



Using God's mirror to inspect your life.

Main Point: We have recognised the importance of building walls of protection around our heart and mind. We also learnt how God's enemy opposes us. This week, we see how Nehemiah urged God's people to return to hearing God's law. James also teaches us that it is not sufficient simply to 'hear' God's word, we must also obey it and apply it in our lives.

Intro | We are up to part 3 of Nehemiah's diary. For three months Nehemiah and the Israelites spent their days securing one stone upon the other, fighting enemies, day in day out working through the hot sun. Finally, just 52 days after the work commenced – the wall was finally finished.

When the surrounding nations heard about it "they were frightened and humiliated" (6:16), for they realised "*the work had been done with the help of our God!*" (6:16)

Now, however, we begin to see that building the wall was not Nehemiah's overall goal. The job hadn't finished yet. Although, the external work had finished, the real internal work hadn't even started.

Let us open our Bibles to Nehemiah, chapter 8,

Verse 2, "*On October 8 Ezra the priest brought the Book of the Law before the assembly, which included the men and women and all the children old enough to understand. ³ He faced the square just inside the Water Gate from early morning until noon and read aloud to everyone who could understand. All the people listened closely to the Book of the Law.*" (Nehemiah 8:2-3)

With the reading of the law, a time of celebration and festivities began, which continued for seven days.

But on the eighth day, a solemn assembly was called. For three hours they listened to the Law of God, then, "*they remained standing for three more hours confessing their sins and worshipping the LORD their God.*" (9:3)

Nehemiah, with Ezra and the priests, called God's people to return to worship him alone, reminding them to live the way God had originally instructed them.

When they heard God's law, it showed them of how far their lives had wandered from doing things the way God commanded. And it stirred in each a decision to obey God's law again.

It is not hard to see how we too can apply this in our lives.

When we hear the term 'God's law' or the 'Law of Moses' we can understand it as God's right way of living.

In our Psalm today we read,

*⁷ The instructions of the LORD are perfect, reviving the soul.
The decrees of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.*

⁸ *The commandments of the LORD are right, bringing joy to the heart.
The commands of the LORD are clear, giving insight for living. (verse 7-8)*

And in verse 11,

"They are a warning to your servant, a great reward for those who obey them."

Point 1 | God's law (way of doing things and being right) will confront areas of our life which need changing

Even as we move into the New Testament, the same concentration on studying and meditating on God's Word is given. In fact, God's Word is referred to as the only solid pathway upon which to journey through life.

For example, when Paul wrote to his protégé, Timothy, he told him,

"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right."(1 Timothy 3:16)

Let me repeat that last verse, God's Word *"correct us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right."*

So, if we want to understand who we really are, and the areas of our life that need changing – we go to God's Word.

If we want to know the areas of our life which need repentance – we go to God's Word.

If we want to know the areas of our life in which God's grace is evident – we go to God's Word.

The way we understand ourselves and who we are before God, is by meditating and reflecting on the Word of God.

Point 2 | God's word of truth is the only mirror through which to evaluate who we are, providing the only true reflection of our status before God.

I'd like us to go to the book of James, back to Chapter 2. There is a picture which James provides which I feel is very helpful for us today.

²²But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. ²³For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. ²⁴You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. ²⁵But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it."(James 1:22-25)

Let's go through this verse slowly because the truth contained in these verses is starkly different from the deceptive message we hear promoted in our world today.

I'm sure, this morning, it did not take long after getting out of bed for you to glance at yourself in the mirror. (Now, I am well aware that staying inside the safety of our homes has meant our need to be presentable to others has not been such a priority. Nevertheless, I'm sure you glance at the mirror before stepping out your front door.)

Why do we look in a mirror?

Perhaps we want to check that we still look the same as we did when we last checked – that no new wrinkle has suddenly appeared overnight!

Or we may want to check that the sore we have on our face is healing.

Or I may look in the mirror to make sure I haven't put lipstick all over my teeth! If so, I can quickly correct it before I go out in public!

We use a mirror to see parts of ourselves that we cannot see on our own.

In our world today there are many different types of mirrors people use through which to inspect or analyse their lives.

Some use the mirror of public opinion – what the media or the general public is likely to say about them – and they'll change their behaviour to gain more popularity.

Some use the mirror of a specific worldview or religion – studying its teachings to gauge if they are living their life in the right and proper way.

Some use the mirror of their own self-consciousness – looking within themselves for the answers for their questions in life, then determine that they alone can decide what is right or wrong.

But each of these worldly mirrors are fogged up and dirty, giving a distorted reflection and therefore, they only lead to deception.

James writes that there is only one mirror worth looking into – that is God's Word.

But there is more involved than just glancing at God's Word, or haphazardly reading a few verses each day.

James tells us that we need to "look carefully into the perfect law".

To 'look carefully' is like leaning in towards the mirror for a closer look. It means that we look with the intention of putting into action what we've just read.

So, we if happen to read something in God's word that indicates our behaviour is contrary to how God reveals is the right way to live, we are prepared to acknowledge it as sin, repent and determine in our heart to change our behaviour in that area.

That's what James calls 'looking intently into the mirror of God's Word'.

Most Christians don't read God's Word that way.

Most Christians read God's word like the person James describes.

They take a quick glance at a few verses, and then happily go their way doing what they want to do.

They think, 'I've done my duty, I've read my Bible. Let's get back to the real world.'

Christians who behave this way have conformed themselves to the pattern of this world. They have placed themselves and their way of thinking, as their primary source of authority on how to live their life, believing themselves to be more reliable than God's Word.

What James is saying is, "if you read the Word of God and you do not feel any challenge or conviction about some area of your life, then it is like you are looking in the mirror and see a huge splotch of dirt on your cheek, but instead of admitting it needs to be cleaned off, you shrug your shoulders and say 'Oh, well, so what. I don't care what I look like!'" Or you may say "actually I like walking around with dirty smeared all over my face – it makes me an individual!"

That's an accurate example of the dominant attitude of the world.

Most people in the world don't care what the Word of God says about their lives.

Even if you showed them an aspect of their lives that doesn't align with God's right way of behaving, they will shrug their shoulders and say, 'So what! I am who I am, and I will do what I want to do, when I want to do it.'

Instead of looking intently into the Word of God, they are looking intently into their own reflection, and only see the flaws they WANT to see, rather than the flaws that are glaringly obvious to everyone else!

Point 3 | God's Word of Truth is the only source of freedom from the bondage of sin which holds us captive.

That is why we need the mirror of God's Word, which James calls the 'perfect law of freedom'.

James tells us, *"if you do what [God's word] says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it."*(v25)

Freedom comes not just through reading God's Word, but by daily applying it into our lives and obeying its instructions as the Spirit of God convicts our hearts.

It is our responsibility to look intently into God's Word with the intention of changing our behaviour when the Spirit of God convicts us.

That's why James wrote, *"get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the Word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls."*(James 1:21)

Living life guided by the Spirit of Christ always brings freedom.

Jesus said in John chapter 8, *"If you continue in my word, you really are my disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free,"*(John 8:31b-32).

Through Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in our heart we have been, and are being, set free from the bondage of sin and death. Jesus set us free to love Him and be obedient to His Word. As we look intently into God's Word each day, we are empowered by the Spirit of God to put into action the convictions the Spirit of God illuminates in our heart.

Application | How to find freedom through the perfect law of liberty

Every time you read God's Word ask yourself four questions:

- What do I learn about God?
- What do I learn about humanity?
- Is there an example in the passage I am to follow?
- Is there a command in the passage I am to obey?

Let us ask the Spirit of God to make us 'intent lookers' into God's perfect law of liberty, especially at this time when so many are indifferent to God's truth.

Then our lives will shine brightly, and we will be the 'word with skin on', especially to those who would never even dream of opening a Bible.

Discussion and Reflection Questions

Some suggested resources for reading God's word would be any contemporary translation of the Bible, such as *New International Version, The Living Translation, The Contemporary English Version*, or the *New Revised Standard Version* are helpful. I have attached a "Read the Bible in a year" schedule which can be used.

For those who are technically savvy (or struggle with reading):

The Audio Bible is a helpful resource (again choose a modern-day translation).

The Visual Bible is available for those who like to 'watch' God's word and 'hear' it at the same time.

Bible.is is an audio enhanced version of the Bible where background noises are added to add context with different voices used for different characters.

Read Scripture is an app which you can read portions of Scripture each day with a short video explaining the overview of the book or themes as you progress.

The Australian Lectionary – breaks the entire Bible into daily readings over a three year time period.

If you need assistance reading your Bible, or listening to it, please let me know.