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Title: *Quick & Slow*

Scripture: James 1:19-21

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Hello, folks. Good morning. It's not Buffalo. That's all I got to say. It's a great morning because it's not Buffalo because they are under, I think, 17 feet of snow at the moment. So, the sun's out. It's Pittsburgh. It's a miracle. Let's get to it this morning. My name is not Kurt Bjorklund. And Kurt Bjorklund is away this weekend. He is our senior pastor here at Orchard Hill Church. And so, today you're stuck with me. But I did bring out Kurt's trademark stand right here. So, he is not with us physically today, but he is with us in furniture. So, you know, Kurt, we remember you and we miss you and come back soon. Until then, hold my water.

But I want to spend some time kind of letting you guys get a chance to know me a little bit. You know, again, we get the blessing and the privilege to sit under Kurt's teaching almost every week. And it is such a blessing. Kurt is one of the reasons that when I was interviewing here, thinking about coming to work for Orchard Hill, getting a chance to meet him, hear his heart, see how he approaches the Word of God and how he has a vision for ministry in a church here in Pittsburgh area. I was so excited to work alongside him. And so, it is a privilege. But we'll see if you say the same thing after I'm done this morning.

But since I'm not up here a lot, you don't get to know a lot about me and so I thought I would share a little bit about myself and help you get to know me. I am still extremely out of breath from carrying this thing from there to here. Man, I did not anticipate that. Give me a sec. Okay. But I want to share a little bit with you and here's why I think it's going to help set up kind of the direction of where we hope to go with the time that we have left this morning.

And so, first off, I've been married for 13 years to my wife, Lindsay. Yes. Thank you very much. We've got four kids. You can see them on the screen up here. This is a picture of us right outside the church right before KidsFest kicked off this summer. That's our oldest, Peyton. She's 12 years old. She's in middle school. So, please pray for me as often as you think. If you've got middle schoolers or ever had them, you're like, yes, Lord, we pray for that man. But to the left in red is our second. That's Addison. She'll be ten in December. That's our one and only boy right there. He's got a lot on his shoulders with a house full of girls. That's Bennett. He's seven. And then the feisty one down there with the pose. That's our youngest. That's the baby. That's Avery. She'll come into the story later today.

You know, my wife and I moved here to Pittsburgh and started working at Orchard Hill back in 2015. But both my wife and I are from Toledo, Ohio. And I've got a picture of Toledo, Ohio, for you guys to see. Check this out. That's Toledo. And I didn't know what to show. Toledo has nothing to offer, and really the only time people visit Toledo is to get to a better city. And so, I just thought I'd show the turnpike. Chicago and 475 take you to Detroit.

But in Toledo, I came to know the Lord. I began a relationship with Christ the summer after my sophomore year of high school. And if you're like, we want to see that. Here you go. There I am. Yes, I used to have hair, and yes, I used to dye the tips because I wanted to be Justin Timberlake. I admit that to all of you right now. And that's forever etched in your brain. You're welcome.

But I met the Lord the summer after my sophomore year through a ministry called Young Life, and that was where I heard the gospel message for the first time. And it captivated my heart in such a way that my life was forever changed at that moment.

And then, you know, some of my favorite things, we all have our favorite things. Some of my favorite things include sports. I love watching sports. I love playing sports. I'm noticing that I'm tending to do more watching than playing these days as I look at my physique and realize how out of breath I was just from carrying this podium six feet. I love coffee. I love smoked brisket. I love tiramisu. I love good, clean, standup comedy. My favorite comedian is a guy named Nate Bargatze. If you don't know who that is or you don't have anything to do because the Steelers don't play till four and you've got a window after church, go home. He's got two specials on Netflix. I promise you will be crying with laughter as you watch those.

And my all-time favorite TV show, I think it's the greatest show of all time, period. There's a show called The Office. The Office is my favorite TV show and I want to talk to you for a moment. I want to try to describe my favorite scene from this show. It's found in season five, episode 14, where Dwight, the guy in the background in the mustard shirt, one of the main characters, he's in the suit. As the show opens up, Dwight is very upset because no one in the office paid attention to his most recent fire safety presentation.

And so, Dwight decides to take matters into his own hands and mock a real-life fire. He actually starts a fire in the office setting to see what the office people will do. And needless to say, as you can imagine, if you've ever worked in an office setting, all chaos breaks loose when the fire is noticed because each character in the show is unique and everything about them, and they all go about how they think that they should attack this fire or try to survive this fire.

And within a matter of minutes, all chaos has broken loose. And I cannot stand up here and try to describe with words how funny the 5 minutes of television that this is. It is worth going home and watching. But just when it seems like all hope is lost and every character has just given up and they are just ready to die in this office, Dwight stands up on his desk and starts to blast an air horn. And then he starts to scream. Attention, attention, employees of Dunder Mifflin. There is no actual fire. This was all a test. And you all failed.

And I share this story of my favorite scene from *The Office* because I do think that as we begin to look at the text today, what we find in James chapter one verses 19 through 21, helps set the tone of urgency, of which James is writing to each one of us, just like Dwight got up on that desk and blew an air horn to draw the attention in.

Among the chaos from the employees, James is now in this text, standing up on his desk, blowing an air horn, saying, attention, attention, attenders and members, and those who have walked in or tuned into Orchard Hill. Listen, I have something very important to tell you. We know this because as we begin to look at our text in James 1:19, James starts it off this way. "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this..."

In the original language, and the ESV translation of this has the word there that James would have said know, KNOW, with an exclamation point on it. This is James standing up in front of all of us saying, attention, know, listen, air horn. I have something very important that I need to tell you guys. You need to lean in. What I am about to say is of a dear, urgent, importance. And so, the question that we have got to ask ourselves is, what is it that James is going to say next? Because James is saying it's important.

So, I know we just had an awesome worship set, but go ahead and elbow the person next to you or make sure that they're awake and paying attention. Go ahead, lean in, and take a sip of that coffee. Let it kick in the system, and let's get at this because you see, we need to look at what James is going to say next.

And thankfully, I've got some time up here. I don't have to stand up here and give a one-minute sermon, although some of you are like, please do. I got things to do today. I don't have to get up here and try to summarize all of this in one sentence. But if you put that challenge in front of me, I came prepared.

What James has got to say here with such urgency, his importance, can be summed up in what we're going to call today our big idea. And that big idea is that genuine faith in Jesus Christ is going to require us to consistently take a quick and slow

approach to God's Word. Again, the big idea that we're going to tackle today and look at with the help of James is genuine faith is going to require us to consistently take a quick and slow approach to God's word.

And to help unpack this big idea together, again, by looking at James and with his help, we're going to look to do the best we can to answer two questions. Those two big questions are: What does a quick and slow approach to God's word mean? And, how does this impact our relationship with both God and others? So, as we jump into God's word today, would you guys join me in a moment of prayer?

Lord, thank you. Thank you for your word. Thank you for your son, Jesus Christ. Thank you for all your help. Thank you for technology that even if we can't physically be here together as a church family, we can tune in online. Lord, we ask that you would speak and reach into the hearts of each one of us here today and allow us to hear you and know you in a way that we didn't when we walked through the doors or we tuned in. We ask this in your precious name. Amen.

I think before we really dive into James and by looking at only three verses in his book, I think it will also help us if we just establish a little bit of a baseline context for the Book of James. I'll start off easy. The Book of James was written by a guy named, well, James. You guys are doing great. A-plus. But this is not, if you know anything about the story of Jesus's life, he had 12 close disciples, one of them was named James, and this is not that James. This James is a different James.

This James is Jesus's half-brother. And then you're going, well, what does that mean? Well, let me help you out. If you don't know your Bible history, that's okay. Joseph is not Jesus's father. God is. If you read the story of Scripture, you know God through the works of the Holy Spirit. Mary gave birth as the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. And so, Joseph is not Jesus's biological father, but Mary and Joseph did go on to get married and have other children. One of them was James, making him Jesus's half-brother.

So, that's who's writing the book of James, Jesus's half-brother. Another thing you have to understand about James is who he is writing to because that's important. James is writing to existing believers or Christians. Now, if you find yourself here this morning or tuning in and you would say that I don't know if I would label myself a Christian or a believer, that's okay. James has plenty to say to you today as well.

But James in this text is exclusively writing to those who have put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. So, this would have been those who have already heard the good news of the Gospel message, received it into their hearts, or have chosen to put their

faith and hope in the saving works of Jesus Christ and are looking to live their life out in a way that would bring glory to God. And that's who James is writing to.

And it's important to establish that the overall theme of the five books found in James is that of spiritual maturity, what it should look like for a Christian to live out their faith on a daily basis. And again, I say it's important to kind of understand a little bit of baseline context, the book, and what James is doing here because he is again assuming and already speaking in the things that he is hoping to be established. A relationship with Jesus is one of them, an understanding of Scripture, God's Word, who Jesus is and what Christ has done for us would have already been not just known, welcomed, and believed by this group, but trusted and personal to this audience.

And so, with that in mind, let's start trying to answer with the time that we have left our two questions, starting with what does a quick and slow approach to God's word mean? And let's start again by looking at verse 19 in James. "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry..."

So, what do quick and slow mean? James gives us three things, one quick and two slows. And he starts by saying, everyone. This was the thing that he's saying is of extreme importance. Listen up. Pay attention. Know this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

When he says quick to listen in just those three words, I want you to understand what he was saying. This was another way that we would say today to someone, be quick to hear or hurry up and listen. And with James, when he uses the word listen in the original language, he is implying not just sitting and listening, but also a sense of active listening.

Otherwise, when James says to be quick to listen, he's saying not just listen, but know that you are to respond. You are to be active, and ready to obey. Whatever you hear, comes next. As Christians, we know the truth of who Jesus Christ is, and we know that the truth, what Jesus Christ has done, has set us free from our sins.

James is now saying that we should be quick to run towards God's Word, quick to open it, quick to listen to it, quick to trust it, quick to obey it, and quick to do what it says. Because again, as believers, we know whose words are found in here, and they are not foreign to us, but they are from God, our good, good Father. So, we should be quick to listen.

He then goes on to say, we should now be slow to speak. Simply what James is trying to say here, this means that we should be very slow to speak, but when we do, we should do it with humility and patience, not with harsh words or nonstop jibber jabber.

And again, what James is trying to communicate here is a point in the Old Testament that Solomon also speaks to. If you don't know who Solomon is, he's a character found in the New Testament. The Bible tells us that he was the wisest man that ever lived. He was the wisest man because God said, hey, if I could give you one thing, what would I give you? And Solomon asked for wisdom, and so God gave it to him.

And here's what Solomon says in the Book of Proverbs. He says when words are many, sin is not absent. But he who holds his tongue is wise. And the point that James is trying to make here by saying slow to speak, the point that Solomon is partnering up against and saying where words are many, sin is very present.

And when the wise people keep their mouths shut, when they approach God's word, another guy, another commentator, reflected and said this, "When we talk too much and listen too little, we communicate to God or others that we think our ideas are much more important than God's or others."

David Platt, a well-known pastor and author, puts it this way when he reflects on this truth. "Don't we often approach God's word talking and not listening? Don't we often come to God's word thinking to ourselves, here is what I want it to say? Don't we often come to God's word looking to justify ourselves? We're often like the people in an argument who aren't really listening to one another, but instead, we're consumed with formulating in our heads what we're going to say next. Having no idea what they just said. We are not quick to hear and slow to speak, but loathe to listen and anxious to argue."

We often hear a verse or look at scripture and start to think to ourselves, okay, how am I going to get around that one today? That is what James is saying. Pay attention. If you call yourself a Christ follower, you need to be slow to speak and quick to listen. And then he says, slow to become angry. And we're going to spend a little bit more time talking about anger when we look at verse 20. But it shouldn't take a doctorate level education or a NASA astronaut to put together that when you look at someone quick to talk and slow to listen, then naturally anger would be something that would follow.

I mean, this makes sense. If you've ever been in any type of human relationship that you know to exist, where this is true, where the other person is constantly talking over you and never, ever listening to you, what do you naturally become towards them? Angry, frustrated, and annoyed. That relationship is never, ever going to achieve what it was meant to, not at least in a healthy way.

And so, when we approach God's word this way, why do we not expect the same result? When we approach God's word and we are not quick to listen, we are fast to talk over it when we want to speak into God's word and try to say what we want it to say, and then say something different. We are going to naturally become angry towards God's Word. And anger has a way of closing off our hearts and our minds toward who God is, especially His Word.

So, now that we've tried to at least briefly answer our first question of what a quick and slow approach to God's word means, or at least what it doesn't mean, let's now try to tackle our second question. How does it impact our relationships with both God and others?

Let's look now at James verse 20. Again, he says in verse 19, "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry..." But then in verse 20, he says, "...because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires." Human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

So, God has a desire for us. He wants to produce in us righteousness. And that's a pretty big word. That's a lot of syllables in there. Someone do the clapping thing for me to know how many that is. Righteousness is something that we have to grasp. And I would encourage you, if you don't know what that is, this is where I would say it's okay to go home and Google it because you can find a ton of trusted Christian resources and websites that will walk you through a basic understanding of what righteousness is.

But here is what God desires to produce in us that anger will rob us of experiencing. The Bible's standard of human righteousness is God's own perfection in every attribute, every attitude, every behavior, and every word. Thus, God's law as given in the Bible both describes His character and the constitute, the plumb line by which he measures human righteousness.

And if you look at the original Greek, the word for righteousness primarily describes conduct as it relates to business matters, and legal issues, at the beginning of our relationships with God. So, the contrast, the opposite of this, if that's what

righteousness is, the opposite of righteousness would be this wickedness, the conduct of one who out of gross self-centeredness neither reveres God nor respects man.

So, it's important to understand a few things about righteousness. Again, airhorn, pay attention. Here's the bad news. We'll start with the bad news. First, the bad news about righteousness, about perfect righteousness is that it is impossible for man, for you and I to obtain it on our own. The standard according to Scripture is just too high.

But now the good news. The good news is that when I heard this for the first time entering my junior year of high school, it rocked my world. It forever changed what I knew to be true about God, about Christ, about me, and who I am. And it's this good news that righteousness is possible for mankind, but only through the cleansing of sin by Jesus Christ, and through the work of the Holy Spirit.

You see, the good news is that we have no ability to achieve righteousness on our own and of ourselves. But Christians possess the righteousness of Christ because God made Him Jesus who knew no sin to become sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God. That's Second Corinthians five, verse 21, and this is an amazing truth. Again, the truth, Jesus, that sets us free. The amazing truth is that on the cross, Jesus exchanged our sins for His perfect righteousness so that we can one day stand before God, and He will not see our sins but He will see His Son.

This means that we were made righteous in the sight of God. That is, we are to accept this righteousness and treat it as righteousness by God's account, given to us as a free gift. Jesus was made sin. We were made righteous on the cross. Jesus was treated as if He was the sinner, even though He was perfect and holy, and we become treated as righteous. Even though you and I are the ones that are so broken and sinful, we have received this precious gift of righteousness from a God who is nothing but full of grace and mercy. And that's the point. That's the thing that James is leaning in, saying, wherever you are in your faith journey, lean in, and listen closely.

When we are slow to listen to God's Word and when we are quick to talk over God's word, we become angry at God's word and anger closes our hearts and our minds off towards God's truth. And when we are raging against the truth, James tells us that there is no room for righteousness to do its good work in us. And when we approach God's word this way, it quickly and naturally becomes how we start to approach God and others as well. In everything about us, our attributes, our attitude, our behavior, our words, our conduct, and even our actions no longer reflect God's righteousness and instead communicate self-centeredness, wickedness, harshness, anger, and uncontrolled responses. This is what James is saying is so important.

And now, as we look to try to say, how are we going to apply that to our lives today? Let me just also state something. What I'm explaining, it's important, but the reality is it's very hard to do. I know this to be true, because when Kurt asked me a while ago to speak on the weekend of November 19th and 20th, I was like, absolutely, I would love to. Are we going to be in a series? No, this is what we call in the church business a one-off message. You can talk about whatever you want.

I was like, oh, okay. But then I've always had this kind of discipline where if I ever get a chance to do a one-off message, I don't want to try to come up with something. I don't want to try to borrow from something I've done in the past. I'm going to take that opportunity to just talk about whatever it is I'm learning as I work through God's Word in my own personal time. Whatever God is putting in me. So, for a while now, I've been reading through the Book of James. I remember coming across this passage and I was like, ooh, be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

That sounds like a great idea to do towards other people. I'm going to start small, though. I'm going to sample size. I'm just going to try to be that to my wife and kids. How long do you think I lasted? Why are you laughing? It's not funny. I didn't last very long. I mean, maybe a matter of hours. Just that day, fresh out of the Word of God. Oh, I'm great. Look at me. I screwed it up. And I had this moment where I was like, gosh, this is a lot harder than I thought.

And I was still in the Book of James as part of my discipline, and I was reading through it multiple times. It's only five chapters. It's not that hard, even for someone as educated as me. And when I got to it again, I realized something that James was not necessarily talking about. We should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry towards other people, although there's a lot of truth and value to that. And everyone, if you're married in this room, is looking at your spouse like you should definitely do that. But that's not what James was pointing at.

He was saying that before you can ever become quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry towards others, you first have to start doing that with the word of God. Because it's only the word of God who's going to be able to do a work in you that is outside of your control. That begins to change your heart from the inside out through the righteous production of God in you, and you will only ever be able to start to exemplify this in your life outside.

So, I know that this is important, but I know that in reality, this is hard. And that's why James says what he says next. In verse 19, he says, remember, take note, pay

attention. "...be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires." And here's what James says next. He says, "Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you."

He says if this is really what you want to be about, if you want to actually learn to approach God's word in such a way like this, you've got to do something. You have got to get rid of the sin in your life. And when he says to get rid; this is where the Scripture kind of gets fun. He's using word pictures that would have been again, the original audience in the original language, the audience would have picked up on these right away. When James says get rid, that's a word used to describe a picture of someone taking off a heavy dirty coat or stripping off or putting off raggedy clothes.

I want to tell you a story. You guys remember COVID, right? Do you remember quarantine? Remember this was what happened right after the quarantine was over and life was kind of slowly getting back to normal. And this was like the first outing that my family and I were going to do, and I'm like, we've got to get out of here. Where are we going to go? Let's go eat somewhere. Where are we going to go eat? Where we haven't been in a really long time? What do you think we said? Let's go to Eat n' Park.

So we go, and we're the only family in the whole restaurant. We're in the back corner booth. This is after church one Saturday night. And the waiter who comes to our table, he right away tells us, like, hey, welcome to Eat n' Park. This is my first day. I've never worked here before. This is my first time ever in Wexford. I really hope to do a good job. I'm like, you're going to be great. This is going to be awesome. The standards are low. This is the first time we've been out in years.

So, I need you to understand what happened here, okay? The waiter brings our drinks, and then he says, hey, what can I get you? I had looked at my five-year-old Avery. I saw her. She's right there in the booth, and the time it took for me to look at my menu for 2 seconds, look up at the waiter and go, I think I'll have... when I looked up at our waiter, his face was white. He was communicating that something was not right. And it was behind me.

And so, in the matter of time that it took me as Avery's father to look at my menu for one last time and look up at the waiter, somehow, Avery had stripped off all of her clothes and was standing shirtless in the booth having the time of her life. It's almost as if we hadn't been out in society for years. Turns out we hadn't. My kids have been raised in a setting where they didn't know how to act in public because at home, for the last 18 months that was acceptable at the dinner table.

I mean it was like Avery, have you ever seen the movie Bruce Almighty, where you are just like, poof, clothes off? We laugh at that, and we should because it was a super funny story except for the waiter. I think he quit after that. But that is the sense of urgency of James saying if you want to go after God's word, be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

James is saying, then you need to get rid of the sin in your life as fast as you can. And I'm talking about the sin that you can identify that you know darn well isn't good for you, that you know isn't bringing God glory. I get that there is sin in our lives that is heavy and it is real and it is complicated and it's addicting.

And we need outside help. We need the work of the Holy Spirit. We need the transformational truth of Jesus' death on the cross and fighting off that sin. We need other people. We need accountability. We need counseling. We need a lot of help to get rid of our sins.

But James is saying, do whatever you have to do that is in your control, and what you can't control you need to be running towards God's word, praying and asking him to do a miracle in you so that you can get rid of the sin.

Another story I'll share is right after this, James says, get rid of all moral filth. And again, the fun word picture here in the original language, when James says the word moral filth, was a word that was originally used to reference earwax back in the day.

And I'm not a doctor if you have been able to tell. I know that earwax serves a good purpose, but in this setting, it's a negative side of earwax where he's saying sin, a known sin in your life, is like too much earwax in your ear. And if you try to approach God's word quick to listen, if you've got sin in your life that you are choosing to ignore or try to work around, it's like saying you can't hear God's word.

I said that I originally came here in 2015, and I started in Student Ministry. I actually can see some of my former students in the crowd. In Student Ministry, I had a huge role to play in KidsFest. This is our summer-long vacation Bible School on steroids. And we had this idea one summer.

On the last day of the week, there was a scavenger hunt. We wanted campers to dig through inflatable pools filled with different things like corn, sand, and stuff to find these hidden objects that somehow you could trade in to beat the bad guy. I don't

remember that part that well, but I had this idea of, you know, it would be really cool if we got a pool full of orbeez and campers could dig through orbeez.

And if you don't know what orbeez are, I am going to help you out here. So, orbeez are like those little squishy ball things that you see everywhere. That's actually what a million orbeez in a pool looks like. And I said, hey before we do this with campers, we should probably test this on humans.

And so, I thought of the best lab rats I could, my children. So, there they are. And I was like, kids, go have fun. Let's see if this works. They're having fun. You can go to the next picture. There you go. That's my oldest at the time. She's having the time of her life.

You also need to know this about me. I'm a huge child at heart. It did not take very long for me to, poof, my clothes and jump in the pool with them. And I got to tell you, it was amazing. It was like, we're definitely doing this at KidsFest. Well, a couple of hours go by, and I'm sitting at home trying to get my quick to listen on with the Word of the Lord.

And I'm like, something is off. Something is going on in my ear. I can't hear anything. I'm deaf as a doornail. I think that's how the saying goes. And I'm like, honey, come here. Look at my ear. And my wife walks over and sure enough, she goes, Russ, the inside of your ear is blue. I think you got an orbeez stuck in your ear.

I was like, what? So, I did the only thing we ever do when there's a medical situation instead of seeking professional help. I Googled it on the Internet right away. It was like, you're in trouble because orbeez, the way that they're designed is the longer that they sit in a compressed, wet environment, they will just continue to expand.

Yeah, I'm like, my head's about to blow off. I'm going to die from an orbeez. And so, it was like I got to get to the hospital. I drove to the urgent care and they were like, what's wrong with you? I got an orbeez stuck in my ear. Hurry, I'm going to die.

And they're like, what? What's an orbeez? I was trying to explain it. I showed them my phone. And so, here's what they do. This is a picture of it. They saved my life using a Star Wars lightsaber. That was the smallest lightsaber I've ever seen. But she was able to scoop in and get this orbeez out. And as soon as she did it, it was like a night and day difference. I was hearing birds chirping as I'd never heard before. I was hearing people coughing, and I actually was like I love to hear the sound of sickness in this room.

And again, we laugh. But that's what James is saying, that when we have sin in our lives that we are purposely ignoring, we cannot approach God's word and still be quick to listen because it's going to block it out. And finally, he says that we are to get rid of all moral filth and sin and evil that's so popular and well-accepted in the world. And we need to humbly accept the Word of God.

Jesus tells us a parable in Matthew 13 about a farmer scattering seeds, and the seed falls on four different things. It falls on the path. It falls on rocky areas. It falls on crowded areas and falls on good soil. And only the seed that fell on good soil, a heart, is a parable. So, the good soil is a parable of a heart ready to receive, quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. In any other setting, it's not going to work out. Righteousness is not going to be produced, Jesus says.

So today, this week, this month, this season, what is the state of your heart towards the Word of God? James is saying, pay attention, listen up. If your heart is on the path, the rocks, or the thorns, the only approach that you have to change is to start to approach God's Word quick and slow.

And I'll close with this. I said earlier that I'm a huge basketball fan, so I grew up watching Michael Jordan, Kobe Bryant, and LeBron James and having those arguments. And we won't get into that today, although I have an answer that I know is right. But a few years ago, Kobe Bryant passed away from a horrible helicopter accident.

And at his funeral, Michael Jordan gave a speech. And at the end of the speech, Jordan is just balling, but he says this. He says, he, talking about Kobe, used to call me, and text me 11:30 at night, 2:30-3:00 in the morning, just wanting to talk about post-up footwork and sometimes even the triangle offense, which if you don't know, basketball, ignore that part.

This kid, he said, had passion like you would never know. It then goes on to say, it's an amazing thing about passion. If you love something, if you have a strong passion for something, you will go to the extreme to try to understand it and get it. When I heard Jordan say that, immediately I thought of this text.

And for a moment, I want to speak to any folks who would simply identify as nonbelievers or still on the fence or questioning faith. Or if you're there, I want you to know something. It's an amazing thing about passion, and it helps you understand this passion that God has for you. Don't forget who James is in this story. As the writer

of James, remember, James was the half-brother of Jesus. And as a brother, if you've ever had a sibling, you know that your brothers and sisters, your family, know more about you than anyone else.

You can't hide from them because when you go home, you share a room, you share a bathroom, you share a toothbrush, maybe. I don't know what your family's like, but James knew everything about Jesus, and it took a long time, at least from what we've been able to put together historically. It took a long time for James to finally humbly believe and accept Jesus for who he was as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

But if you think about it, if there was ever one person who could have challenged Jesus's truth, it would have been his half-brother. If there was ever one person who could have said, you know what, I question or I challenge this about Jesus, I remember as a kid he said this or he did this, or I watched and he was one way in public, but man, at home, punk. James would have been that guy.

But we see later in the Book of Acts, a scene described in the upper room in which the resurrected Jesus now stands before James. And at that moment, James sees experiences and feels the extreme passion that God has towards each one of us, that He would be willing to do anything.

It took even something extreme, like sending his one and only son to pay the price of your sin so that you can be forgiven and be restored to a relationship with God like you were created and designed from the beginning. And while all of us are running around trying to find life, scripture says life is only found in one place and that place is the name of Jesus Christ.

And so, I encourage you, if you're on the fence, if you're not sure about faith, even though James is saying be quick and slow to approach God's word, if you're a believer, I'm asking you to be quick to approach God's word, too, and get to know who Jesus Christ is. See for yourself if what any of us believers here are saying is true. But don't base it on us. Base it on the evidence here of who Christ is, because you will see who Christ is as who God is. And God loves you so deeply and passionately that He would anything for you to know Him and for him to be known by you.

And if you're a believer in this room, I want to challenge you with this. It's an amazing thing about passion, and it's a passion that you have known to be true, that you've accepted. I'm not saying it's always easy. It's hard to live out your faith. It's hard. Life is complicated. Sin is real. But you know, the extreme lengths that God went to demonstrate his love towards you, and may you be quick to run towards God's Word.

May you be quick to look at God's Word and allow it to guide you to become a permanent, constant, inseparable part of who you are, remembering God's Word, committing it to memory, and meditating on it again, never forgetting that we are still a work in progress. Me too. And I'm going to need to be reminded on a daily that even though I know this to be true, I struggle to live it out.

I need to remember God's grace and mercy and His forgiveness and that I can't outrun sin. I can't get too far from the cross. And just when I think I have, Jesus shows up and says, yeah, I still would have died for you to fight to get rid of the sin in your life, to fight to bring people in, even when it's awkward or embarrassing or confusing, or you don't see how you're going to ever conquer this. Bring people and bring the Word of God and bring prayer in.

But for all of us forgetting yesterday and not yet worrying about tomorrow, what will be your approach toward God's word today? Will it be quick and slow or simply something else? Let me pray, Father, thank you for your Word. Thank you for your son. May each of us today approach you, your Word, and your son quick and slow. And we give this all to you. Amen. Have a great day, everybody.