

# PRACTICE MAKES PERSONS

## “The Bond-servant”

James 1:1 | January 6, 2019

**Sermon Summary:** We make much in the Christian faith about sonship. If you are in Christ, whether male or female, you are a son of God. And that’s not a sexist statement; that’s radically egalitarian. Every one of us is treated like the firstborn son. We are co-heirs with Christ of God’s kingdom, with all the rights and privileges thereof.

Yet throughout the New Testament, people like Paul, Timothy, Peter, Jude, and James call themselves a *doulos*, that is, a *slave*. James opens his letter by addressing his audience as, “James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

There are three things to know about James:

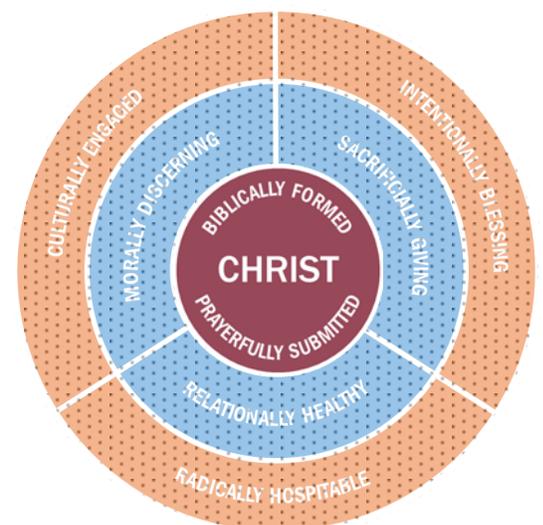
- 1. James was the brother of Jesus.** He isn’t the disciple James of “Peter, James, and John” fame. He wasn’t a fisherman by the lake called to be a fisher of men. He was Jesus’ brother, probably Mary’s second born given that he is always listed first among Jesus’ siblings.
- 2. James was not a believer.** He, like the rest of his family, didn’t initially believe in Jesus. John 7:5 says, “Even his brothers did not believe in him.” In fact, they taunted him. At one point, they considered Jesus crazy and tried to take charge of him (Mark 3:21).
- 3. James became the leader of the Jerusalem church and an author of the Bible.** Paul calls him the first “pillar” of the church in Jerusalem. Later writers called him “James the Just” and “Bulwark of the People.” This makes us ask, *What happened? What led to such a radical transformation?* And the answer is: An epiphany. A revelation of Jesus.

Paul tells us about it in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8. James, like Peter and Paul, received a special visitation of the resurrected Christ. And they all needed it. Peter betrayed Christ; Paul persecuted him; and James flat-out disbelieved. But an epiphany changed his heart.

It’s like that for all of us. Unless God opens our eyes and hearts we will not believe. We are dead and blind in our trespasses and sins. But “God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6).

How do you know if you’ve received this epiphany? Simple: You trust and treasure Christ. You realize that the Lord of the Universe is the Lover of *You*, and you love him back.

Discipleship Focus: Christ,  
Biblically Formed, Prayerfully Submitted



If you had this kind of epiphany, you also see yourself like James did: as a bond-servant. While we all have the full rights of sons, like Christ, we do not consider “sonship with God a thing to be grasped.” Rather, we empty ourselves. We take the nature of a servant. Because we haven’t merely “converted” to a new religion. No, we’ve been redeemed; bought out of the slave market of Sin and Death. And our purchase was not with mere perishable things like silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ. So God own us—and we couldn’t be happier. “But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life” (Romans 6:22).

As Christians, we’re free; but we don’t use our freedom for self-indulgence; rather, we freely submit to Christ. “I run in the path of your commands for you have set my heart free” (Psalm 119:32). Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life *for us*. He gives us a new heart and moves us to walk in his ways, not as masters of our own fate but as freely submitted servants to his. And his “fate” is resurrection, glorification, and eternal reign!

In Old Testament Israel, slavery was always temporary. You could indenture yourself to a master for six years, but in the seventh, you went free. Unless you didn’t want to: “But if the slave plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children; I do not want to go free,’ then his master shall bring him to God, and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall pierce his ear with an awl, and he shall be his slave forever” (Exodus 21:5-6). That’s us. We could walk away from God or go soft and casual in our apprenticeship. But what on earth for? We love our Master. We love the Bride of Christ. We love the children of God. In Christ’s presence is fullness of joy. *Pierce my ear, Lord. For this love, this life, I will be your slave forever.*

## Discussion Guide

1. Think back to when you were a kid, practicing and training for hours for the sheer love of *becoming*, of growing and maturing and acquiring skill and knowledge. Greg talked about reading the Bible, shooting free throws, and kicking field goals as a kid. What were some things that motivated you?
2. What do you think changes in us as we grow older? Why do even committed Christians grow slack in their discipleship sometimes?
3. Do you think that can change? What would it take for you to reacquire the fire, and tap into the internal, gospel-motivated, grace-driven impulse to grow?
4. Although James was a brother of Christ and leader of the church, he self-identified as a bond-servant. How do you reconcile the natural tension between “sonship” and “servanthood”? Can you be both at the same time? How?
5. As is so often the case, the issue boils down to lordship. Is Christ really your Lord or not? (His identity as “Lord” certainly implies our identity as “servants.”) What is one specific area in which God is call you to be “biblically formed, prayerfully submitted”?
6. Recall the Josh Puffenberger interview and the quote from Mack Stiles’ book, *Evangelism*. How do these challenge or inspire you? What can you take away and apply to your life?

“When I have led people to Christ over the years, it has usually been because a non-Christian was willing to study the Scriptures with me. Perhaps it was a group of students looking into the Gospel of Mark at a camp or conference. It could have been a couple of people in a coffee shop or just one person during a lunch break. No matter where or with whom, the process is simple: we read the passage and talk about what it means. Over time, in ones and twos, people come to Jesus because they are taught the gospel. Such teaching may not be as exciting as a massive revival, but if every Christian did this with non-Christian friends, it would have far greater reach and authenticity.”

*Mack Stiles*