

Starting Out Right

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[0 : 00] Everybody wants to turn to James chapter 1. James chapter 1. I believe it's important for us to get a fresh start. They're on the field right before the game, and the field reporter will stick a mic in their face, and they'll say something about the other team's strengths or the other team's playmakers or something.

And any good coach will say, we've got to get off to a great start. We need to get after it. Under Dabo, Clemson wins 93% of the time when they're leading at halftime. They weren't leading at halftime yesterday. A good start is important, not just in football, but it's also important in the basis of life.

If you buttoned up your shirt this morning, and if you started with the wrong buttonhole, you probably didn't figure it out until you was almost finished. But the reality is, this problem was from the start.

You have to start out right. Church, God has blessed us with a wonderful 2025.

[1 : 40] He's been wonderfully good to us, and I am very thankful for that. Amen? He's good to us.

He is. And as we bust into a new year with a new steeple, I want us to do it right.

I want us to do it right as a church, but I want it to be right as individuals too. And I can't think of anyone who speaks more to where we are in life than James does.

When I think of James, I think of where the rubber meets the road. James pulls no punches.

Speaks right to the heart of the matter. And I believe that's the way we need to look, where we need to look, as we start out the new year. Let us be advised by James this morning.

[2 : 45] James chapter one, beginning in verse 22. It says, but be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he's like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what it was like.

But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

And if anyone thinks he's religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this, to visit orphans and widows and their affliction and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

The first step to starting a year outright is to be a hearer of the word. I don't want you to miss that.

He says we don't need to only be hearers of the word but I want you to understand we need to respond to, we need to respond to what we hear but we first, we need to hear it.

[4 : 22] So, I want to begin by talking about how we start right. I believe that you need to start your year out, actually start each day out with the word of God.

You need a daily dose of God's word. It's not like popping a vitamin and moving on. I mean, we need to pause with God's word.

And I don't believe it will happen in most of our lives if we don't have a plan. So, let's get one.

I don't believe it's a one size fits all. Everyone has their own leanings in this and I get that. We can provide you guidance in this area with a lot of options.

A lot of options. I'm going to give you some this morning. But, most of those options that I'm going to give you and I want you to hear this before I ever say it. Well, you can't hear it before I say it but anyway. That's getting ahead of me.

[5 : 37] Don't get ahead of me. Before I ever explain it, I want you to hear this. Most of the options that I'm going to mention this morning will carry you through God's word in a year.

If you want to read the Bible through in a year, they will do it. If you've never done that, I encourage you to try to do that. We need all of God's word.

It's good to take the whole thing in. However, be clear. We're not pausing in this worship hour to have everybody who's read the Bible through to come up so that we can give you a trophy. Just because you skim through the genealogies, just because you skipped over some of the senses, I don't believe when I get to heaven he's going to pull me inside and say, good, well done, servant.

you've read the Bible through multiple times because the reality is when you're trying to read three or four chapters, some of you have been on this journey, you'll admit it, when you're trying to read three or four chapters on a rough schedule, you don't have a clue what you just read.

[6 : 59] Okay? So, I'm not devaluing the value of taking in all of God's Word. And almost every plan that I give you today as options will do that for you.

But I want you to hear what's most important about that is to not just be a hearer or a reader of God's Word but a doer.

We have a lot of options. At every door including by my side here and at the front door there's an offering box.

And on top of that offering box is a bookmark. A bookmark that we've customized from a book that I read in 2008 called The Divine Mentor by Wayne Cordero.

If you need something to motivate you to read God's Word go pick up Divine Mentor from Wayne Cordero. It's a very inspiring work that tells us the importance of taking in God's Word.

[8 : 11] And then he gives us a plan of how to do that and to read through the Old Testament once and to read through the New Testament twice. The wonderful value of this is that you get some Old Testament and you get the New Testament.

The reason why I don't do chronological studies through Scripture on my daily Bible time is because I need Jesus every day. I need the New Testament every day and so I like some of that.

And so I leaned on this particular bookmark and this particular reading plan for years as well as his way of not only being a hearer but a doer of the Word and it still changes.

It's changed in my devotional life when I read that book. Made it a lot more consistent in pattern and made a lot more meaningful for me and this bookmark comes off of that study and it's a great way to keep up with it.

It's a quarterly bookmark. We replace those on the Sunday before the quarter starts hopefully and they put those out for you and get those out so you can see those. The bookmarks are wonderful.

[9 : 21] There was a man that lived in the 19th century named Robert Machain and Robert Machain only lived to be I think 29 years old.

He died young but his influence was huge in the days in which he lived. Never any more than his reading plan, his Bible reading plan.

And it is a it's got a we've got this flyer out here on the information center for you this morning. It gives a great explanation of his philosophy behind it, why he does what he does, the way it's written out and the whole bit.

If you want to read through the Bible in a year you can pick up the Machain plan and do that. And it's a classic that many Bible reading plans are based off of Machain because he kind of set the standard for that.

And then there's one that I did this past year and I thoroughly enjoyed it, plan to do it again. It's called the five-day reading plan. And again, this plan will take you through the word of God in a year.

[10 : 34] You get some old and some new every day in that plan. And it's out there on the information center just like that. And what it does, lets you cheat a little bit.

It gives you readings for Monday through Friday. That don't mean you don't take in God's word on Saturday and Sunday. Hello. That's not what that means. That means you catch up from what you missed.

That's what it means because you ain't perfect. Or you can always go to a psalm on a day when you don't have a reading. There's a psalm, there's five psalms for every day because there's 30 days in a month and there's 150 psalms.

And so there's several ways you can work that out. There's also a chapter of Proverbs for every day of the month. There's 31 chapters of Proverbs. And so if I get to a point where I'm caught up with everything and I've read everything and the first thing I do is look to Proverbs for the proverb of the day.

Today is December the 28th I believe it'd be Proverbs 28 and you look at that. And it gives you a great way to take in God's word every day. Our ladies have been a part for the last two years of a plan called Bible Recap.

[11 : 41] The Bible Recap plan takes you chronologically through scripture and they, I believe the strongest thing about Bible Recap is the resources that are related to it.

There's a wonderful podcast where somebody explains to you what you read that day and if you didn't read it it lets you cheat a little bit and find out what's going on.

And then there's also a commentary, a little leather bound commentary that you can buy to go with it. And it's a great explanation of what you've read.

Helps you tremendously if you're reading the Bible chronologically. I love the enthusiasm that was around that and when that kind of took off in the last couple of years. But when I looked at it, like I told you, I'll just be honest with you, I got to have some New Testament every day.

I didn't want to wait until October to read the New Testament. And that's some of what you deal with with that unless you have a plan to read the New Testament as well. It takes you through the entire Old Testament and the New Testament afterwards.

[12 : 47] And then there's a book that is, if you're more of a workbook kind of person, there's a book called Foundations by Robbie Gleddy and he's a pastor at Long Hollow in Nashville, Long Hollow Baptist in Nashville.

It's a wonderful way to take in God's word every day. And on each page, it gives you a reading for the day and then it gives you an explanation of what you've read and then it gives you some kind of application question to do.

So if you're a workbook person that likes to respond to that, Foundations is great. Let me tell you the strength behind this as well as these bookmarks.

If you have a family that you would like to go along with you on a Bible reading plan, there's a Foundations book for kids, there's a Foundations book for teens, there's a Foundations book that only goes through the Old Testament, there's a Foundations book that only goes through the New Testament, there's a Foundations book that goes through all the Bible.

And so if you want to, and I encourage you to do this, piggyback a family altar or devotional time based upon your reading, everybody's reading the same thing. They don't read as much as you do and those type things, but they're reading the same thing.

[14 : 04] Same thing with this bookmark. There is a kid's journal that this ministry provides as well for kids to read just a couple of verses or maybe if they're a little older, about six verses or maybe if they're a little older, a half a chapter that goes along with the same reading that you'd read when you're following the bookmark.

And we don't have all that out there, but I can sure give you links to that and share what that is. There's a teen version of that or what I call the light reader. Somebody don't want to take it all in but want to take in something.

There's a lot of resources out there and there's a lot there and I'll be happy to help you. My number's on the front of the bulletin. You text me anytime and I'll be happy to help you or call me because I want you in God's word every day.

I'm not concerned about how many verses you consumed for the day. Don't brag to me and come up and say, you know what?

I read Isaiah while I was watching game day the other day because I won't be impressed. Okay? Because if I ask you something about Isaiah, you don't have a clue what's going on, but you know who's playing today.

[15 : 16] So the reality is you need to come up with a plan to, you know, and reality, and as well, these Bibles today are broken down and given subtitles to where you can find how to read small sections of scripture and dig into that and just a lot of ways out there.

And I don't want to be confusing with that. I just don't want you to have any excuses that there's not something out there for me. Start right.

The second thing is, and this is more important than that, in my opinion, is go deep. Go deep. Take the time to take it in.

Breathe it in. This is key. I want to give you a new acronym. I'm not big on acronyms, but I thought about all the things that I think you ought to do in your time with the Lord, and I came up with a little acronym.

One is settle. Take a breath. Pause.

[16:31] Some of y'all are so busy in life, you've got to take a pause. And if you don't have time for a pause, you're too busy. I always tell people if they can't get up early enough, ask God to give you the strength to get up 15 minutes earlier and watch and see if he does it.

Trust him in it. Set your alarm for it, and then trust him in it because he will. He'll provide for you. I promise you. But the first thing you do is just settle. Don't rush into it.

Don't barge into the throne. Settle. Sit down. Take a breath. And settle.

And then pray. Lord, you know what weighs on me today. You know what I need to hear better than I do. Show me.

I ask him to highlight a verse for me today. Illuminate the scriptures. Shed light on them.

[17:53] Help me to understand them. Third thing is read. You actually need to read it. Slowly. And as you read it, observe.

Don't just read it to say you read it. Look for the application in the scripture. Our men on Tuesday morning just got done reading a book called The Life God Blesses.

I meet with men at 6 a.m. on Tuesdays and another group at 9 a.m. I have the overachievers and the sluggards. And we meet at 6 and 9 and we read a chapter of a book each week and then we talk about it.

And we read The Life God Blesses by Gordon McDonald. And another one of his works, he talks about how he's a frequent flyer and that makes him, allows him to get upgrades along the way.

And he's able to sit in an exit row quite a bit on most flights. And that gives you more leg room and it also gives you a little bit of responsibility there. And when the flight attendant comes by and if you'll sit in the exit row, they always come by and ask you, have you read the instruction card that tells you how to open the door in case of emergency?

[19:04] And they look at you and say, I need a verbal answer. And he gave her a verbal answer and he fudged a bit. He'd flown before, he hadn't looked at the card.

And she was smart and senses dishonesty and called him out on it and said, and if emergency happens, I'll be depending upon you to open the door.

Dozens of other people will be relying on you too. So are you sure that you know what's on that card? And he said, suddenly she had my attention.

Aren't we the same way about the counsel of God through his word? We say we read God's word, but do we?

So I encourage you to read it, observe what it's saying, and then understand.

[20:16] What is it that God is showing me? There's a personal application there and sometimes we don't even know why it's brought to our attention.

There's times when God will highlight a verse to me and I'll know that is the verse that he would have me to see for that day, but I don't see the application in my life at the time.

I don't know how I'm supposed to use that verse to encourage somebody else this day. And then later on that day, I find out why he led me to that verse. So there's personal application there and sometimes we don't even know why it's brought to our attention.

Sometimes it brings immediate conviction. We know exactly why God had us read that verse that day. And sometimes clarity will come later in the day, but I'm asking you to take time to marinate on it.

Meditate. Ruminant. Let it steep like tea. Let it marinate like meat. Let the truth simmer. Slow down.

[21:36] Take a few minutes. Don't take long, but just take a few minutes. And then trust him. And then trust.

Go live what he's shown you, trusting the Lord that he'll lead. Jesus often used agrarian terms because he was around farmers a lot.

So he uses a lot of stories about farming and the best kind of growth in the kingdom of God and in the life of the believer is organic growth. That is seeds planted in fertile soil and watered and nurtured and encouraged to grow.

And that's why you need to sprout this coming year. To grow. May new growth come.

Not only in the life of our church, but may new growth come in our individual lives. That will not happen apart from taking in and the application of God's word.

[22:51] Some of us take in God's word like like my dog eats her supper. There ain't no way she could taste any of that. She gobbled it down. You know, I'm not a whole lot better myself, but still.

Take it in. And then James goes on to tell us how to apply it.

Stop wrong. Stop wrong. We will not get right if we don't stop doing wrong. And James emphasizes not just hearing the word of God, not just reading the word of God, but responding to it in obedience.

And he starts with our mouth. We need to learn to watch what we say. And scripture tells us that what we say is a key sign of who we really are.

Jesus put it this way in Matthew chapter 12, verse 34. He said, for out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. So in other words, if we fix our heart, our mouth will follow, but a sure sign for us, and sadly, an indication to others is what comes out of our mouth.

[24 : 16] So let's be open enough to let God show us through the Holy Spirit what needs to change in our hearts and in our lives. stop. Stop.

What's wrong? And sometimes in our devotional life when we read God's word or maybe when we sit through a sermon, God will show us something and we'll get convicted about that and we'll know what that is and we'll know how to respond to that.

Even if we don't do anything about it, we'll know what we're supposed to do about that. and some of us won't need to read God's word or to hear a sermon to know what's wrong in our lives.

Some of us already know what it is. It weighs on us. We're chained to it. It won't seem to leave and what James is saying is stop.

What's wrong? You got three days to get your heart set on that. Might want to go ahead and do it today.

[25 : 35] Well, let's start out the year stopping. Something in our lives that's wrong and we know it is.

It's a great start. Lastly, aim high. Aim high. Notice again what he says in our last verse. He says, It's a religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this, to visit orphans and widows and their affliction and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

In other words, we are to be God-centered, not stained by the world. We are to be not only God-centered but we're to be other-centered, ministering to those that need it.

And he mentions the vulnerable here. And so let's look out for those that need it the most. I'm thankful that there is a lot of ministry in this church that ministers to a lot of people in a lot of different ways.

And not only is that done corporately as you give through the offering and as we use that money for mission opportunities both locally and afar. But in addition to that, life groups come behind things and help people along the way and then there's individual efforts and nobody outside the life group knows what they're doing to help.

[26 : 59] Sometimes they may not even know the specifics of it. And then there's people in this church who help people that nobody else even knows about. Christmas was provided for for several less fortunate families and it was not done through a whole church effort of us raising funds to do that.

It was done through life groups and individuals that provided Christmas for families who could not have Christmas otherwise. Besides the hundreds of shoeboxes and the thousands of dollars to Lottie Moon.

So much of that is happening and we don't even know what that is. love gifts were sent out to our homebound. We don't even know what all those things are quite honestly. It goes along with what Jesus said in Matthew chapter 6 verse 3 and 4 when he said but when you give to the needy don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that your giving may be in secret and your father who sees in secret will reward you.

Take care of the needs that God lays upon your heart and if no one sees it it's okay God sees it. He sees it. He'll take care of you. I mean remember how Jesus summed up the whole law as they tried to pinpoint him.

He said in Matthew chapter 22 he said you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great this is the great and first commandment and the second is like it you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

[28 : 31] My friend that that is is what settling before the Lord and praying before the Lord and and reading God's word and observing what it says and understanding how that applies to our lives and then trusting God with it that's what sprouting looks like.

It's taking in God's word and then living in response to it and what I'm trying to share cannot be summed up any better than the way the psalmist wrote it in Psalm chapter 1 when he said blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked nor stands in the way of sinners nor sits in the seat of scoffers but his delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night.

He's like a tree planted by streams of water that yield its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither in all that he does he prospers and I want you to be clear today without the word of God daily there is a slow digression happening in your life it's like it's like straddling a boat by a harbor that's not tied up it might be slow but it's going to be bad before long the digression is from going around and Psalm 1-1 tells us exactly what it is from going around listening to the wrong people to put verse 1 back up there for me I want them to see this to listen to the wrong people that's counsel of the wicked to stopping and taking in what sinners are doing that's standing in the way of sinners to then plopping down and making yourself at home with people who are sarcastic people who are negative people who are dismissive people who are unbelieving

I've heard it said this this way scoffing is unbelief that laughs so it does not have to listen that is exactly the opposite of what God wants for you and me in 2026 he wants us listening applying and living it and if we lack God's word it will not happen so if you want to grow and make 2026 a year to sprout new spiritual growth in your life begin with the word of God start out right and I'll be clear nobody's keeping a record this is between you and God it really don't start there that's a continuation of something that should have already started if you close out this year and you look at your life and you realize that there's never been a time in your life when you surrender your life to Jesus if you look at your life and you realize there's never been a time when you have asked the Lord

Jesus to forgive you of the sin in your life and you've acknowledged that you've done wrong and you've never asked him to forgive you of that sin and to come into your life and empower you to not do the same things you used to do and to change your life to live for his honor and glory and to decide that you don't want to make your own decisions anymore that you want him to make the decisions for you and you'll follow his lead if you've never surrendered your life to the Lord Jesus if you've never asked God to save you I want you to know there's not a better way for you to close out a year than to say Lord Jesus I give you my life and I ask you to save me and if you've never done that we're going to stand in just a moment we're going to sing and as we sing I don't want you to hesitate they'll let you out I promise you they'll get out your way step down and say pastor I need to be saved and if you have done that but that's a private matter for you and you've never acknowledged that publicly

[33 : 22] I'll tell you there's nothing biblical about having a private faith as a matter of fact Jesus said if you're saying to me before men I'll be ashamed of you before my father in other words it's not real if you don't tell others about it if it don't show and Jesus by his commission and by his example tell us that the first steps of obedience is to follow that with baptism to publicly acknowledge a private faith through baptism and if you've never been baptized baptized as a believer as we stand to sing I want you to come and say pastor I need to be baptized I want to begin the year with baptism we're not going to do it today we'll line it up but you come maybe you're here and God's led you to First Baptist Church and you know that you've worshipped with us you've never committed to be a part of here but you know this is where

God would have you to be I encourage you to come obey God start the new year out with a new church that you know this is where God would have you to be we'll guide you in what all that means and for everybody here let's pause a moment Brian wants you to sing but you don't have to okay you can bow your head and pray and say God let me in this year right start the new one right if you need to come to this altar do that you do that if you need a pastor to pray for you I'll be happy to pray for you if you can do that where you are you do it where you are you don't get too many opportunities to start right so praise God let's start out right start anew amen amen Lord Jesus thank you for your love and for your lesson help us to respond to your obedience in Jesus precious name amen