



Message Transcript

Growing in the Word

Jeff Schwarzentraub

Jeff:

Father in Heaven, we thank you for your glorious son, Jesus Christ and your Holy Spirit who indwells all of us who believe. We ask this morning, Lord, that you would use your living and your active word in our lives to conform us more into the image of Christ. Because Lord, as a people, we believe that every time that your word is faithfully and accurately proclaimed that you speak, and our prayer to you this morning is speak Lord, for we are ready to hear. And so now for all those who have gathered, who would say, Lord, speak directly to me, who will believe what Jesus tells you and who will by faith put into practice what he shows you? Will you agree with me very loudly this morning by saying the word amen?

Congregation:

Amen.

Jeff:

As we've been going through the Book of James and we've been talking about how to walk your talk, we've highlighted the idea of trials and temptations, that God is the one who authors trials and God is the one who allows temptations and he does it for our good. He does it for our benefit because if we respond the way that God wants, we can grow our spiritual muscles. But the question becomes how specifically should we respond when trials come, when temptation is right at our doorstep? How is it that we know what it is that in that moment God wants us to do? And it's important that we understand that because as we've talked about as a group of people, that

trials are coming our way or we're in a trial right now or our flesh is tempted to sin and go the other way because we have an enemy of our soul who wants us to go opposite of what Jesus wants us to do.

So if you've ever wondered how is it that I can get the benefit of the trial or how is it I can get the benefit of the temptation? I believe God has a word for you. God wants you to be conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. God wants you to respond in the proper way. And these are opportunities for us when we go through trials, these are opportunities for us when we go through temptation in order to be conformed to the fullness of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so if you want to know when you're in a trial, you want to know when you're tempted, what does God want me to do and how am I supposed to respond? I believe the Lord has a word for you today. He wants you to grow in Christ by growing in His word. And so if you do me a favor this morning, open up your Bibles to James Chapter 1 and in James Chapter 1, we're going to be in verses 19 through 25.

And as you hear the word of the Lord this morning, know this is how we're called to respond when we're in a trial, how to respond when we're dealing with temptation. And here's what the word says. He says in verse 19, "This you know my beloved brethren, but everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility, receive the word implanted which is able to save your souls. But prove yourselves doers of the word and not merely hearers who delude themselves 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. For once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty and abides in it, not having become a forgetful hearer, but an effectual doer. This man will be blessed in what he does."

And here the half brother of Jesus inspired by the Holy Spirit highlights for us how it is that we can grow in Christ during trials. How is it we can use it as an opportunity to build our spiritual muscles? And he's going to give us four ways to do that this morning that we can really grow. So when you go through a trial, when you're being tempted severely, if you'll apply what he's telling you here, this is how you will grow in Christ. And here's the first way that we grow in Christ. I'll give you four this morning.

Growing in Christ or growing in the word requires concentration on the word. Concentration on the word. Notice what he says when you're going through a trial, he says "This you know" as if you already understand this, you're already aware of this. "This you know my beloved brethren. This you know my beloved brethren." Isn't it awesome the way that James describes the people that he's talking to? I mean James, the half brother of Jesus and Jude, the half brother of Jesus, each write a book in the New Testament. They're both pulling no punches. It's like right out of the gate, they're kind of like hitting you in the face and yet their tone is this. While I'm telling you the truth, I'm telling you this because I love you. You're my beloved brethren. You're my beloved sisters, you're my family and I love you enough to tell you, and this you already know when you go through a trial, but I'll tell you again and here's his

instruction. "But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God."

Notice what he says. You already know this, but everyone. Who's everyone? That's y'all. That's me. But everyone must be, this is not a suggestion. This is a command for those who want to grow in Christ. If you're in Christ, you want to grow in Christ. So everyone must know this. He must do what? "He must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger." Why? "For the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God." Now, I know when I became a believer, I felt like maybe God got this one wrong, like it was out of order. I mean, isn't it more natural to do the opposite? Isn't it easier to be quick to become angry, quick to speak and slow to listen? Wouldn't that make more sense? Hey brethren, you know what to do. When things don't go your way or you're in a trial or you're being tempted, get really angry, talk and complain about it a lot and be really slow to listen.

I mean, wouldn't that be our natural [inaudible 00:05:54]? But he says no, just the opposite. You know this. When you're going through a trial, be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger. Well, here's the question. Be quick to listen to who? Who am I quick to listen to? Okay, I heard Colorado Springs and Westminster, I didn't hear you. Who are we quick to listen to? The Lord. Be quick to listen to the Lord. Sometimes when we're in trials, we're quick to listen to everybody but the Lord aren't we? We're quick to listen to our friends. We're quick to listen to our podcasts. We're quick to listen to the person that has invested in our lives well, we're quick to listen to the people that think have our best interests. No, be quick to listen to the Lord, be quick to listen to

Him. Be quick to listen to what He's trying to tell you. If the Lord is always speaking to you and He's always talking through his word during times of trials and during severe temptation, He's willing to scream at you through his word.

When we read His word, when we concentrate on His word, that's when we really get there. And when I talk about concentration of the word, concentration on the word, I'm talking about our focus. Where does our focus? How do you get to a place where your entire focus is on the Lord? Now here's what I mean by concentration on the word. I mean, where do you spend time where you give specific attention to hearing the Lord and hearing Him only? Now we could come up with a plan and say, "Everybody needs to get up at five in the morning and drink a cup of coffee and open their Bible and do a Bible study."

But for some people that are wired that five in the morning doesn't feel so good, that might feel like hell to some of the people in here, to get up at five in the morning and start trying to ... So it's not about the religious methodology by which you use, it's when are you giving concentration of your time to block out all of the other voices and clearly hear what the Lord is trying to tell you. We talked about when we went through a trial, we can ask the Lord for wisdom and He'll give without reproach. He'll give without finding fault. He's not going to shame you when you say, "Lord, I'm in this trial. I don't understand what it is you're trying to teach me. I'm being tempted like this again and I don't know how to get out of it. Lord, would you help me? What do you have to say to me in here?"

If you're asking that kind of question, you need to have time where you're concentrating on the word, where there are no other distractions, there are no other competing voices. You are hearing the voice of the Lord. Be quick to do this. Don't make listening to God your last resort once you've exhausted all other possibilities. Once you've talked to all your friends and you've watched all your social media and you've done all your things, now I got nothing left. I guess I'll ask God. No. Be quick to listen to God, be quick to listen to what He has to say because He's the one that either authored that trial or is allowing that temptation. So He's the one who's more than willing to speak to you about it. So be quick to listen and then how about this?

Slow to speak. Slow to speak. Now some of you may say, "Well, I'm an introvert. I get away with that one." Slow to speak to who? To God. You say, "Well, what do you mean?" When we go through trials and temptations, what do we tend to do when we're not listening to the voice of God? We complain. We may not even be talking to God, but when you're complaining to somebody else, here's what you're saying, "Lord, I think the situation you gave me is unfair. I think what you authored is wrong. I don't believe in what you're doing and I'm very upset with you." Be quick to listen to him, be slow to speak. Even when everything went wrong for Job. Even when the enemy came and said, "What can I do?" And God says, "Have you considered my servant Job?" And the Devil goes and attacks Job. What happens? I mean Job didn't "do anything wrong" and he's got all his friends saying, "Well, it's because of your sin or it's because of this or it's because of that."

And Job doesn't really say much until he is like, I know it's not me, can't be me.

But what's he not doing? He's not listening to the Lord. And when he finally gets to a place where he repents and hears the Lord, we get about three chapters of how incredible God is and what he's been wanting to tell him all along. When you go through a trial, God is wanting to talk to you. When you're experiencing deep temptation, God is wanting to talk to you, be quick to listen to God and slow to speak.

Guard your tongue as to what you say to God and guard your tongue as to what you say to others about your circumstance. Every time you complain, what you are saying is God doesn't know what he's doing. And how quick are we to speak? We're all at fault. Be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. Angry at who? Angry at God. Well, I'm not really angry at God. I'm just angry at my boss. Well, who put your boss in your life? When you're angry at your boss or when you're angry at your spouse and when you're angry with everybody, you're really saying, "God, I don't trust you in this circumstance or this situation and I don't like it and I think you're wrong and I'm going to talk about how wrong you are. And if you don't listen, I'm going to get really angry with you about it." No, no, no brethren. You already know this. Be quick to listen to God, slow to speak, slow to become angry. Why? For the anger of man does not bring about the righteousness of God.

I mean anger doesn't result in righteousness. It doesn't result in your personal growing in righteousness and it doesn't benefit anybody else in a godly way. And all of us have gotten angry and all of us have acted in anger in bad ways. That's why Jesus had to die on the cross for all of our sins. But he's saying now that you know because

brethren be quick to listen to God, be slow to speak to God, be slow to become angry with God, be slow to become angry with all those around you. Why? Because your anger doesn't bring about the righteousness of God. It doesn't produce what you think it's producing. When you get to a place where you explode on somebody else or you get upset at somebody else or you talk bad about your spouse or you talk bad about your boyfriend or you talk bad about the church or you talk bad about your job or you're speaking bad, it doesn't bring about the righteousness that you think it does. And what we tend to say, "Well, it's just holy righteousness, I have a holy anger."

Well then be quick to listen, slow to speak and be very slow to anger. That's what He says. It's concentration on the word. When you're going through trials and when you're going through temptations, focus on the word, spend more time in the word. The more you know more you'll know how to respond. The more you hear God when you're in that situation, the more you see what he's at work doing, the more you understand what he's working out, the more you'll be able to endure the trial, the more you'll be able to overcome that temptation. Growing in Christ, and growing in the word requires a concentration on the word. It doesn't mean you get religious today and say, "Okay, tomorrow at this time I'm going to spend time in the word. You probably won't be able to do it because the enemy will do everything to distract you from doing it."

The bigger question is how do I make focus time concentration on the word a priority in my life? What does that look like? It means, one is you can prioritize going to a church that preaches the Bible. One is you can open your Bible on a daily basis. One is you can listen to the Bible being read on a daily basis. Just get alone and hear God

Speak to you about you. Hear God talk to you about what's going on in your life. He wants to talk to you. We worship the living God. He's not dead. He's alive. The word is living and active. It's why when you hear the word faithfully and accurately proclaim, you're hearing God. If you're encouraged, you're encouraged by God. If you're frustrated and he's chiseling something away, you're not mad at me, you're frustrated at God. It's the Lord who's doing the work. It's the Lord who's reading you. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Jeff:

It's concentration on the word.

Number two is this, growing in Christ also requires preparation for the word. There involves a preparation for the word. Notice what he says in verse 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." He says, "Therefore put aside all filthiness." Filthiness is the idea of moral impurity and wickedness is evil. He says, "Therefore put all that stuff aside." He says, "You cannot hear clearly what God is saying when there's unconfessed sin in your life, when there's moral filth in your life." You say, "Well, Jesus died for my sins." He did. If you've repented of your sin and trusted Jesus, you're in Christ. And yet even though you're in Christ, there are still things that God is working out of you. And when there's unconfessed sin in your life, it's very difficult to hear the Lord clearly. You need to confess your sin. You need to

forsake your sin so that you can hear the Lord clearly. That's just one way to do it.

Now, I'm dating myself with this example and some of you won't even know what I'm talking about, but there was a day and age prior to cable when in order to get television stations, they had a thing called an antenna. Do you remember that? I mean, I'm old. You had to adjust the antenna. You had to get it just right because if you didn't, it was all skewed. Or with radio, when all people did was listen to radio, you had to get the antenna just right or it was all skewed. When it comes to your relationship with the Lord, you have to get the antenna right and one of the ways that you get the antenna right is confessing and forsaking sin.

If there's unconfessed sin in your life, meaning this, God's been showing me an area, I know it's wrong, but I'm unwilling to do anything about it, I'll work on it later. I'll get around to that. You cannot hear the Lord clearly. There has to be a preparation, a weed pulling in your life in order to hear the word clearly.

Hunger is also important for the word, a desire for it. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied." Is there a hunger in your life for the word? I mean many people will say, "I just wish God would tell me what he wants. I wish God would tell me what he wants." Many people that say that do not want to hear what God has to say. It's just a smokescreen to say, "I'd like Him to agree with what I'm thinking right now." But if you really want to hear what God wants to say, God's really willing to speak to you about what He wants you to hear. But there has to be somewhat of a spiritual shower, so to speak, where you're preparing yourself to be

able to hear what the God of the universe wants you to hear.

Psalm 139, which is one of my favorite, we hear about who God is in all of His glory. We hear about His omnipotence, that He's all powerful. We hear about His omnipresence, that He's everywhere. We hear about His omniscience, that He knows everything. And as David writes that Psalm in Psalm 139 and gets to the end in verses 23 and 24, he says this. It's a prayer of his. "Search me and try me oh Lord. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me to the way everlasting." What is he saying? In light of who you are in all your glory, lord, if there's anything in my life that's hindering me from being anything you want me to be, Lord, show me. I want to hear what that is. Now, if you pray that prayer, I promise and you mean it, I promise you God will speak to you.

Lord, is there anything in my life at all that's not aligned with what you want me to be? Because I can't think of anything, but if you have anything, I'd love to hear what that is. Would you speak to me? I promise you God will speak. See, there's a preparation for the word. Before you walk into a church, there's a preparation for the Lord. It's during the week and it's on Friday and Saturday. Now I'm pulling weeds and I'm praying that the Lord would have a word for me, that the Lord would speak to me, that my heart would be receptive to what His word has to say. And here's why that's so important because there's nothing wrong with the word. The word always produces results.

I mean, do you remember the parable of the soils? One of the first parables

Jesus told, in Mark Four when he tells this parable and the disciples aren't understanding, they ask him for the explanation later. He's like, "Are you still so dull?" He goes, "If you don't get this, you're not going to get any of the parables." Do you remember the story. Said a sower went out to sow seed, sprinkled it on the ground, some fell upon hard soil, it was eaten up by the bird. Some in the rocky soil, shot up immediately, but it had no roots so when the sun came out, it caved. Some among the thorns, the rocks or thorns. So the cares of this world choked it all out, making it unfruitful.

But the one that fell upon the good soil produced a harvest of 30, 60 or even 100 fold. "He who has ears let him hear." And the disciples are like, "We hear it. We don't understand what you're talking about. What do you mean?" And Jesus said, "The seed is the word of God," and it goes out and it falls upon different soils which is representative of our hearts. There are some hearts that are so hard, they don't want the word, and even though the word is true, they don't want to hear it. "Get that away from me." And when people have that attitude, the enemy comes and eats it up. You don't get a privilege of the word taking root. Some say, "You know what? I like it that excited me and they grow, but they don't want the word to take any depth in their life." They don't want it to take root. They don't want it to go deep. It hits a place in their life, like, "I like the Jesus loves me stuff, but don't give me anything else."

And when trials and temptations comes, it wilts because it doesn't have any root. And then some say, "Well, I like the word, but then the thorns represent the cares of this world, the desires for wealth, the things that are important now, it chokes it out,

making it unfruitful." So whether you have hard soil or rocky soil or wheaty soil, what's the result? There's no fruit, there's no harvest, there's nothing. Meaning the word of God does not have its way with you. But when you have a good soil, a good heart, and it falls on it, produces 30, 60 or 100 fold. What's that mean? It means there's no problem with the word. You want God to go to work in your life and you have a heart that's receptive to what he wants, He will produce results in your life 30, 60 or even 100 fold because there's no problem with the word.

The problem is that we don't prepare our heart to hear it. We don't want it. We say we do, but at the end of the day, we don't. So when you're preparing, it means that when you come into church, you should already be asking a question like this. If you're in a church where the Bible's being preached, this is what you should ask. If you're not in a church where the Bible's being preached, leave that church and go to a church where the Bible is being preached and then ask this question. As a result of what I'm hearing today. Lord, what do you want me to start doing? What do you want me to stop doing? Or what do you want me to start doing differently? In other words, Lord, is there anything in me that you want to change?

See, the purpose is not remembering every point the pastor said. The purpose is allowing the Holy Spirit to convict you of an area in your life that the Lord is speaking directly to you about and then you go do something with it. That's preparation for the word. And God listen, is willing to talk to every single person. That's why we pray that way. Who wants to hear the Lord? Who wants to hear what he has to say? Who will believe what he says? Who will put into practice what he shows you? He's willing to do

that with anybody. He's willing to do that with you. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Jeff:

It's preparation for the word. It's I want it. So you can do a drive by devotion every morning for 5 minutes or 10 minutes or 30 minutes, you can just read through the word. I have no desire to do anything it says, but I'm going to read it because that's what I do because I'm a Christian. And you'll miss out on everything that God is trying to speak directly to you. Pastors can do this. Well, I'm reading the word for you. I'm studying the word to preach to you. No, no, no, no, no. I'm studying the word to see what God's going to say to me so that I can speak to you. Amen. The word is living and active and the more you prepare your soil, the more you're going to be able to receive the fullness of everything that God has. It starts with a willingness to concentrate on his word and then prepare to hear his word. Those are foundational if you want to grow during a trial.

And honestly during a trial and during temptation, sometimes that's when we turn the off switch. Like, "It's too hard right now. How am I going to have time for the word when my whole life is blowing up? How do I have time for the word when I'm so tempted by all these things?" Because now more than ever is when you need time to concentrate on the word. Now more than ever is when you need the Lord to uproot some of those things in your life so that you can hear the fullness of what God is

saying to you in the moment. And that's how you're going to endure the trial and that's how you're going to defeat temptation and that's how you're going to grow your spiritual muscle. And those are only the first two. Isn't that awesome? Isn't it cool what James is saying? "Be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry for the anger of man does not produce the righteous requirements of God."

And then he says, "Get rid of all the filth. Get rid of all the evil so that you can in humility, receive the word and plant it which is able to save your soul." Yes, the word of God can save your soul for all eternity, but savior actually can mean delivered to. The word can mean it can deliver you out of, it can deliver you out of your trial, it can deliver you out of temptation. It can do work for you here on this side of Heaven. In addition, it can save your soul for all eternity, but there's benefit to the word here. There's benefit to the word now.

Let me give you a third way that you can grow in Christ. Not only concentration on the word or preparation for the word, but how about application with the word, application with the word, not just application of the word. With the word. Now, why do I say with? Because when I say word, I'm saying, Jesus Christ. I'm using the word word and Jesus Christ interchangeably because John 1:1 tells me, "In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God." He was with God in the beginning and verse 14 says, "And the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." Who is the word? The word is Jesus. When I read scripture from Genesis 1:1 through Revelation 22:21, that is a revelation of Jesus Christ, that written word is Jesus. His personhood when he came is the manifestation of the written word. The

word and Jesus are synonymous, one and the same.

So I need to apply the word, I need to make application with the word, I need to make application with Jesus. Notice what James says. He says, this is so important and this is so important for those of us that live in a culture that says, "Well, I prayed a prayer and I did this and I got religion." And people point at you and say, "Well, so what? You think just because you prayed a prayer, you're going to heaven?"

"Yeah, because my pastor told me so." Then he says this, verse 22. "But prove yourselves doers of the word and not merely hearers who delude themselves." Pastor Mike Christian, it's not my job to confirm or affirm that you're a Christian. It's your job to prove that you are by what you do. If you say you are, then live it. I mean your theology is your life on display. What you practice is what you believe. If you swear you have a theology that believes that's okay. If you get drunk, you have a theology that says that's okay. I mean whatever you're practicing is demonstrating what you say you believe. Just because you say you believe it doesn't mean you're living it.

"Well, I believe I'm to love my wife. I just don't do a very good job at it." Well, yeah, all of us can improve at that. I get that, but is there a desire to improve at that? Is there evidence in your life you're wanting to grow in that? Is there confession of sin when you don't do that? Is there a desire to hear the word of God and surround yourself by others so you can become more of that? Or is just like, "Well, I'm just not good at that?"

"Prove yourselves," he says. "Doers of the word and not merely hearers and

delude yourself." Don't deceive yourself. Don't deceive yourself. "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. For once he has looked in himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was." It's like what good does it do in a mirror if you look in the mirror and it reflects back to you what you look like, but you don't take any account of it. It's interesting that this word in the Greek is the word for man. It's specifically male. When a male looks at a mirror, which is interesting because I think men and women look at mirrors differently. I mean, there's a difference between a glance and a gaze.

I mean men, we kind of walk by, that looks pretty good and we move. Whereas you just take a wedding on a wedding day, the amount of time it takes groomsmen to get ready for the wedding versus the amount of time it takes to bridesmaids, it's just different in my experience. Says what good is it if you look, but then you don't respond to what you see and you forget what you see? What good is it to look in the mirror and notice you have broccoli in your teeth if you're not going to take the broccoli out when you go say hi to everybody and smile at them? He's like, that's what it means if you say, you know what? I'm not really a doer of the word. I'm just a hearer of the word.

Hearing the word is really, really good. It's really, really important. And the longer I've been a pastor, the more I believe in the entirety of the word. If you would've pressed me some 14 years ago before I became the pastor of this church, "Jeff, do you believe in the authority and in errancy of the scriptures, I would've said 100% yes." If you would've pushed me on it, I would've said, "If the Bible says it, I believe it even if I don't understand it." But having to stand here week after week, month after month,

year after year and preach the whole council of God, I believe it in a way, way more than I did before. I believe every part of it and it irritates me at my core when somebody doesn't. It bothers me. When I read Genesis 1:1 and I read about 2 genders and 1 race in 6 days, I believe that God is the creator of all that and did it just like he said. And it's not up for debate. Amen.

So when I hear people say millions and millions of years ago in a land far, far away, that's a fairytale to me. It's not biblical truth. And if we have to apologize for the first chapter, we may as well apologize for every other chapter after that. That's me. So I believe all of it, even the stuff I don't understand. Oh my God, that's right. Even if I don't understand it, you're right. I'm wrong. I believe that. But I'll say this, listen. To know a lot and not apply it is worse than knowing a little and applying all of what you do know. I've been on the mission field with people, pastors, they've had zero Bible training, they know nothing and they've gotten saved and they don't know anything, but they're running around telling everybody about Jesus and what little they do know they're putting into practice, which is how you grow spiritually. To know a lot and not use it, is worse than anything. I mean, take what you do know and put it into practice and that will grow your spiritual muscles.

Because here's what happens in church? The Bible tells us knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. I mean, you can come to BRAVE Church, a church that preaches the whole council of God, and you can say, "I don't really know anything. I don't really know how many books there are in the Bible. I don't understand what a Corinthian is or a Philippian or I don't know any of these things." And I would say to you, "Welcome, no

problem." But if you know how to forgive somebody, put that into practice, you're welcome here. It's not what you do know because what happens in some churches that are Bible churches is there's a lot of knowledge that's going around with a limited amount of application and pride just seeps through it. And everybody thinks they're more spiritual if they have more knowledge. No, you're more spiritual with how obedient you are to the Lord with what you know. Amen.

When you meet Jesus on judgment day, he's not giving you a final, a written exam of how much of the Bible you know. He's going to qualify your life by how well you listened and were obedient to what He showed you individually. There's no award for Bible scholar in Heaven. There's just not. I mean, the only true award in heaven is that we get to worship the One, the Lord Jesus Christ and who He is. We're putting him on display. Amen. And the interesting thing about the word is it's more than just a mirror. It's more like an x-ray machine. Hebrews 4:12 says, "The Word of God is living and active. It's sharper than any two edged sword. It penetrates to divide both soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and it judges the attitudes and the intentions of the heart." I mean, this is the only book in the world that when you read this book, this book will read you. That's how you know it's living and active.

Because if you're really open to what God has to say, this book will encourage you, and this book will offend you and it will never stop. It does both all the time because it's an x-ray machine that goes down to your soul. Because when a person is saved, the Spirit of God is implanted deep inside of that person, the resurrected Christ lives inside of you. You are in the realm of Christ. And now this word that's coming to

you is aligning with this word that is inside of you. And that word inside of you wants all of this because this word inside of you wants to become the fullness of what you were intended to do, and it starts chiseling off all the things that aren't supposed to be there.

I read a quote this week from Michelangelo, the great sculptor who said this when he looked at a marble block, he said, "The sculpture is already complete within the marble block before I start my work. It's already there. I just have to chisel away the superfluous material." When you're in Christ, He sees you as perfect. When you're in Christ, He sees you as forgiven. When you're in Christ, He sees you as holy. And then He uses the word on this side of Heaven so He can chisel away all those things in your life that aren't aligned, which is why sometimes it's so encouraging. "Oh, I'm glad that got chiseled off." And other times it's so painful. "Why are you taking that? That's part of me." And it's an ongoing process because God is in the sculpting business of seeing you the way you were designed to be and presenting you and getting ready to present you faultless before the Father. And that's an ongoing process. That's why there has to be application with the word. When I say with, it means you can't do this yourself.

I mean, when you read the Book of James, he would've been a great campaigner for Nike. I mean, it's just do it. Just do it. Apply it. Go, go. But we know that we can't just take what God says and go do it ourselves. We need the help of the Holy Spirit. We need the help of Jesus to do that. So when Jesus talks to you and he shows you what you need to do, then you're saying, "Lord, with your help, help me do this. Lord,

with your help, help me do that." And that's why when you're listening to a message, sometimes we just want to hear scripture. We want to hear clarity.

But what we don't want to hear is what God's saying specifically to me. "I don't want to hear about forgiveness today. That's not why I came in. I was just wanting to hear James. I didn't want to hear about stewarding differently. I didn't want to hear about changing my career. I didn't want to hear about changing who I am in my marriage. I didn't want to hear about the way I parent. I didn't want to hear about forgiveness. I didn't want to hear any of that stuff. I just wanted to feel good." And yet the Word of God comes and the Holy Spirit meets you right where you're at because He knows the next step of what he's trying to chisel away and what He's trying to sand away and what He's trying to make new so that you become the fullness of everything God wants you to be. And you have to apply the word.

I mean, think back to the Old Testament. Think back to the Old Testament. The Children of Israel were leaving Egypt and they had to on the last night slaughter a lamb and then do what? Apply the blood. They had to take the blood and put it on the doorposts. Now, they could have said, "Listen, we're willing to do the supper. We're willing to kill the innocent lamb. We'll do everything. But do you know how gross it is to put blood on a doorpost? I mean, that's going to stick. It's going to look awful. It looks weird. It's kind of masochist. I don't know that I'm going to do that." What would've happened if they hadn't have done that? What happened to every home in Egypt that didn't do that? The eldest died. You have to apply the word.

When you come to church, you should be asking this question, "Lord, what do

you want me to apply today? What are you saying to me right now?" And here's the way the Lord works. He works specifically and not generally. He will talk to you about you. He will tell you what you need to do, and when He does, it will bother you because He's not talking to anybody else about that. Your specific application to what God wants for your life may look like nobody else's. I mean, we could read Romans about what we look at with our eyes and why that's important, but the specific application to you may look different than the specific application to me. I remember when the Lord told me to get rid of cable television. I'm like, "You got the wrong guy."

To this day, I don't have cable TV and it's not because I got DirecTV either. I don't have channels, but it's not like I'm going to rant. I don't think that's what every Christian should do. I don't. I know that's what God wants for me. So what's he saying to you? Because when He says something specific to you, usually it goes something like this. "How come I'm the only one that has to go through this right now? Why are you doing this to me? So-and-so doesn't have to do that. So-and-so doesn't need to be obedient to that. You didn't call so-and-so to act like." Yeah, I'm not talking about so-and-so. I'm talking to you. Are you going to listen to me? That's the way the Lord works. He always works that way. Even as I'm in the word, you remember we did that 21 days of prayer and fasting back in January.

I mean, I'm going through 21 days of prayer and fasting. I'm fasting, I'm seeking the Lord. I'm like, "Speak to me Lord. I want to hear what you have to say." And there was one specific day where I've really sensed the presence of the Lord, and I was thanking Him for His power and what I wanted to see him do at BRAVE. I wanted to

see more deliverance ministry at BRAVE. I not only wanted to see the word go forth, but I wanted to see his spirit move and power here, where I saw more healings and I saw more deliverance. And we're talking about deliverance, and the Lord asked me a question in my spirit. He is like, "Do you believe I can heal people from cocaine addiction?" I'm like, "100% yeah, I've seen you do it." He said, "Do you think I can heal people from a meth addiction?" And I was like, "Yes." I said, "I have a good friend who's a pastor. He used to be a meth addict." I'm like, "I know you can."

And I'm getting all fired up as the Lord's asking me questions and I'm a good student and I'm answering them. He said this. "Then why won't you let me heal you of your food addiction?" And I was like, "Say what? Food what?" I mean, I didn't even know what he was talking about. And as the Lord started walking me through a process, he said, "You know what? You comfort yourself with food because nobody's going to call you on it. And even if you told people you eat too much or you like a bowl of ice cream or an extra pizza or whatever, if you said, man, I feel kind of ashamed by this. Here's what they'd say to you. Oh, I understand that. Why don't you come over to our house for dinner and we'll talk about it?" Because it's one of those little ones.

And I started, "Okay, Lord, you got me, but I don't even know what to do and I don't even know how to eat and I don't even thought about it before." And the Lord started walking me through a process of what did He have for me? Now I'm not going to teach on health and food, and that's between me and the Lord. What is it between you and the Lord? How do you honor the Lord with your body? I mean, it was specific

to me. It's not for everybody else. And that's how He preaches and that's how He speaks. Sometimes there's things generally for us as a church or as a body or as a family or things like that, but oftentimes I find that the Lord is speaking directly to the heart, and it's only Christians that get the benefit of hearing this.

I mean in First Corinthians Chapter 2 in verse 14, it says this about the natural man, meaning somebody that's not saved. "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God for they're foolishness to him and he cannot understand them because they're spiritually appraised." When you start talking to non-believers like I'm talking to you, like that's an idiot right there talking. Why would anybody do that? Why would you change your behavior based upon someone you can't see? Because they can't discern it. But when you know that the Lord is real and He's speaking through his word, He's going to talk to you about you in ways He's not going to talk to anybody else. And we say, "Oh, I want that," until he's making you make a change you don't want to make, but that's how you grow your spiritual muscle. That's how you develop into what God wants you to be.

And you see, for many of us, we have to realize this is how God wants us to grow. I remember in college you can take classes in college, you can take classes for grades or you can do what's called an audit. You remember that? Credit, no credit classes. And then if you're auditing a class, here's what it means. You can come if you want, but you don't have to come if you don't want, and you can read the textbook if you want, but you don't have to read the textbook if you don't want. And hey, you can take the test if you want, but you don't have to take the test if you don't want. And at

the end of the semester, it's all the same because you aren't getting any credit for being here and nobody cared whether you came or not.

Some of us audit God like that. Some of us audit church like that. "I'll come if I want. I don't come if I don't. I mean, I really don't care what the results are. I'm just an auditor." No, you're not. You're a son or a daughter of the most high God. And there's something about being in the presence of God with his people hearing his word that changes who you are. This year on vacation, we were gone three Sundays. Normally we go to a church and we visit and do that. This year we decided to watch online, which was great. Loved the preachers because I picked them, loved the worship because I know all the songs. I mean, we had a great time watching. It was good, but when I got back from vacation, I sat in that front row with my wife and the music started. I started to cry because I'm like, I'm back with my people.

There's something about being in the presence of God with his people that changes you. It's not you're making me come to church. You don't have to come to church. I'm telling you, you're missing out if church isn't the biggest priority in your life, but you don't have to. That's not a have to God. God says, I'm worthy of everything you have. What are you holding back from me? That's what it means to apply the word. When you're hearing it today, it's not that you remember all four of these points. It's that you take what God showed you and you apply it to your life. You apply it, and the word feeds the spirit man inside of you and the spirit man inside of you loves it, and it offends the old man, that one that wants to hang onto the past. "Well, this is who I am and this is who I've always been." The Word of God offends that one, but that's

why we need to be in the word. That's why we need to apply the word. That's how we grow in the word, and here's why.

Because you're either green and growing or you're ripe and rotting. You cannot spiritually plateau just by cruising. You will go down. You say, "Well, I've been studying the Bible for years." Great, it got you to here, and if you stop, you will go down. There's no spiritual plateaus. You don't get to a place where you get to be like, "Okay, I've done this for 70 years now I'm just going to cruise into Jesus." No, you're not. You're probably going to go down a spiral you don't want to go. You need to continue on with him. Amen. You need to apply the word. You need to continue to grow with him, which at leads to point number four.

Not only do we need to apply the word, but then finally we need to do this. Growing in Christ requires a continuation in the word, a saturation of it. I mean, if we believe what the scriptures say that they're useful for teaching, rebuking, and correcting, and training and righteousness. If we believe what the word says that no prophecy had its origin in the will of man, but it was men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. If we believe that this entire book is of the Lord, then we need to continue in it. You need to marinate in it. Some of you that are grill experts know that you need to marinate a piece of meat for a long period of time. They have these things at the grocery store now. It's like five minute marinade. I'm telling you, it doesn't work. It'll burn off as soon as you put that sucker on the grill.

If you're going to marinate, you got to let that soak in. You got to let it be there.

You got to let it own and be inside the meat for you to be able to have the flavor that you want it to have. The same is true of the word. You got to continue in it. And there's too many Christians that have said, "Well, I've already read the Bible. I went to church for 20 years. I don't need that anymore." Yes, you do. I need it every day. You need it every ... We have to continue in this process. The continuing process of hungering for the word, the continuing process of preparing for the word, the continuing process of applying the word, and it never ever ends. Why? Because God has us just the way he wants and God wants to use us.

I mean, the Bible makes clear that we are already dead in our transgressions and sins, and that is the spirit of God who lives in us. It's no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me and God wants to work in and through me to accomplish his purpose. That's why verse 25 says it like this when you talk about continuing in the word. "But the one who looks intently." That means focused. "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." You want to have a blessing of the Lord? Stay in the Word. You want to have a blessing in the Lord when you're in trial, stay in the Word. You want to have a blessing of the Lord when you're under temptation, stay in the Word and then do what he says. Put into practice what he shows you.

You say, "Well, the law sounds confining." No, the law is what brings liberty. Like none of God's commands are burdensome. All of the commands that God gives us in His words are to set us free from the power of sin and death. All of his commands are good. They're guardrails that keep us from going off course. They keep us in line so

that we can enjoy the fullness of who he is. That's why we continue in His Word and we never stop until we hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Let me present you faultless before my Father." We don't stop. We keep going. We continue. Why? Because God's doing a work in us, and the longer we allow God to do the work, the more fruitfulness you're going to see.

I was thinking about ventriloquists the other day. Have you ever seen a ventriloquist? They hold these little puppets on their lap and after a while. If they're really good, I don't know how they do it by the way, but if they're really good, it's almost as if they're not there anymore and it's the puppet puppet who's doing all the talking like they actually have a personality. I mean this very lifeless puppet, this one that's dead. I mean, there's no life in it because of the master's hands and the master's voice, it starts moving in such a way that you're like, "Wow, that thing's really speaking, that thing has a mind of its own." It's really the mind of its owner. When you walk in the word, it's as if God puts his hand on you in such a way that he does something in and through you that only He can do, that He's the one that's moving in and through you. He's the one talking through you. He's the one doing it.

Other people may see the Spirit of God and be like, "Well, what's that? Well, that's not him. You know what? That's not her." That's the spirit of God coming through. How does that come through? The continuation of the word. It means I'm not done growing. I'm going to continue growing in Christ. I'm going to continue being all that God wants me to be. I'm going to continue being the man or the woman or the boy and girl He wants me to be, which is this. What's God shown you today? If you've been

willing to hear what He has to say, He's been telling you about something.

Maybe there's a sin you need to confess and forsake. Maybe there's somebody that you need to forgive. Maybe there's a way you need to start living differently. Maybe there's some areas you need to take ownership in your life you haven't taken ownership of. Maybe there's ways you need to relate to your spouse different. Maybe there's a way you need to be a more godly single. Maybe there's a way you need to deal with your finances differently. I don't know.

But it's always amazing to me when people hear God, they'll come and say like a week later, "When you spoke on money last week," and I think I didn't talk about money. But God was talking to you about money. "Or when you spoke on forgiveness last week." I'm like, "I didn't talk on forgiveness last week, but God spoke to you about forgiveness last week." It's the Spirit of God that's taking his word into your life right now and saying What you going to do with it? How are you going to apply it? And what you do with that word will determine your growth and maturity in Christ, and He loves you enough to send trials, and He loves you enough to allow temptation so that you will be quick to hear Him, slow to speak, and slow to get angry so you can experience more of the righteousness of God. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Jeff:

Would you stand with me? Our Father in Heaven, we give you praise, glory, and

honor for who you are. Lord, we thank you for your work in and through our lives, and we thank you that even in trials that we hate and temptations that we suffer, Lord, that you are there to speak to us. Lord, speak and Lord, not only that, but help us apply the very thing that you want us to apply. Lord, that was our prayer at the beginning of the message that we put into practice what you showed us. Lord, put on the heart of every single person here what you showed them, and let every person put into practice what you said. And Lord, we'll give you all the praise, glory and honor for you are worthy, and you alone are, and you won't fail us because you are good and we love you, and it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen and amen. Can we give God praise today?