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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH  
ELKHORN, NEBRASKA  
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PASTOR WENDA FRY

1 PASTOR FRY: The Book of James is an excellent book.  
2 It tells us not how to become a Christian, but how to act  
3 like a Christian.

4 I want you to look with me right now at Chapter 2,  
5 Verse 18.

6 "But someone will say you have faith and I have  
7 works. Show me your faith apart from your works and I, by my  
8 works, will show you my faith."

9 That is at the heart of his message, but we are  
10 going to begin with the very first verse, and talking about  
11 marks of a Godly disciple.

12 And I thought we might have some fun with it today  
13 because we have so many of our canine friends amongst us,  
14 that we'll have a little bit of fun with it, talking about  
15 marks of a Godly/dogly disciple.

16 James is very clear on that and it's amazing how  
17 many dog truths show up in James, that can teach us as humans  
18 how to act like Christians.

19 So we'll start right at the beginning there with  
20 Chapter 1.

21 But I wanted to tell you before we get started that  
22 part of the inspiration for this message came through an  
23 experience I had this summer.

24 I was over at a friend's house, and actually I was  
25 over at Lexie's house, this is Lexie, the dog, and that's her

1 owner, Natalie.

2 And we were over there and I was meeting with her  
3 parents and some other young people between the ages of 20  
4 and 35 talking about doing life together deeply. The vision  
5 that is ours here at Bethany.

6 It's simple, but it's not easy, to do life together,  
7 and we were talking about how that could be done and how we  
8 could move forward with that and Lexie, during the  
9 conversation, she would come over to me and she would try to  
10 lick my hands and lick my arms, and I don't like stuff like  
11 that.

12 So I tried to be polite. So I said, "No, no, Lexie,  
13 no. I like dogs, but I just don't like that."

14 I tried to say something polite like that, and she  
15 would go away and then she would come back and she would try  
16 to do the same thing.

17 I was wearing a skirt that night. She would lick my  
18 legs.

19 "No, Lexie, don't do that."

20 She would go away and at the end of the evening we  
21 were all praying about what we had talked about.

22 And I've got my hands clasped to my friend here and  
23 my friend here, my eyes closed of course.

24 All of a sudden I feel this warm tongue all over my  
25 face.

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(Laughter)

I could not believe it. I go, "No, Lexie," and the owner was going, "No, Lexie. Come here."

You know that dog did that three times during that prayer.

But she taught me a dog truth that night. She taught me the mark of a Godly/dogly disciple

And that is no matter how many times you are scolded, dogs run back and make friends

And that's just one dog truth that we are going to talk about today.

That kind of served as an inspiration for this message today.

And hopefully through the dog truths that we look at as we look at the first chapter of the Book of James we will discover, maybe even grasp a little more tightly, what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ; what it means to be a Godly disciple.

So we are going to just go right down the book here. The very first mark of a Godly/dogly disciple is that dogs greet their loved ones with a wagging tail.

There is no creature on this planet that does unconditional love better than a dog.

Dog owners, it's true, isn't it?

They may bark at you, but they don't talk back to

1 you, and they always greet you with a wagging tail and  
2 unconditional love.

3 James, being a disciple, he does the greetings, the  
4 thing about James is that he's right, short, and to the point  
5 and you see in Chapter 1, Verse 1, it just says greetings.

6 But at least he said hello. A lot of times we don't  
7 even do that.

8 Our dogs teach us to greet our loved ones with a  
9 wagging tail.

10 But a lot of times we don't look one another in the  
11 eye and say how are you?

12 We don't seem happy to see our loved ones, and dogs  
13 can teach us how to be happy to see our loved ones.

14 Because it's important to feel loved, and I don't  
15 think we do enough of that.

16 I don't think we do enough of looking one another in  
17 the eye and saying how are you? Or I love you.

18 Yesterday I did a baptism at 11:00 o'clock in the  
19 chapel for a special situation where the families were from  
20 California and from here.

21 So we put that together and at the end of that time  
22 I invited the family and the friends that were gathered to do  
23 a human card, if they would.

24 Instead of going to Hallmark and buying a card and  
25 sending it, I invited them to do a human card right there and

1 then, and just to offer words of blessing.

2           It was one of the most beautiful things I've ever  
3 seen.

4           And the sponsors just spoke to the mother of the  
5 child and said, "We love you. We love being friends with  
6 you."

7           And one of the sponsors took the head of the baby  
8 and spoke to the baby, "Campbell, we'll be your friend and  
9 we'll be friends with your family, and we'll be there for  
10 you."

11           It was the most beautiful blessing I've ever seen.  
12 We don't do enough blessing.

13           We send the Hallmark card, not that there is  
14 anything wrong with that, but we don't do enough words of  
15 blessing in the passages of our life and with our loved ones,  
16 telling them how we feel. Our dog friends teach us how to do  
17 that.

18           The second Godly/dogly truth we can learn from today  
19 is when you are happy dance around and wag your tale, and  
20 dogs do that really well.

21           Verses 2 through 4, "My brothers and sisters,  
22 whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but  
23 joy because you know that the testing of your faith produces  
24 endurance."

25           We're not supposed to be happy because we have

1 trials; we are supposed to be happy and wag our tails, so to  
2 speak, because we know what the result is going to be.

3 And James is clear about the result of that,  
4 Verse 4.

5 "Let endurance have its full effect so that you may  
6 be mature."

7 Genuine faith is mature faith and it realizes that  
8 when trials come, when hardships come, when unfavorable test  
9 results come, when a loved one dies, it's for the maturing of  
10 our faith.

11 We can learn to be steadfast. Endure. We can learn  
12 to be patient. Endure. We can learn to have patience in  
13 that trial.

14 So the second dog truth is that when you are happy  
15 you dance around and wag your tail.

16 Not that everything is great all the time, but you  
17 give thanks.

18 Gratitude and thankfulness in the midst of  
19 adversity.

20 That's what Deirdre taught us. I think there is a  
21 picture of Deirdre and look at those three beautiful children  
22 of the kingdom.

23 She said it was so humbling that she would go down  
24 there and help out and she really humbly received more than  
25 she was offering, because the kids in the midst of that mess

1 were joyous.

2           You can see the expression of joy. There is a  
3 picture of joy in the face of adversity.

4           James is saying don't give thanks because you are  
5 having trials; give thanks because the trial is going to  
6 develop your character and make you have genuine faith.  
7 That's what he's saying.

8           A third one is that dogs teach us to be loyal. Dogs  
9 are almost loyal to a fault, aren't they?

10           But when it comes to humans, we can wane. Loyalty  
11 in our day, in the 21st Century, is really lacking.

12           We lack loyalty to spouses, to friendships, to  
13 commitments, to projects at work, to bosses.

14           The lack of loyalty in our time is rampant and in  
15 Verse 5 he says:

16           "If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God who  
17 gives to all generously and ungrudgingly and it will be given  
18 you, but ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts  
19 is like a wave of the sea." Verse 6 there.

20           When we don't get what we want, when we ask God and  
21 we don't get it when we want it, our loyalty begins to wane.

22           We begin to doubt that God has heard our prayers,  
23 that he even cares for us, that his promises and his word are  
24 even good. Can we count on them?

25           We begin to doubt when we ask God for something and

1 we don't get what we want when we want it from God.

2 James is being really clear here. He says don't be  
3 double-minded.

4 You are a disciple. You're a follower. You're  
5 supposed to be not double-minded.

6 Not saying I just prayed about that, but I wonder if  
7 God heard me.

8 No, he's saying don't be a doubter, Verse 8, "For  
9 the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way,  
10 must not expect to receive anything from the Lord."

11 God wants us to be expectant, and to not doubt that  
12 he has our every need in mind, and he will provide for us.

13 So that is a mark of Godly disciple, is to be loyal  
14 to our Lord and Master.

15 Loyal to Him as He is loyal to us. He will never  
16 leave us, forget us, or forsake us.

17 And he asks us to trust in that, and that's loyalty.  
18 So there is another mark of a Godly/dogly disciple.

19 The next one is in Verse 9 and following. Lay at  
20 his feet, after we are expectant and know that we are going  
21 to receive gifts from his hand, then what we want to do is  
22 lay at his feet.

23 Dogs are so good at this, aren't they? They are so  
24 good at resting at the feet of their master.

25 And that's what our Lord wants from those who say I

1 believe in you.

2 That's a mark of a Godly disciple, is that you rest  
3 at the Master's feet.

4 Sit in His presence. Pick a time of the day that is  
5 the best time of the day for you.

6 Maybe it is early morning. Maybe it is at night  
7 before you go to sleep.

8 Maybe it's right in the middle of the day, you set  
9 your watch to that.

10 And you just sit. You sit, American Christians, you  
11 sit.

12 You bask in His presence. You sit at His feet and  
13 listen to His voice.

14 So many times people say to me, "Wenda, I can't hear  
15 what God is saying."

16 And mostly it's because they have not taken the time  
17 to abide, to rest in His presence, just sit there and listen.

18 And then what comes in, if you are praying, if you  
19 are saying, "Lord, speak to me," whatever comes in is what  
20 He's saying to you.

21 And we often doubt that, but trust it, disciples,  
22 trust to lay at His feet.

23 Because Verse 9 says, "Let the believer who is lowly  
24 boast in being raised up."

25 Jesus says it this way in Matthew 23, Verse 11,

1 Jesus says to the crowd, and to his disciples, "The greatest  
2 among you will be your servant. All who exalt themselves  
3 will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be  
4 exalted."

5 It's not about boasting; it's about humbling.  
6 Deirdre spoke of that.

7 She was humbled, and we need to look for those  
8 places in life where God is wanting to lower us, humble us,  
9 because in due time His word says that we will be exalted.

10 So sit at His feet. That's a mark of Godly/dogly  
11 disciple.

12 Stay. I love this one. Stay and you'll get a  
13 treat. That's Verse 12.

14 "Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a  
15 one who has stood the test will receive the crown of life  
16 that the Lord has promised to those who love Him."

17 Stay and you'll get a treat. Now, my neighbors have  
18 a dog named Sadie, and I know you guys think that I don't  
19 love Sadie. I do.

20 But Sadie comes bounding over sometimes when she's  
21 supposed to stay and they go, "Stay, Sadie, stay."

22 But she gets so excited, as most dogs do, running  
23 into the street and running across the yard and not obeying  
24 what the master says.

25 I love Sadie, you know I do. Sadie is a great dog,

1 but sometimes she just cannot endure the temptation to run  
2 across the street, even though she's supposed to stay.

3 But we do, too. We humans do, too. We have the  
4 same problem.

5 It is so hard for us to stay, instead of giving in  
6 to the temptation, and that's what James is saying here.

7 You will be blessed. You will have peace in your  
8 heart. There won't be conflict in your heart.

9 That is what blessed means. You'll have peace in  
10 your heart when you endure temptation.

11 This is important for us, because we know what the  
12 Ten Commandments are.

13 They are stay, and you will receive the crown of  
14 life. That's what the Ten Commandments are.

15 And when he says God doesn't tempt people, he means  
16 that.

17 It's our own evil desires that tempt us. It's not  
18 God's fault, and he's trying to show us to be accountable and  
19 to own up to the temptation and just to say, yes, I'm  
20 tempted, but I'm not going to act on it.

21 See, that's where we get into problems. You can be  
22 surfing the web and run across a pornographic site.

23 You don't need to return to it. That is enduring  
24 the temptation.

25 You can be standing in the checkout line and want

1 one of those Reese's Big Cups, and just flip it into your  
2 pocket. Who is going to see?

3 It's one of the Ten Commandments. You can think  
4 that way, boy, that would taste good today, but I am on a  
5 diet.

6 Stealing it, or buying it if you are own a diet, is  
7 giving in to the temptation, do you see?

8 If you see some money laying around, you can think,  
9 wow, I could use some extra, but leaving it for the person it  
10 belongs to is enduring the temptation.

11 Taking it is falling into sin. You see, there is a  
12 difference, and you can apply this to anything in your life.

13 Thinking about stealing somebody else's wife or  
14 husband is your evil desire acting.

15 But acting on that and going through with the call  
16 and going through with the affair is sin. That's what James  
17 is trying to say.

18 And that, after we act on the temptation, then that  
19 leads to sin, and what sin is is simple separation from God.

20 Then we start getting that conflict in our heart.  
21 We don't feel all that great about stuff.

22 So James wants to be clear here. Stay. Stay. Such  
23 a one who has endured temptation and you've stood the test,  
24 you will receive the crown of life.

25 We are not going to make every test with straight

1 A's. I know that. I've failed some tests.

2 But the promise here is that we will receive the  
3 crown of life if we endure.

4 And we don't have to give into the temptation. We  
5 are the victors because Christ is in us.

6 That what happened to Ethan this morning. The new  
7 Adam, the new Christ, was fused with the old in Ethan this  
8 morning. That's what happens when we are baptized.

9 And so the old Adam and the old Eve are always  
10 tapping us on the shoulder, "Aren't you sure you want a Big  
11 Cup?"

12 "You don't really think that little glass of grape  
13 juice or wine and that wafer are going to forgive your big  
14 fat sins, do you?"

15 "Don't you want to have that affair with that  
16 person? It's okay. Nobody will catch you."

17 That's the old Adam and the old Eve inside us, but  
18 we who are disciples of Christ, we have got this new Adam and  
19 Eve in us and we have a victor there.

20 We can turn to Christ in those times and we can  
21 endure the temptation and not enter into sin and we will  
22 receive the crown of life. That's the promise.

23 The next Godly/dogly truth is if someone is having a  
24 bad day, sit close by and gently nuzzle. This is Verses 17  
25 and 18.

1           "Every generous act of giving with every perfect  
2 gift is from above coming down from the Father of life."

3           That's one of my favorite verses. Dogs are  
4 generous.

5           Our dog friends are generous in their time, aren't  
6 they?

7           They will just sit with you. If they know you are  
8 having a bad day, they'll sit down with you, sit at your feet  
9 and nuzzle, lick your face, I guess, but that's how dogs are,  
10 and we can learn from them.

11           We don't do enough human cards. We don't do enough  
12 words of blessing with one another.

13           We need to tell one another an affirming word. When  
14 someone is discouraged, or having a bad day, just sit close  
15 by with them, spend some time with them, be generous with  
16 your money, be generous in your giving, be generous in your  
17 giving of your time.

18           Because those gifts come from God and that person  
19 that you give that gift to will feel as though God is giving  
20 them that gift.

21           And that's what is a mark of a Godly disciple.  
22 Every generous act of giving is from above.

23           And, of course, Lexie, she taught me that. She  
24 taught me the next dog truth which we are going to look at,  
25 which is this.

1           No matter how harshly you're treated, don't pout.  
2       Run back and make friends.

3           Lexie taught me that, and that mark of a Godly  
4       disciple is Verse 19.

5           "You must understand this, my loved ones, let every  
6       one be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger. For  
7       your anger does not produce God's righteousness. Therefore  
8       rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of  
9       wickedness and welcome with meekness the implanted word that  
10      has the power to save your soul."

11          So this Godly/dogly truth is about not holding  
12      grudges, and not speaking angrily with one another.

13          How many times did I tell Lexie no. I kept saying  
14      no to her and then she got me, didn't she?

15          She got me good in the prayer. She came and she  
16      just slobbered my face with her warm tongue.

17          Running back to make friends, not pouting, no matter  
18      how many times I said no to her.

19          Dogs are good at that, but humans aren't very good  
20      at that.

21          I was just talking to a pastor friend yesterday,  
22      trying to line up pastoral care while Pastor Mark and I are  
23      on vacation

24          And she was telling me about a woman that has not  
25      been to church for three years.

1 I said, "Really? What is going on?"

2 I don't know how we get into the conversation. I  
3 said, "What is going on?"

4 She said, "Well, apparently someone said something  
5 to her and she has not returned for three years."

6 She said, "I don't think it's me, and even if it is,  
7 it doesn't matter."

8 But do you how much negative energy that takes? It  
9 takes a lot of energy to stay away from the church for three  
10 years because of something someone said.

11 That takes a lot of negative energy, and that's what  
12 grudges do. They rob us of good energy.

13 That's not the mark of a Godly disciple, a disciple  
14 that holds a grudge. Our canine friends are better at this  
15 than we are.

16 We tend to hold a grudge, but this is our life in  
17 Christ. That cross.

18 That cross is the number one symbol for our lives  
19 together, and that is to forgive one another, and to let it  
20 go, to keep short accounts, like dogs do, they keep short  
21 accounts. They don't remember it.

22 I keep this quote in my wallet.

23 "When somebody you have wronged forgives you, you  
24 are spared the dull and self-diminishing throb of a guilty  
25 conscience."

1           That throb thing. You know what that feels like in  
2 your heart, when you have not forgiven somebody, and it holds  
3 there, and that's why I love that choice of words.

4           "When you forgive somebody who has wronged you, you  
5 are spared the dismal corrosion of bitterness and wounded  
6 pride. For both parties, forgiveness means the freedom again  
7 to be at peace inside their own skins and to be glad in each  
8 other's presence."

9           I love that. I carry that in my wallet.

10          We are so good at holding grudges, but James is  
11 clear.

12          If you are going to be a Godly disciple, you are  
13 going to be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger,  
14 and you're going to let that word be implanted, that word of  
15 forgiveness be planted in your hearts.

16          We can do it, because of the way in which he hung on  
17 the cross, exposed to all, for us and our salvation.

18          So we have His saving power. That's salvation. We  
19 have His saving power so that we can do this very thing.

20          Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and when Peter  
21 asks, Matthew 18, Verse 21 and following, Peter comes to  
22 Jesus and says, "Lord, if another member of the church sins  
23 against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven  
24 times?"

25          And Jesus says, "Peter, seven isn't enough. Try

1 seventy times seven."

2 So we have the word from our Lord that that is what  
3 we are to do. It's the mark of a Godly disciple.

4 And then just two more. One is run, romp and play  
5 daily. That's a mark of a Godly disciple.

6 This is the central message of the Book of James.  
7 Verse 22.

8 "Be doers of the word and not merely hearers of it."

9 In the 21st Century those that are watching  
10 churches, the futurists and church growth experts, they are  
11 saying that this century, unlike any other century, is the  
12 one century where the world is looking at the church and  
13 saying all those Christians ever do is sit in the pew and say  
14 what they believe.

15 I don't see what they believe, and that's why they  
16 don't come. One of the reasons.

17 James really gets after us on this. A mark of a  
18 Godly disciple is that you are doers of the word.

19 That you get after it in life. You run and romp and  
20 play daily.

21 That's the nature of a dog, is that they are moving  
22 all the time.

23 That's what the nature of a disciple is supposed to  
24 be, moving, playing daily in the presence of the Lord.  
25 Interacting. Putting our faith into action.

1           The English language is a funny language. I would  
2 hate to have learned it.

3           There is no egg in eggplant, if you think about it.

4           There is no ham in hamburger.

5           There is no butter in buttermilk, right?

6           Quicksand, for example, moves really slowly.

7           And boxing rings are square, right?

8           That's fine for words. You can have  
9 inconsistencies.

10           It's no big deal when you have buttermilk and there  
11 is no butter in buttermilk, or ham in hamburger

12           But when it comes to what we say and what we do, it  
13 has to match.

14           That's what James is saying. Christians have to act  
15 like Christians.

16           Our words have to match our actions. Be doers of  
17 the word and not merely hearers.

18           The last one we're looking at today is avoid biting  
19 when a simple growl will do, and that's right there in Verse  
20 26.

21           "If any think they are religious and don't bridle  
22 their tongue, but deceive their hearts, their religion is  
23 worthless."

24           Avoid biting when a simple growl will do. Our words  
25 can injure others so quickly.

1           But they can also give life, and they can show  
2 kindness.

3           And so as we begin our study of the Book of James I  
4 simply want to say to you, how about if we vow, if not  
5 bow-wow -- that's getting too much, isn't it -- how about if  
6 we vow, if not bow-wow, to not let our dog be better  
7 Christians than we are?

8           Can we give an amen to that? All right. That's  
9 good.

10           Let's sing. There will be prayer ministers up here  
11 after worship today.

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