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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH

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ELKHORN, NEBRASKA

PASTOR WENDA FRY

1 PASTOR FRY: The pivotal thought in the Book of
2 James is that real life giving faith produces motion and
3 specific actions.

4 So by way of thinking about that, I want to tell you
5 about our vacation that we just returned from.

6 Pastor Mark and I went up to -- Pastor Mark, for
7 those of you who don't know, we're married.

8 It's not like the two pastors always travel together
9 and we do all our vacations together.

10 We are actually married, so that is why we do that
11 and sometimes I forget to say that to people and they think
12 they have something going on there, don't they, at that
13 church.

14 (Laughter)

15 But, anyway, we went up to a cabin in northern
16 Wisconsin. I have been going there for about thirty years
17 because my college roommate from St. Olaf College, it's her
18 cabin, and we have been going there since college days on
19 fall and spring breaks.

20 And she is the regional director in Asia for the
21 Helen Keller Institute.

22 She works in the world. She has been in the world
23 since she left St. Olaf and it has nearly cost her her life.

24 She has swam with hippopotamus in Africa and she's
25 contracted malaria and she just has a passion for eliminating

1 poverty, and so she's out.

2 She does a lot of out time, and she doesn't get much
3 up time with God at the cabin

4 And she wants me to have that, so she is really
5 generous and gracious and she likes Mark and I to go there
6 and she loves to hear about the fish he catches and
7 everything.

8 It looks a little bit like this. This is not
9 actually a picture of it, but it looks quite a lot like it.

10 It's a beautiful spot. It's north of Green Bay
11 about an hour and it's on an Indian reservation, and the lake
12 is so clear.

13 And I set my day in motion each day at the lake by
14 getting in my suit and swimming across the lake and back.

15 And you all know, those of you who know me well,
16 know that I'm not a morning person.

17 But when I'm at the lake I am, and it still bothers
18 me, Pastor Mark's biological clock is still set two hours
19 earlier than mine, and it proves it when he takes the watch
20 off and I just sleep until I wake up and I get up and it's
21 about 9:00.

22 That's when I am really awake, so you're getting me
23 good now.

24 The 7:45, I worry about them sometimes, because it's
25 like what did she say? I think she was still sleeping.

1 But I wake up at 9:00 and go across the lake and
2 back, it takes about thirty minutes, three-quarters of a mile
3 probably is what that is.

4 And then Pastor Mark has the coffee ready and we
5 just go up and there is an open deck, it's about 80 degrees
6 there every day, 55 at night, just perfect.

7 And we just sit the deck and listen to a crunch
8 here, or a chipmunk there, or a peep there, or suddenly the
9 wind is starting and the birch tree leaves start clapping for
10 joy.

11 At that place you can just watch nature move, and
12 every day it's a grand display of God's motion.

13 And I love it, because that's the place where we
14 just sit and we are still and we listen to nature move.

15 James uses a lot of pictures from nature to get his
16 point across, that if there is life there is movement.

17 So if you say you are a Christian, there is going to
18 be motion and movement.

19 Vivid pictures from nature give visual character to
20 James' work, almost as if each thought were a photograph, and
21 he uses like sea froth, and wilted flowers, and morning mist,
22 and he uses things from nature to get his point across.

23 The image that Jill chose for our Genuine Faith, I
24 always am amazed at Jill, she's really intuitive and she's
25 very creative, and she just does it, and she just shows it to

1 me and I say yes, that's great.

2 But now, especially as we look at Chapter 3, she has
3 chosen those sunflowers.

4 And the thing about sunflowers is they don't come
5 into the fullness of their created beauty on their own.

6 They are called sunflowers because they need sun,
7 but first of all you have to put a seed in the soil, and you
8 have to till that soil and get that soil ready, it's grounded
9 in dirt, and then it needs sunlight and it needs water.

10 So do Christians, but a lot of Christians stop at
11 the water. They stop at the baptism.

12 They get the water on them and they forget about the
13 two other elements for coming into the fullness of our
14 created beauty.

15 Being grounded in the soil of spiritual discipline.
16 That's why we asked Scott and Shelly, as she grows will you
17 bring her to this community so she can learn in discipleship
18 classes?

19 Will you pray at meal times and bedtimes and in
20 between times?

21 That's why we ask those kinds of questions, because
22 it's more than water.

23 And if you are coming here, then you can bathe in
24 the light of the worshipping community. You need sunlight
25 and the Savior's beauty.

1 Christians often stop at water, but we need the same
2 three things as sunflowers do.

3 We need to be grounded in the soil of Christian
4 discipline.

5 And that's what we were going to talk about today,
6 and in the sunlight, and also water, but we need all three
7 things.

8 And before we actually look verse-by-verse at
9 Chapter 3, it's so important that we understand this, because
10 otherwise the Book of James is a book about being moral, and
11 good, and right, and not saying bad things.

12 See, then it's just like writing out a check for
13 charity, going through your closet giving all your clothes
14 that you don't want to Goodwill, saying nice things about
15 other people and stopping yourself once in a while, oh, I
16 shouldn't say things like that, or I probably shouldn't talk
17 like that.

18 That is not what the Book of James is about. It's
19 not on the surface; it goes way deeper than that.

20 And that's why when we read and listen to the Book
21 of James, we've got to do that within the framework of
22 understanding that he's talking to people who have been
23 watered, who have been coming to the sun, Jesus Christ, the
24 Savior, and bathing in his light, who have been practicing
25 the spiritual disciplines.

1 So that is what so important. Otherwise it's a
2 moral issue, and then it's all about morality, and James
3 wants to get at the heart of the Christian life.

4 "The Spirit of the Disciplines", this is a book that
5 Pastor Mark finished while up at the cabin.

6 We just took coffee and books and my suit and he
7 took his fishing gear. He caught a couple of fish for
8 breakfast. It was awesome.

9 It was so great to just sit and read and be quiet
10 together and to abide and just to put or heads on Jesus's
11 chest and just rest.

12 Because he teaches in his word that when we rest and
13 abide in him, then we can bear fruit

14 And if we don't, then we can't. We won't bear fruit
15 and it won't be excellent fruit.

16 We might bear some fruit, but it won't be excellent
17 fruit.

18 But this is a book about the spirit of the
19 disciplines and he writes a lot like James. He's passionate.

20 He says "My central claim," so you know what this
21 book is about, "is that we can become like Christ by doing
22 one thing. By following him in the overall style of life he
23 chose for himself. If we have faith in Christ, we must
24 believe that he knew how to live. We can through faith
25 become like Christ by practicing the type of activities he

1 engaged in. What activities did Jesus practice? Such things
2 as solitude, and silence, prayer, simple and sacrificial
3 living, intense study and meditation upon God's word and
4 God's ways and service to others."

5 These are spiritual disciplines. That's what he
6 calls them.

7 And he says, "This book is a plea for the Christian
8 community to place the disciplines for the spiritual life at
9 the heart of the Gospel. When we call women and men to life
10 in Christ Jesus, we are offering them the greatest
11 opportunity of their lives, the opportunity of a vivid
12 companionship with him in which they will learn to be like
13 him and live as he lived. Real life faith sets a Christian
14 in motion and the motion is toward becoming Christ-like."

15 And that is what we have to keep in mind when we
16 read the Book of James.

17 Because if we are doing things like Jesus did, like
18 spending time with no sound, and finding that, not letting
19 OPPD create that for us.

20 Did any of you have that opportunity this week where
21 they were going to shut your power off?

22 Pastor Mark and I, when we got back from vacation on
23 Wednesday night, and then Thursday we had this little orange
24 slip that said power is going to be shut off at 8:00 o'clock
25 in the morning.

1 tock, you know what I'm saying?

2 There was nothing. No air moving. Nothing. That
3 is the kind of solitude.

4 We cannot count on OPPD to create that kind of
5 solitude and silence for us.

6 It's a spiritual discipline and what Dallas Willard
7 says is that when we practice the spiritual disciplines, and
8 I'm praying about doing a class on the spiritual disciplines,
9 because I think we just don't talk about them enough and you
10 don't know how to do them, it's really hard for us.

11 The way most of us do solitude is we just reduce the
12 noise a little bit. We don't do the whole thing.

13 But he says that if we are practicing these things
14 like prayer and solitude and simple and sacrificial living,
15 that's stewardship, living with less, not having to have it
16 all, then our lives will naturally -- and here is where I am
17 coming in now with Chapter 3 -- then our tongues will
18 naturally cease fire. Do you see?

19 When we are grounded in the soil of the disciplines,
20 the Christian disciplines, then the things that God wants us
21 to do will come a little more easily, it won't be as hard,
22 and it will happen more often.

23 We'll find ourselves being less judgmental and less
24 impatient about things in our life.

25 Let's go to the scripture. I know I spent some time

1 on that, but we can't read James unless we understand that we
2 need to be practicing the spiritual disciplines, because then
3 these things will follow naturally.

4 Let's look at Chapter 3, Verses 1 and following, and
5 the first verse is for me, really.

6 "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers
7 and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged
8 with greater strictness."

9 That's a word for those of us who teach. We will be
10 held accountable, is what James is saying, and that is
11 important.

12 He gives a bit of grace there in Verse 2, "For all
13 of us make many mistakes," that's true of me, and "Anyone who
14 makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the
15 whole body in check with a bridle."

16 So the first couple of verses is, teachers,
17 remember, you'll be held accountable for how you teach and
18 what you teach, and just remember, it's just a good thing,
19 and you're not perfect, so I thank James for that, that bit
20 of grace.

21 Then he gets into it at Verse 3. "If we put bits
22 into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide
23 their whole bodies. Or look at ships. Though they are so
24 large it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are
25 guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot

1 directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts
2 of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a
3 small fire, and the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed
4 among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole
5 body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on
6 fire by hell."

7 Don't you just have to sit back? James, we are
8 never going to get anywhere if you keep holding back.

9 I mean, he gets out there. He's passionate about
10 the tongue and he says that it can set a whole forest on
11 fire.

12 And you know that, because you have had moments
13 where your tongue has set ablaze a fire that wasn't even
14 kindling just by one of two things that you've said.

15 Dallas Willard says that if we practice silence and
16 solitude, that will affect our tongue.

17 If we practice not speaking, then we're more apt to
18 say less more often.

19 And Willard has an example of a young person who has
20 been practicing the discipline of solitude and this is what
21 she says.

22 "The more I practice this discipline, the more I
23 appreciate the strength of silence. The less I become
24 skeptical and judgmental, the more I learn to accept the
25 things I didn't like about others, the more I accept them as

1 uniquely created in the image of God. The less I talk, the
2 fuller are words spoken at an appropriate time. The more I
3 value others, the more I serve them, the more I enjoy and
4 celebrate my life. The more I celebrate, the more I realize
5 that God has been giving me wonderful things in my life, the
6 less I worry about my future. I will accept and enjoy what
7 God is continuously giving to me. I think I am beginning to
8 really enjoy God."

9 That is what solitude and silence could do for us.
10 We will find ourselves really beginning to enjoy God and our
11 life in him.

12 Do you see what I mean?

13 By practicing solitude and not speaking as much,
14 then my tongue is less judgmental and less skeptical and less
15 ungrateful.

16 So that is how we must read James. We must read it
17 within the framework of the spiritual disciplines.

18 Let's go on to the next part, which is James 3,
19 Verse 7 and following.

20 "For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and
21 sea creature can be tamed and has been tamed by the human
22 species, but no one can tame the tongue, a restless evil,
23 full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father
24 and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of
25 God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My

1 brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. Does the
2 spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and
3 brackish water?"

4 Brackish is salty, distasteful water.

5 "Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield
6 olives? Or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield
7 fresh."

8 If you have your own Bible, I would invite you to
9 write in the margin Matthew 23, 25 and 26.

10 We are going to go to that right now, Matthew 23, 25
11 and 26, and listen to how Jesus says that same thing.

12 Jesus says, "Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees,
13 hypocrites, for you clean the outside of the cup and of the
14 plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.
15 You blind Pharisees, first clean the inside of the cup, so
16 that the outside also may become clean."

17 That's how Jesus says it. In other words, what is
18 inside is so much more important to God than what is on the
19 outside.

20 But our world says your outside is more important,
21 so pay attention to that more. That's what the world says.

22 Jesus says no, they have that wrong. I don't care
23 about the cup on the outside, or the plate on the outside; I
24 care about the heart of a Christian inside.

25 That is exactly what James is saying in that section

1 in Chapter 3.

2 And the picture here, Martha did a great job of
3 putting a couple of images together for us, because that
4 polluted water there, that comes from our selfishness and our
5 indulgence.

6 And what James and Jesus are saying is that you've
7 got to take care of what is inside.

8 Is the spring stagnant inside? Is it polluted?
9 Because then what pours forth out of your mouth then is
10 either going to be stagnant or polluted or it's going to be
11 fresh and life giving, which is what a beautiful waterfall
12 like that is, it's fresh and life giving. So that is what
13 that section is about.

14 Verse 13, "Who is wise and understanding among you?
15 Show by your good life that your works are done with
16 gentleness born of wisdom."

17 I'm going to stop there a second. The picture here
18 is of the good life.

19 A family or friends enjoying wine and some delicious
20 salad, or something else, we can't exactly see, but it looks
21 awesome.

22 Dallas Willard talks about celebration as one of the
23 spiritual disciplines.

24 Not partying until you're into oblivion, but
25 celebration.

1 And I just recently read a survey that surveyed 20
2 to 35 year olds as to why they are not coming to church

3 And one of the reasons they don't like to come to
4 church is because you look like you're not having fun with
5 this whole thing.

6 And so I found it interesting in the book that
7 celebration is a spiritual discipline.

8 He writes, "We engage in celebration when we enjoy
9 ourselves, our life, our world, in conjunction with our
10 faith."

11 And the Puritans didn't help us here, because they
12 separated pleasure out from what God created in the beginning
13 and said this is good, it's all good, and I want you to enjoy
14 it.

15 They kind of did us a bad turn in that part of
16 history, because they said pleasure is no good, and we've
17 struggled with that forever.

18 But I love that, "We engage in celebration when we
19 enjoy ourselves, our life, in conjunction with our faith, so
20 that the Saturday night gathering with friends and wine and
21 food is part of the worship that leads into Sunday morning.
22 Holy delight and joy is the great antidote to despair and is
23 a wellspring of genuine gratitude, the kind that starts at
24 our toes and blasts off from our loins and diaphragm through
25 the top of our head, swinging off our arms and our eyes and

1 our voice upward towards our good God."

2 We often separate out, okay, now we are going to go
3 to worship. Now we are going to have a party. Now we are
4 going to have that celebration.

5 But our God, according to the Book of Ecclesiastes,
6 wants that to all be part of worship.

7 And it's a discipline, to celebrate the good life,
8 the blessings that we have in Christ Jesus.

9 I think that is marvelous, and that's what James is
10 getting at there when he says, "Show by your good life that
11 your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. But if
12 you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart, do
13 not be boastful and false to the truth. Such wisdom does not
14 come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish."

15 James gets after it.

16 "For where there is envy and selfish ambition there
17 will also be disorder."

18 This really speaks to our lives, sometimes our busy
19 lives that we have, doesn't it?

20 He wants us to relax and celebrate the goodness of
21 our God. The wonderful things we have.

22 Yes, the conversation should flow more than the
23 wine, but he wants us to celebrate the good life, and the
24 goodness of the creation.

25 And he doesn't want us to always be thinking about

1 the next party, or the next car to buy, or the next house.

2 That's what he means by selfish ambition, because
3 where there is always striving after things in a different
4 kind of life, then there is going to be disorder.

5 That's what he means, there's going to be chaos, and
6 things are going to get out of order.

7 Verse 17, "The wisdom from above is first pure."

8 I would like to jump back to the Book of Colossians
9 2, Verses 2 and 3.

10 Paul writes to these Christians and he says
11 something similar.

12 "I want their hearts," see, this is really what
13 James is talking about, he's talking about our hearts, our
14 Christian lives, not our mouths, because if what is in our
15 hearts, if we are pouring beautiful things into our hearts,
16 then what comes out will also be beautiful.

17 "I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in
18 love so that they may have all the riches of assured
19 understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that
20 is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of
21 wisdom."

22 Now, according to Colossians 2, Christ himself is
23 the wisdom from above.

24 Now let's go back to James 3, Verse 17, and put his
25 name in there.

1 "Jesus Christ is first pure, then peaceable, gentle,
2 willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits without a
3 trace of partiality and hypocrisy."

4 That's how we have come to know him, isn't it?
5 That's Jesus Christ.

6 He's the wisdom from above. He is peaceable. He's
7 gentle. He's willing to yield to our sin.

8 He's full of mercy when we mess up, and he's not a
9 hypocrite.

10 He says go and sin no more, and when we come back
11 and say we're sorry, he welcomes us right back in. He is not
12 partial.

13 Now, if Jesus is that way, and we are grounding
14 ourselves in the soil of the spiritual disciplines, solitude,
15 prayer, meditating on God's word, doing with less, and
16 feeding his word into our hearts, then we are going to be
17 this; peaceable, full of mercy, less judgmental, willing to
18 yield, willing to be a little flexible toward a new thought
19 maybe. That's how we are going to be.

20 And I think sometimes as Christians we think, gosh,
21 I can't sit around and read the Bible all day.

22 You don't have to. It's a good idea to do it, have
23 some time set aside so you can feed on it.

24 But one of the ways you can pour his word is by
25 praying through a word.

1 And that's what I did this weekend. I knew I was
2 going to have a challenging weekend with Pastor Mark still
3 gone.

4 I had two wedding rehearsals, and two weddings
5 yesterday, and the message, and today I have the new members.

6 And I thought, Lord, give me a word to pray through,
7 and he gave me Psalm 100-1, "Serve the lord with gladness."

8 So on Friday I said to the Lord, teach me about
9 serve.

10 And I just thought about serve all day long. Well,
11 I didn't just sit there and think about it, I went about what
12 I had to do, but that was the day I had to say good-bye my
13 prayer advocate of two years.

14 And this is how it works, Christians. She was
15 praying and she must have used the word serve four or five
16 times.

17 And, see, when you are tuned in to what God wants to
18 tell you, say Lord just instruct me on serve today, and I
19 just kept thinking what does serve mean?

20 I was driving my car, and serve means prepare, give
21 a dish.

22 For me serve means do these weddings, but serve
23 means, and then I was thinking of a picture of Jesus down
24 with his hands washing feet.

25 I thought yes. So when you concentrate on a word,

1 when you pray through God's word, he teaches you so much
2 more.

3 Yesterday I took the phrase the Lord, and I found
4 myself singing, "Holy is the Lord God almighty."

5 And then I find myself singing "He is exalted, the
6 Lord is exalted on high," and every verse I read in the
7 morning, the Lord just popped out.

8 And then later someone prayed for me over the phone
9 and she just used the Lord. There are a lot of names to use.

10 Do you see? It's pouring the word. Pick a Bible
11 verse and pray through it a whole week, one word a day, I'm
12 not kidding, you will so learn from Jesus' feet.

13 One week I prayed nevertheless, you are with me
14 continually.

15 One whole day I worked on nevertheless. Never the
16 less. I am never the less in God's eyes. That's what came
17 to me.

18 Then I thought more of you God in my life; less of
19 me.

20 Do you see how you can pour the word and pray
21 through a word? Just take a verse.

22 Today it's with gladness for me, and I am really
23 thankful because I'm about three-quarters of the way through
24 my marathon of the weekend.

25 I'm really thankful, but I'm so grateful, and this

1 morning from my devotion the word that was there, all over
2 the page was glad.

3 That's God talking to me, and you can claim that,
4 too, as Christians.

5 That's how you pour the word in, so that then what
6 comes out is more pleasing to him.

7 I want to close with a story about raspberries. I
8 love raspberries, they are my favorite fruit, and at the
9 cabin I was bound and determined, I got my Great Grains and I
10 was going to have some raspberries, maybe two or three times
11 out of the week, I was going to stretch them out and see if I
12 could have raspberries every day.

13 I got this tin for four dollars, took them home,
14 went across the lake, came back.

15 I got my raspberries out and prepared myself, got a
16 little spot in the sun, and took a bite, oh, sour.

17 Of course, I ate them, because that's what you do
18 with raspberries that are four dollars a tin.

19 So I just ate all the sour raspberries and it made
20 me kind of sour.

21 And so then I said to Mark I have to go back into
22 town and get some raspberries. I just have to. I associate
23 this place with really good raspberries.

24 So I went back into town and I was looking for the
25 raspberries and I saw the sour tins and I was really looking

1 at them, because you can kind of tell, some of them say I'm
2 sweet, if you really listen, but nobody was saying that.

3 I looked over and there was this organic section and
4 I walked over and these raspberries were five dollars.

5 You know what organic is, don't you? They grow
6 without any chemicals or toxins.

7 I thought I've got to spring for those. I can just
8 tell how sweet they are.

9 The next day, over to the lake and back, put those
10 raspberries on my Great Grains, every bite was just sweet and
11 busting with flavor, and that's what James is talking about,
12 Christians.

13 When we seek to reduce the toxins in our lives, then
14 we'll know these things that Jesus Christ is, and they will
15 be a part of us, and we will not only take in what is sweet,
16 but what comes out then will be sweet.

17 What if our life was a little more like that, where
18 we were trying to reduce our toxins, and filling instead with
19 his goodness and his love and celebrating the life he's given
20 us.

21 That's James' word today. Let's pray about putting
22 it to work.

23 Thank you, God, so much, for your word, especially
24 that part about you being full of peace and not hypocrisy,
25 and you are not partial to any one of us, no matter what

1 we've done or not done, you love us, and you have given us
2 your word so that we can be the people that you have created
3 us to be, we can be the disciples that you want us to be.

4 So thank you, and we thank you for the sweetness of
5 raspberries, the sweetness of a bride and groom who are so
6 grateful for your life in theirs.

7 Thank you for this place called Bethany, the place
8 where we can come and bring our hearts and hear your word.

9 Help us to do your word this week, Lord, and thank
10 you, Lord. In Jesus's name. Amen

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