus, God is transforming you. But he invites us to cooperate with him. And so the Old Testament law begins to give us that picture of what heavenly righteousness looks like in earthly relationships. And so we began to go, “I need to be headed in that direction.” And so we cooperate, “Oh, I’m moving in that direction.” So we’re part of that process that’s going on. And so He says, “You need to look at it.” You need to look at yourself in the perfect law. Now, He says, “The law...” I mean, in the Old Testament because when James is writing there was no New Testament. James is probably the first book of the New Testament. So what he’s really just saying though is you need to look at yourself in light of the Bible. For us, it’s both the Old and the New Testament. He says you need to go to it because you begin to see that picture of what it is that Jesus is doing in you and what that relationship is supposed to look like. And in that way we cooperate. So he says, “You’ve gotta look at it.”

But when you look at it, you don’t need to just hear what it says. You also need to do it. That’s our process of cooperating God. He says. Don’t just hear what the Bible says, you have to do what the Bible says, which tells me that there’s basically four kinds of people and maybe more than anything else this morning. You need to wrestle with the question, which of these four kinds of people am I? One kind of person is the person who’s not hearing what the Bible has to say, and they’re not doing it, not hearing, not doing. And I’m gonna be honest. I actually have a certain amount of respect for these people, at least they’re authentic. They might be authentic atheists. But these are the people who say, “I don’t really care what the Bible has to say. I don’t care what God has to say, makes no difference to me.” And they’re making no effort to put anything that God says into practice. And I would say. At least you’re not a hypocrite. You’re walking your own road and you’re consistently walking your own road. I can respect that. But I also have to say in love that road leads to hell. And I don’t say that as condemnation. I don’t say that it’s judgment. I say it as a reality. God is the only source of hope, peace, and life. And if you walk a road of your own devising that has nothing to do with Him that walks you away from Him, the end result of that is death and horror and pain, not as punishment. It’s just the reality.

And I know Christians are often thought of as being judgmental when we say that some of those roads lead to hell. But it’s not judgment. It’s genuine concern. Listen. If I were in Iraq, and I knew that there’s a fork in a road and if you go this direction, it’ll
get you to the place you wanna go. If you go this direction, it'll get you to death because the road is, you know, it's just filled with IEDs and land mines like that. And if I was standing at that fork and somebody were coming towards me and they started to make a turn down that horrible road and I didn't say anything, there's no way that you could look at me and say you care about people. In fact, you tend to look at me and go, “What kind of a horrible person are you that you didn’t tell them not to take that road?” So when I say that this road of not hearing and not doing leads to hell. I say it out of love because I know the end of that road. And I don't want that for you. And if you're here today and you go, “Yeah that’s my road.” I just...In all sincerity, I beg you that come talk to me or one of the people that’ll be up front after the service or talk to somebody to Welcome Center or call the church this week and let one of us take you to coffee and let's talk about this because you don’t wanna walk the road. I can respect the authenticity, but I don’t want you to get to the end of that road and find what’s waiting there.

Now, there's a second group of people. And these are the people that are not hearing, but there's some doing. They're not looking to wait to see what God has to say. They're not searching out God's Word or His wisdom. They're not going to church to hear God's Word proclaimed. But because they live in a Christian culture, they're doing some of the right stuff, you know, because they've heard, you know, “Don’t commit adultery.” They've heard, “Don’t murder.” And they kind of know those sorts of things. They're like, “Yeah. I'm not gonna commit adultery on my wife or my husband. I'm not gonna kill anybody. I might think about it a little bit, but I not actually gonna do it.” So, “Hey, honestly, what’s wrong. I’m a pretty good person, right? “Hey, especially those people over there. I’m way better than those people.” And see what happens is...and in some ways this is a really dangerous place to be because they have it just enough of the truth that they've heard because of the culture they live in to feel like they're on board with it when they're not actually. And that's a dangerous place because it’s a little bit like, you know, how we vaccinate against diseases. You know how we do it, right? We give them just a little bit of the disease and their body learns to fight off the thing when it really comes knocking.

And in the same way because we live in a culture that was historically Christian, you get a lot of people, they're not seeking out what God has to say. But they're doing a little bit of it just kind of by virtue of the culture. And they begin to go, “I’m pretty good. I’m a good person. I’m good enough.” And if you’re in that place also out of love...and I mean this in all seriousness. Out of respect for you, I have to tell you the honest truth which is you're not good enough. No one is good enough. I am not good enough. And that little voice inside your head that says, “Yeah. But I’m better than them.” It’s not a helpful voice to listen to because Jesus says, “Be perfect.” And you go, “I can’t do that.” He goes, “I know but, I can do this for you.” But those people that they're not hearing God’s Word. I just say. They have a hard time understanding that reality. They get kind of inoculated against the truth. And if you’re in that place, I just really encourage you to ask yourself the genuine question. Am I really good enough in the way that Jesus says, and if not, do I need to come to that place where I humbly come before Him and say, “Would you rescue me?”

There’s the third group of people. They’re the people that are hearing, but they’re not doing. And in some ways this is the hardest person. These are the people that...you know, they come to church. You know, they like to listen to good preaching. Probably they even read their Bibles. They can quote parts of it. They’re hearing. They’re searching out what God has to say. But they’re not doing it. It’s not transforming them. They’re not seeking to cooperate with God and moving towards that picture that it paints of what a transformed life looks like. And in some ways, this is a harder place to be. If the person who is not hearing but doing a little bit is inoculated against the truth, these people who are hearing but not doing, they’ve rubbed up against the truth so much that’s built up a callus. And the truth doesn’t penetrate it anymore.

You know, I play guitar. I don’t play all that much anymore and so my calluses have kind of gone away. Yesterday, for the baby dedication, I did some worship. And it was painful like my fingers hurt. It was a different kind of a sensation because a couple years ago when I was playing, you know, on a weekly basis, I had calluses. I mean, you could stick pins in my fingers, and I wouldn’t respond. Now, I mean, if you really dug them in, you’d get a reaction. But I wouldn’t feel the initial pricking. And that's the danger that comes from people who hear the word of God, the Bible regularly, but they're not looking to put into practice. They’re developing a callus. It's not penetrating in a way that forces them to recognize that, “Huh, it might just be that this thing that I call my faith is fake.”
And there’s a fourth category, this person who is hearing and doing. And obviously, that’s what James is calling us to. He says, “Hear and do.” And hear doesn’t just mean show up in church. There’s an active sense to it. Hear means, dig into God’s word for yourself, be a part of a community that preaches God’s Word on a regular basis. Hear the voice of God speaking to you through His word and through His people. But then take that, “Okay. What do I do with this, Lord?” And seeks to put that into practice, and in that way to embrace all of the gospel. And as you’re transformed, it will also transform these circumstances that cause James to write this in the first place.

He reminds us of that with his last words he says, “Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues, deceive themselves and their religion is worthless.” And I think the reason he mentions tongues here is he’s just taking us back to that beginning because, you know, what is the first sign that we’re harboring anger towards others in our hearts? It’s the way we talk about them. It’s the way we talk to them. And so he reminds us. Listen. you’re in these difficult circumstances, but your anger will not change things in the way that you want. So look at yourself in the gospel. See yourself as a sinner saved by grace and begin to treat those who mistreat you with grace. Get your tongue under control. Let God begin to do what you can’t. Don’t just hear what God has to say about who you are, but put it into practice in your daily lives because at the end of the day, real religion pours heavens righteousness into our hardest relationships, maybe more than anything else this morning that’s the truth to try to grab a hold of.

If my faith is real, real faith, real religion, it pours heavens righteousness into my hardest relationships, not my easy ones, not the ones where we’re all on the same page and we’re treating each other well and it’s all great. No, no, real religion pours heavens righteousness into our hardest relationships. And so I just give you two quick questions. Question number one, what’s your hardest relationship? Maybe it’s that name that you wrote at the beginning of our time together. It’s on top of the page or maybe God has brought somebody else to mind as we walk through his word this morning. But who is it? Where is it that God wants you to take this tool that he’s giving you and apply it?

Which is the second question, how do you apply it? The second question is what would it look like for me to allow God’s grace to transform the way I respond into that relationship. And in so doing, leave space for God to do what I cannot, what I’ve been trying and failing time and time again. How am I gonna pour God’s grace into that relationship so that God can do what I cannot. Will you pray with me?

Jesus, we recognize this is a hard truth. It’s easy to be gracious and merciful to the people who treat us well, but that’s not what you did. We didn’t treat you well and yet you were as gracious and merciful as you could possibly be. And you call us to embrace that, not only as a truth that saves us but as a truth that transforms us that should inform the way that we deal with those hard relationships that we all face. Lord that’s not our natural wiring. It’s not our natural inclination, but it is who we are in you. So I just pray for my friends as you point them to those hard relationships, would you transform their hearts and their thinking in those so that we don’t pour out anger. We don’t even harbor it in our hearts towards them. But instead, we feel mercy and we pour out grace that’s been poured into us, we pour it out into those hard relationships. And Lord I ask you that you would bless us in what we do when we do that. But that wouldn’t be an endless pouring out of grace with no return, but, Lord, that you would use that sacrifice that we make as we pour out grace in those hard relationships, that you use it to transform those relationships, to that transform those circumstances that we would experience a gospel that not only secures our eternity, but it transforms our present because we’ve created a platform, a place for you to do what only you can do, in Jesus name. Amen.