

May 17, 2026
James 1:22-27
Pure Religion
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today we will be wrapping up chapter 1 of James. Like I mentioned a few weeks back, chapter 1 functions as the high-level introduction to the major themes and ideas of James. That's why we've been moving pretty slowly, bit by bit through this first chapter. We'll take bigger bites as we move through the rest of the book, and slow down again a little bit in chapter 5.

The big idea for James is godly wisdom, that's what we've been talking about. In this book he's essentially asking the question, "how can I live a life that is both pleasing to God and satisfying for me?" I've argued that for James, and really just in general, wisdom is both theoretical and practical. It's both head knowledge, and practical skill. You need to know what is true about God, the world, the gospel, and life, and you need to have the skills to actually live accordingly. You need to know the rules of the game, and you need to actually be able to shoot a free-throw.

Today we will wrap up the practical side of godly wisdom. Verses 1-18 was the theoretical side, and 19-27 is the practical side.

Wisdom is the art of living well. Godly wisdom is the art of living a life that is both pleasing to God and satisfying to you. It is both a life of holiness and a life of happiness.

This is probably the big stumbling block for most people when it comes to godliness and wisdom. Often, we think that those things are in tension. Either I can live a holy life, or I can live a happy life. And so, we can tend to think of wisdom as finding the proper balance of holiness and happiness. I want to live a life that is holy enough, but also, I don't want to be too holy that I'm not happy.

We can tend to think about godliness kind of like taxes. I need to meet the minimum godliness requirements, but then whatever margin I have left over I can use to have some happiness too.

This is just setting yourself up for failure and misery. The holy life is the happy life. If you go after happiness without holiness, you will get neither, you'll end up a slave to your passions and sins. You'll end up like Paul says to Titus, hating and being hated by others.¹

But if you go after holiness, you'll get happiness thrown in too. Now, I'm talking about real holiness, biblical holiness. Not "I'm only happy if I'm controlling other people" holiness, or "I'm only happy if I'm shaming other people" holiness, or "I'm too holy to enjoy the good things God created holiness." But real, biblical holiness.

The first couple of weeks I laid out what I think are the two most common spiritual symptoms of our age – not the root issues, but the surface level spiritual problems of our age – despair and directionlessness. And this confusion is where those problems come from.

As a culture we've wanted happiness – we've wanted the good things of God's world – but we've wanted nothing to do with holiness. Therefore, we get neither. We've refused God's direction; therefore, we get both directionlessness and despair – emptiness, meaninglessness, cheap ephemeral pleasures instead of deep soul-level satisfaction.

Which leads to two questions. What is this holiness, what is godliness? And where does it come from? What is holiness, and how do I get it?

These are the two questions that today's text addresses. What is holiness, what is pure religion, and where does it come from?

¹ Titus 3:3.

Verses 22 through 25 spells out where holiness comes from. And verses 26 through 27 spells out what holiness looks like.

Let me give you the big idea for today, then we'll pray, and then get into the text.

Here's today's big idea: True holiness (or what James will call pure religion) *comes from* gospel transformation, and *looks like* self-control, love for neighbor, and love for God.

True holiness, pure religion comes from gospel transformation (esp. v. 25), and looks like self-control (v. 26), love for neighbor and love for God (v. 27).

Gospel Transformation

First, gospel transformation, where does it come from?

Look with me at the first four verses, 22 through 25. I need to make a few comments on the first three verses, but then we'll camp out a bit on verse 25.

22, **"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."** A couple things to point out. Like I said last week, here James is digging into and deepening what he said in the previous few verses. Verse 19, "be quick to hear," 21, "receive the Word with meekness." Then here he's deepening that and clarifying that. Don't just hear it, but actually do it. Being quick to hear means being quick believe and be changed by the word.

Now here, it's helpful to understand what he actually means by "be a doer." Post social-gospel, and post liberal Christianity, it's really easy to flatten what he's saying here.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries a movement within Christian churches sprung up called liberal Christianity that preached what's called the social gospel. Basically, they came to the conclusion that Christianity was essentially a myth but wanted to keep the ethical teachings of Jesus. Their idea was that the gospel wasn't about saving souls but about transforming society. And they argued that all the doctrine and focus on belief was counterproductive.

They said, let's throw out all the miracles, let's throw out the inerrancy of the Bible, let's throw out the divinity of Jesus, the resurrection, and the virgin birth, and let's certainly throw out the second coming and the judgement. Don't want any of that. But we want to keep the ethical, visit widows and orphans part.

So, you get this idea, this virus, within Christianity that puts doctrine against practice. They would read this passage as saying, "don't be a *believer*, instead be a doer." Don't worry about theology, only worry about social needs. Don't worry about the Trinity, just worry about the poor.

Essentially this movement would reduce Christianity to a soup kitchen. Now, the irony is, it was a robustly doctrinal Christianity that invented the soup kitchen. The doctrines of Christianity, the theology of Christianity is why the church invented the orphanage. You take away the doctrinal, Trinitarian, substitutionary atonement theology of Jesus, and you don't get the ethics of Jesus.

It was in the fourth century, the 300s, at the height of the rigorous, precise theological battles over the definition of the Trinity that the church invented the orphanage. The church at its most doctrinal is the church at its most practical. When the church looks most like the world intellectually, the church is the most irrelevant socially.

But, ever since that movement, there's been this infection in the church that causes us to read this passage and go, "wait, did they have a point? Is theology the enemy of practice?"

No, no it's not, and no they did not have a point. They just didn't believe in Jesus.

What James is saying is that being quick to hear means more than showing up to church every week. Being quick to hear means more than just being in the room while someone preaches. It means actually receiving the word, believing the word, being transformed by the word. Yes, transformed in your hands and feet, but also in your heart, and your head as well.

Being a doer of the word means responding appropriately to what the word commands of you. You can boil that down into essentially three things, believing what the Bible teaches, loving what the Bible says is lovely, and obeying what the Bible says to do.

The Bible addresses your head, your heart, and your hands. The problem with the social gospel is that it tried to skip all the head stuff and the heart stuff and go straight to the hand stuff. In their zeal to be doers of the word they ignored most of what the word actually says.

In John 6, some people ask Jesus **“what must we do, to be doing the works of God?”** That’s a softball. What works do we need to be doing? Here’s Jesus’ chance to give us the social gospel. What do we need to do to be doing the works of God? Jesus answers, **“This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”**

So, do you want to be a doer of the word? Then believe in Jesus.

Or again, Mark 12, someone asks him, **“Which commandment is the most important of all?”** Again, a softball. What does Jesus say? **“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and will all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. [And] you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”**

Do you want to be a doer of the word? Then love God and love your neighbor.

Now, that certainly is not to take away the importance of more practical, tactile obedience. Here in James, visit the widows and orphans. Galatians 2:10, **“remember the poor.”** Galatians 6:10, **“as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone.”**

So, James isn’t pitting faith against actions, he isn’t pitting theology against practice. He’s saying that being quick to hear the word means hearing it and actually being transformed by it – *believing* what it says to believe, *loving* what it says to love, and *doing* what it says to do.

Now, one last comment on this verse. Notice that he says, be a doer, not just a hearer, “deceiving yourselves.” James is really keen on this idea of self-deception. There is a way that we can trick ourselves into thinking that we’re doing the word simply because we hear it a lot. There’s a way that just hearing and hearing and hearing but without actual transformation of the head, the heart, or the hands can start to make us numb to the conviction and direction of the word.

This is where much wisdom is needed. And deep Christian community will help you here. It is often easier to deceive yourself than to deceive others – *if* they are willing to speak and you are willing to hear.

Next, in 23 and 24 he gives an illustration of this point. He compares being a hearer only and not a doer to a guy who looks in the mirror in the morning, sees his bedhead, sees last-night’s broccoli stuck in his teeth, does nothing about it, and walks out the door thinking he looks great.

He’s saying, the point of hearing is to be transformed, just like the point of looking in the mirror is to fix stuff, not just to say, well, that’s not right, that’s not right, ah well, time to start the day. You look to fix, you hear to do. The point of hearing the word is to be transformed by it.

And this is a good test for us. When you come to the word, when you go to read your Bible, or come to church, do you come to be transformed?

Then, next he gets to 25, and this is where we need to camp out for a bit.

Look at 25, **“But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.”**

This verse is packed. There are a few things I want you to note. First off, we’re going to look at a couple other passages here in a moment. If you have your Bible with you, you’ll want to grab that. There are a couple passages you’ll want to be ready to follow along on.

If you don’t have one, grab one of the blue ones from the pew around you somewhere. We’ll go to Psalm 19 in a minute, then 2 Corinthians 3. So, just put a finger in 2 Corinthians 3, and flip to Psalm 19.

Quick note, the law here is basically a synonym for the word.

James describes the law in two ways, and that’s very intentional. James isn’t a flowery writer. He doesn’t pack in a bunch of unnecessary phrases. He calls it the perfect law, and the law of liberty. What is he doing with these?

The first is a reference to Psalm 19, we'll flip there in a moment. And the second is a reference to the idea that when we see Jesus in the word, the whole thing shifts from condemnation to grace, from death to liberty. When we don't see Jesus, when we don't read in faith, the whole Bible is condemnation and death. When we do read in faith, the whole Bible is life and liberty. We'll see that in 2 Corinthians.

Ok, flip to Psalm 19. I just want to read verses 7 through 11. Just see, just notice what it is that this word does, what the perfect law does. Psalm 19:7-11.

**⁷The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;
⁸the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;
⁹the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.
¹⁰More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.
¹¹Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.**

This is the perfect law, and this is what it looks like to be a doer. It revives the soul, it makes you wise, it rejoices the soul, it enlightens the eyes, it warns and ultimately it results in blessing.

So that's the perfect law. Not only is it the perfect law that transforms, but it's the law of liberty, the law that in and through Jesus sets us free. When we don't see Jesus it's the law of condemnation, but when we do see Jesus, it's the law of liberty.

Paul spells out this contrast in a few places, but the most extensive is in 2 Corinthians 3. Flip there if you have it. 2 Corinthians 3.

In this chapter, Paul is describing his gospel ministry, and he is comparing it to when Moses brought down the Ten Commandments from mount Sinai. Notice some of the contrasts he draws. Notice verse 3, **"you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written... not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."** Notice that. The gospel is written on hearts by the Spirit of God, but the Law is written on tablets of stone.

The law of condemnation is external, the law of liberty is written on your heart.

Then, the end of verse 6, **"the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."**

Now, notice what he calls Moses' ministry in verse 7, **"the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone."**

Then verse 9, **"the ministry of condemnation,"** versus, **"the ministry of righteousness."**

On the one hand, we have the ministry of death, the ministry of condemnation, the letter, written on tablets of stone, that was passing away, the point of which was to condemn and kill.

Then on the other hand we have the ministry of righteousness, the Spirit, written on human hearts, that is permanent, the point of which is to give life.

Then, notice what happens next in verse 13, Paul says that Moses, **"put a veil over his face."** In Exodus, when Moses came back down from Sinai, his face was glowing. Literally, not like 9 weeks pregnant glowing, but like quit using your phone in the theater glowing. So, naturally, the people had him cover his face.

But then notice what Paul does with that. In 14, he moves the veil, the veil isn't over Moses, but over everyone who reads the Bible without faith. Verse 14, **"But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away."**

Then 16, **"but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed."** Until you turn to Christ, you are reading the Bible with a veil over your eyes.

Verse 17, **"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."** Exact same word that James uses. Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty.

This is Paul's point. The difference between the ministry of condemnation and the ministry of righteousness isn't a textual difference. The difference between the law of death and the law of liberty isn't a textual difference. The verbal content is the same.

Everybody here is reading Moses, the first five books of the Bible. Everyone here is reading Exodus. Everybody here is reading Leviticus.

To those who read through faith in Jesus, it is all grace, all life, all liberty, because it all points to Jesus. Because they see Jesus in the word.

To those who read without faith it is all law, all death, all condemnation.

It's not Old Testament versus New. If you read without faith, both Leviticus and Romans are law and death. If you read with faith, both Leviticus and Romans are grace, life, and freedom. If you read without faith, James is law and death. But if you read with faith, James is life and freedom.

Verse 18, **"And we all, with unveiled face,"** The veil has been removed, we can finally see the law for what it is.

"Beholding the glory of the Lord," There it is. The veil has been removed. Now what, what can we finally see in the law that we couldn't see before? The Lord. Finally, we can see Jesus where he has been the whole time.

Without faith, we read Leviticus and it's just a long list of things we must not do, that we have in fact done, and a list of sacrifices to do to atone for our sins that we never stop doing.

With faith, we read Leviticus and we see Jesus. We see Jesus fulfilling the law. We see Jesus as both the lamb that is sacrificed for our sins, and we see him as the high priest who carries the sacrifice into the tabernacle, to atone for our sins by his own blood.

All of the moral purity is fulfilled in him. All of the ceremonial purity is fulfilled in him. All the bloody sacrifices are fulfilled in him. Christ in the law, Christ in the lamb, Christ in the sacrifice, Christ in the priest, Christ in the tabernacle, Christ in the altar. All of it is Jesus. All of it screams our need for a savior, all of it points to the finished work of Jesus Christ, all of it offers him to you through faith.

Back to verse 18, **"and we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."** You're transformed, not by moral effort, not by trying harder, not by better principles or life hacks. You're transformed, little by little, by the power of the Holy Spirit as you see Jesus in the law.

This is the law of liberty. You can go back to James now. This is the law of liberty. It's not about 'what part of the Bible are you reading,' or 'what part of the law are you talking about.' It's about how you read, about how you hear. It's about reading the word through the lens of Jesus Christ. Or better yet, the law of liberty is what happens when the Spirit removes the veil. The law of liberty is what happens when you read in faith, when you hear in faith, and you see Jesus in the word where he has always been.

So, this is the law of liberty. It's the Bible as centered on Jesus Christ, pointing to Jesus Christ, full of Jesus Christ, offering you Jesus Christ, transforming you to be like Jesus Christ, all for the glory of God in Jesus Christ.

This is the law of liberty. It is the law, the word, that sets you free from sin. Both the penalty of sin in guilt, and fear, and shame; and the power of sin. It's the law that sets you free in Jesus Christ to actually walk uprightly. It's the law that breaks your bondage to sin, that breaks your bondage to your passions and habits. It's the law that sets you free to actually live righteously. This is the law of liberty.

This is why James adds on at the end of verse 25, **"he will be blessed in his doing."** The righteous life is the happy life. Righteousness, holiness, godliness, godly wisdom, pure religion, is not what God requires from you as the cost of admission but what he gives you as a gift of his grace.

Your problem, if you have not yet been set free by faith in Christ, your problem is not that you refuse to set aside your sin and turn to God. Your problem is that you can't. You are a slave to sin. Your need is not that you would decide to obey God. Your need is that God would give you faith and set you free – that he would remove the veil and give you liberty.

Pure Religion Described

Ok, that's the first major point, pure religion, godly wisdom, *comes from* gospel transformation. To be a doer of the word means to be transformed by the law of liberty.

Next, we'll get to the second point, how do we recognize true godliness when we see it? James answers this in verses 26 and 27. Pure religion *looks like* self-control, love for neighbor, and love for God.

So, James has just given a call to be a doer of the word. Then here, he gives basically a test, or a series of tests, to see if we actually are doers of the word. What does it look like to be a doer of the word?

First, he says, if you don't have self-control, your religion is worthless – oof. Not really mincing words there. Then second, if you do have love for neighbor and love for God, your religion is pure.

Throughout the Bible we see basically three dimensions of practical righteousness.² Righteousness with regards to yourself: self-control, temperance, self-denial, that whole idea. Righteousness with regard to others: love for neighbor, don't kill, don't lie, remember the poor. Then righteousness with regard to God: love God above all, don't have other gods, don't serve idols.

This is what James is getting at. Pure religion has three practical dimensions: self-control, love for neighbor, and love for God. This is what you are looking for when you're looking for pure religion, practical godliness. Where you see self-control, love for others, and love for God, rooted in faith in Jesus Christ, you see the fruit of gospel transformation.

Now, I want you to notice this. James doesn't just say, "self-control, love for neighbor, and love for God." He says, "bridle the tongue, visit the widow and orphan, and keep yourself unstained from the world."

Why? What is he doing here? Why these three specific points? Basically, what he's doing is putting the most difficult form of each of these three dimensions in front of you.

We have a tendency to want to kind of define godliness down a bit. We want to hold ourselves up against the most flattering standard we can. But James wants us to hold ourselves up against the most demanding standard we can.

We want to say, "pure religion is not killing people, waving politely at your neighbor, and showing up to church most of the time." We want to hold ourselves up against the easiest version of these virtues, but James goes right for the hardest, right for the most complete.

Now, remember what we just talked about. This isn't a law for justification.

The law of liberty sets us free in Christ to strive after true godliness, not second-rate mediocre godliness. Christ himself says, "**You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.**"³

Now, James, in Chapter 3, says, "**we all stumble in many ways.**" No one but Christ himself will ever measure up perfectly to the standard. And yet the standard is still good, the standard is still the goal.

Through faith this standard is life and liberty. Without faith this standard is death and condemnation.

So first, for self-control, James says, "**if anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue... this person's religion is worthless.**" Here he's basically getting at the most difficult aspect of self-control.

He's talking about all the ways that we can use our tongue, use our words to lash out in anger or otherwise tear people down and dishonor God. He's talking about just blowing up and yelling at someone, but also

² One other place where we see these three things together is Titus 2:11-12, "**For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.**" Self-controlled: righteousness with regard to self. Godly: righteousness with regard to God. Upright: the Greek there is *Dikaios*, which is the word usually translated as justice, or righteousness. Primarily referring to justice between people, right dealings with other people.

³ Matthew 5:48.

about condescending judgmental comments, and sarcastic biting remarks, crude joking, foolish cursing, he's talking about the "I'm a cool Christian that cusses a little bit" kind of attitude, all of it, all the ways that sin and worldliness rules in our words.

It's a lot easier to bridle your fists than to bridle your tongue. The man who can bridle his tongue can certainly bridle his fists. And there are a lot of us who have never lashed out physically in anger who often lash out verbally in anger – again, whether that's blowing up, or biting sarcasm, or whatever.

Later, in chapter 3, James says, **"if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body."** If you have the tongue under control, you have total self-control.

Again, this is varsity self-control. James is assuming that all of us will struggle with this to some degree. He's not saying, 'if you don't have perfect self-control, your religion is worthless.' He's not saying that if you ever lose your cool and say something you shouldn't, that proves that you're a hypocrite. No, but he is saying that if your religion doesn't motivate you at all to bridle your tongue, then it is hypocritical religion, worthless religion.

If anger, judgment, bitterness, or sarcasm has free reign on your lips, that's a bad sign. If your religion doesn't make you careful about how you use words then it's worthless – not that you're perfect in this, but that you're careful, that you're fighting the fight.

Then next, love for neighbor. Same idea, he's getting after the varsity level love for neighbor. It's easy to be polite to your neighbor. And you should be. It's easy to be kind to those who are convenient for you and easy to get along with. And you should. It's easy to be kind to those who might be able to repay the kindness someday. But here James puts the most difficult form of neighbor love in front of us. Or at least one of the most difficult.

It's one thing to not steal from someone. That's certainly a form of neighbor love. That's certainly required of you. But it's the apex of neighbor love to go out of your way to sacrifice to meet the needs of those who have no way of repaying the kindness.

The highest neighbor love is also the hardest to fake. When your love for your neighbor looks like sacrificially meeting the needs of the orphan and the widow, that is true, gospel formed neighbor love. That is apex neighbor love.

Then third, James points to the highest and hardest form of love for God. Now this one might need a bit more explaining, but just a bit.

Basically, love for God is at its apex when it is the most costly. Again, it takes a certain love for God to show up to church consistently. It takes a certain love for God to like singing worship songs. It takes a certain love for God to read your Bible regularly, and it takes a certain love for God to pray consistently.

But the test of true love for God is in whether or not you give in to the spirit of the age. The test for love of God is whether or not you get sucked in to the idols of the world around you. Do you love God enough to be distinct from the idols of the age?

James hits this head on in chapter 4, verse 4. **"You adulterous people"** Again, James is not exactly a word-mincer, **"You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."**

The Apostle John says something very similar in one of his letters. First John 2:15-16, **"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world."**

So, apex love for God looks like being distinct, separate, unstained from the world.

There is a thin sort of love for God that is all for religion on Sunday morning but blends right in with the world the rest of the week. Or that has your daily bible-reading time, but then thinks like the world, dresses like the world, talks like the world the rest of the day.

There's a cheap form of love for God that will do your quiet time in the morning, then indulge in bitter rivalries, jealousy, slander and childish cursing just like the world.

This is what Paul calls **"having an appearance of godliness, but denying its power."**⁴

This is the test for your love for God. Does it keep you unstained from the world? And in particular, does your love for God keep you unstained from the idols of *this* generation, not the idols of the last generation. Those are bad too, those are still idols, but those are much easier to avoid, avoiding those is swimming with the tide. Not so much the legalism of the last generation – that's easy to avoid – but the license of this generation. Not the formality of the last generation, but the childishness of this generation. It's easy to think that we're being distinct from the world by rejecting the excesses of generations gone past, when in reality we're just swimming with the current of this age.

So, this is James's test. How do you identify pure religion? How do you know if you're a doer of the word? Do you practice self-control, do you bridle your tongue? Do you love your neighbor, especially the neighbors that need something costly that can't pay you back? Do you love God enough to be distinct from the world?

True holiness, godly wisdom, pure religion, *comes from* gospel transformation, and *looks like* self-control, love for neighbor, and love for God.

Application

First, I think for the third week in a row, make diligent use of the word. Hopefully you've picked up on this, practical godliness is deeply rooted in the word of God. You need to be *more* than a hearer, you need to be more than a reader, but you do need to be a hearer and a reader. So again, get into the word, make diligent use of the word.

But then second, this application is a really tangible way that you can practice sacrificial neighbor love. I want to encourage you to set up a monthly donation to our benevolence fund.

Back when we did giving during the service, once a month we would pass a second plate specifically for benevolence – for meeting tangible, financial needs in our community. Ever since we switched to giving online we don't do that anymore. But there are still benevolence needs in Ames.

On the giving page on our website there are several options on the drop-down menu for where to designate your gift. There's the operating fund, that's just normal giving to the church, there's the missions fund, and there's the benevolence fund.

I want to encourage you to set up a recurring, monthly donation to the benevolence fund. Could be \$5 a month, could be \$20 a month, could be \$100 a month, however the Lord leads, and however you are able.

0% of that goes toward the operating budget. 0% of that goes towards the pastors. 100% of that goes towards meeting tangible needs – first for those in our own church, but then also for those around us as we're able.

The Bible is emphatic that Christians should be sacrificing to meet the tangible needs of the poor. So, let me encourage you to set up a regular, recurring, monthly contribution to meet financial needs as way to be obedient to Jesus in a disciplined way a little bit every month.

And when you do become aware of a need – say your neighbor needs help paying for groceries because he lost his job – you can come talk to the elders, or talk to Troy, he runs the benevolence ministry, and we'll see what we can do. If we have the funds already set aside, that's a much simpler conversation.

My dream is that we would have enough in that fund to not only meet needs as they come up in the church, and not only meet needs as they come up in the community around us, but even to have enough left over

⁴ 2 Timothy 3

at the end of the year to pass along to some of the benevolence focused ministries in town like Bridge Home, or Obria, that are doing this kind of work.

Religion that is pure and undefiled meets tangible needs. Religion that is pure and undefiled sacrifices our resources for those who can't pay us back, because Jesus sacrificed his life for those who can't pay him back.

Setting up a small recurring donation like this is one way that you can be proactive and disciplined in offering relief for the poor.

Pure religion comes from gospel transformation, and looks like self-control, love for neighbor, and love for God.

Lord's Supper

Today we will celebrate the Lord's Supper. This is what we're talking about. Everything we're talking about comes from this.

Christ's body broken for us, and Christ's blood shed for us.

There is no pure religion without this. His body is our bread from heaven, and his blood cleanses us and makes us white as snow.

Everything flows from this. Pure religion is not a self-driven effort to do better and try harder. Pure religion is seeing Jesus Christ, confessing your sins, receiving the Holy Spirit to walk in newness of life.

Pure religion is being fed and nourished by the sacrifice of Christ, transformed by the resurrection of Christ, led by the Spirit of Christ. Pure religion is not 'try harder and have self-control, do better and give to the poor, be better and stop being worldly.' No, pure religion says, 'come to Christ, die to sin in his death, and be raised to newness of life in his resurrection.'