

Look Closely in the Mirror

Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and . . . forgets what he looks like (James 1:23-24).

Scripture: James 1:19-27

Song: “Who You Say I Am”

As a teenager I often looked in the mirror . . . but never liked what I saw. I wasn't muscular like many of my male peers were. I didn't have to endure “short jokes,” but I had protruding bony limbs. If someone had wanted to fight me, I'd be sure to lose. And I wondered what girl would want to date a beanpole. I tried to change my body, but only time and age finally fixed it.

James wanted believers to be doers of God's Word, not just hearers. He compared hearing but not doing to looking in a mirror, seeing something we didn't like, but then taking no action to fix the problem.

God's Word provides a mirror that reflects our thoughts, attitudes, and actions. Because our sin nature is still with us, we'll never perfectly obey until we are with the Lord, but the abiding presence of God's Spirit gives us power to make obedience the norm. God's mirror will show us the right way so that our lives can please God and reflect the image of Christ to others.

Father, may our look in the mirror reflect a life that is pleasing to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

February 13–19. **Martin Wiles** is the founder of an online devotional site and serves in various editorial capacities in Christian publishing. He has authored six books and has contributed to numerous publications.

Stand for Right

Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts (Amos 5:15).

Scripture: Amos 5:7-15

Song: “Stand Up! Stand Up for Jesus!”

As a schoolteacher, I sometimes must leave my classroom briefly. Often I return to hear students talking when they’re supposed to be quietly working. To encourage them to do what’s right, I wrote the following on the dry-erase board: “The right thing is always the right thing, whether everyone is looking or no one is looking.” Even so, there are times I return to find that I need to explain *again* what it means to do the right thing.

Amos was not a known prophet, nor was he a priest. He did not hold a “professional” religious position but worked as a shepherd and tended sycamore-fig trees. Although he was a layperson, God told him to warn the northern kingdom of Israel to repent or face God’s discipline. Israel was guilty of oppressing the poor and selling them into slavery. The nation also worshipped idols and was indifferent about justice.

God hates all forms of evil because it destroys His good purposes for humanity. When we do what is right, we encourage others to do the same and we actively repress evil, making the world a better place for everyone—for believers and nonbelievers alike. It’s not always easy or convenient to obey God, but it honors Him—and it shines the light of His truth and love in the darkness.

Father, I want to stand in Your strength today and do what is right. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Praise Our Mighty God

Sing to God, sing in praise of his name, extol him who rides on the clouds; rejoice before him—his name is the LORD (Psalm 68:4).

Scripture: Psalm 68:1-13

Song: “Good, Good Father”

I’ve attended church all my life, and I’ve witnessed various forms of praise over the years. Some worshippers praise God while sitting silently with their eyes closed. Others stand to their feet and raise their hands in the air as they sing. I’ve seen some move joyfully about the sanctuary, while others have knelt at an altar, whispering their prayers to the Lord. And I’ve come to realize that the *manner* of praise is not as important as the *motive*.

In his psalm, David encourages us to praise the Lord, and then he offers many reasons why we should do so. God defeats our enemies and makes sure evil does not win the day. He defends those who have no parents and comforts those who have lost spouses. The Lord provides comfort and friends for those who wrangle with loneliness. He provides for the needs of His people, as He did when the children of Israel plodded through the wilderness on their way to the promised land.

Our God deserves praise because He is omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), and omnipresent (always and everywhere present). No matter what we face in life, God walks beside us and provides for our needs. We praise God because He is good and He faithfully tends to the details of our lives.

Father, we praise You for who You are and for all Your faithfulness toward us. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Speak Up!

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute (Proverbs 31:8).

Scripture: Proverbs 31:1-9

Song: “He Has Shown Thee”

One of my favorite movies depicts a Marine Corps major who is assigned to lead a school’s sloppy ROTC program. The major gets the students into rank, introduces himself, and informs them they are not to speak without his permission. No sooner do the words leave his mouth, than a cadet begins singing. The marine immediately gets in the young man’s face and asks him if he’s deaf. That’s when another cadet pipes up and says, “Actually, sir, he *is* deaf.” The “disobedient” trainee had someone to speak up for him!

King Lemuel penned this final chapter in the book of Proverbs. Although we don’t know much about him, it’s clear that his mother gave him sage advice. She told him that kings did not need to imbibe drink that would affect their ability to rule with wisdom. They did, however, need to speak up for those who could not speak up for themselves, including the poor, the needy, widows, and orphans.

Although governments today care for many social needs, we can still work in God-honoring ways to see His principles of kindness and justice applied where they are lacking. When we attune our hearts and minds to God’s heart for the vulnerable, He will show us where He would have us step up and speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves.

Father, grant me Your wisdom, courage, and strength to speak up on behalf of those who need an advocate. In Jesus’ name, amen.

God's Love Frees

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free” (Luke 4:18).

Scripture: Luke 4:16-30

Song: “Tell Somebody”

Each year, countless refugees seek asylum in countries such as Canada and the US—places with reputations for honoring and protecting personal freedoms. As humans, we crave the freedom to do what we want, when we want, and how we want; and this longing for independence is as old as history itself.

Adam and Eve pursued freedom from the single command God gave them and ate what was forbidden. But instead of freedom, they found bondage to sin. In today's Scripture, Jesus quotes from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah and proclaims good news of freedom from sin's slavery and oppression. Jesus was committed to His Father's will to set us free. And while He faced great opposition, He persisted in His mission and completed it (Hebrews 12:1-3). Praise God!

Then when Jesus returned to His Father, He left to His followers the work of being His representatives—ambassadors who would take His message of freedom all over the world (2 Corinthians 5:20; Matthew 24:14). Only through faith in Christ can others experience the freedom of forgiveness, the hope of abundant life, and the promise of eternal life. As His followers, we carry this good news that all people need to hear!

Father, show me someone today who needs to hear the message of Your love that sets us free. In Jesus' name, amen.

Keep On Keeping On!

We count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy (James 5:11).

Scripture: James 5:1-11

Song: “It Is Well with My Soul”

The sign at the trailhead said our destination was 9.7 miles away. My friend had never hiked such a distance; I had hiked this trail previously . . . 21 years before. We set out and did well until the halfway point. That’s where we came to “the Lighthouse”—a series of large boulders that made the path narrow and littered it with rocks. We slowed to a snail’s pace. The remainder of the hike was peppered with a series of steep steps, one grueling climb after another. Despite our aching calves, thighs, and feet, we kept going. Walking—and enduring—was the only way to reach our goal.

In today’s passage, James encouraged his readers to persevere during persecution. And they certainly knew about persecution! Many first-century believers faced tremendous suffering—even death—as they lived for Christ and made His truth and love known.

And today as well, depending on prevailing political and religious climates, Christians around the world face persecution in various forms. Jesus was persecuted and made it plain that those who followed Him would suffer persecution (Matthew 5:11-12; 10:22). Whether we are killed, imprisoned, beaten, deprived, excluded, or merely mocked for Christ’s sake, God will give us the strength to endure to the end.

Father, give us strength to keep on keeping on in the work of Your kingdom. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Don't Play Favorites

Believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism (James 2:1).

Scripture: James 2:1-12

Song: "How He Loves"

In one of *The Andy Griffith Show* episodes, Sheriff Andy's young son, Opie, is on the brink of failing arithmetic. Andy does what he thinks is best to help Opie succeed. However, Opie is convinced that good grades don't come from studying but from the teacher's favor. As evidence, Opie names a girl the teacher likes, pointing out that *she* gets good grades. Andy challenges Opie's premise by countering that the girl might be liked *because* she gets good grades, not the other way around.

While Opie's teacher, Miss Crump, was actually fair, some teachers, bosses, parents, etc., are guilty of showing favoritism. In today's passage, the apostle James warned his first-century Christian readers against it. The church may have needed the material support that the wealthy could offer; but in Christ's economy of love, this was not a valid reason to treat them with preference over those who had little.

During His earthly ministry Jesus did not play favorites. In fact, He often served people whom the religious leaders wanted nothing to do with. Jesus' example shows us that regardless of anyone's bank account, background, status, ability, or any other temporal factor, our Lord extends His invitation to *all* to come follow Him. And He equips His followers with gifts and talents so that we might serve one another faithfully, without showing favoritism. God sincerely loves each one in our midst, and so should we.

Father, reveal where I am showing favoritism so I can repent and love everyone well. In Jesus' name, amen.