

## Speaking Truth to Others, God, and Yourself (James 5:12-13)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on March 21, 2010

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James 5:12–13 (NASB95) <sup>12</sup> *But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment.* <sup>13</sup> *Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises.*

As always, we want to start with the context. Verse 12 is one of the verses in this book that is not clear to many scholars as to how it is related to the context before or after. Many treat v. 12 separately from the verse before and after, as its own unit, and then v. 13-20 as the concluding section. But it may be that v. 12 is related to the verses after it more than some think. One way to look at it is:

- v. 12 is about speaking truth (we'll explain that as we go, but basically he is saying that Christian brethren should tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, without having to swear "so help me God" or any other oath)
- v. 13 also can be taken as speaking truth to God (praying in 13a), singing truths about God back to Him (13b), which also indirectly is speaking truths to ourselves about God
- in v. 19, the end of this whole section, has the word "truth":  
<sup>19</sup> *My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth ...*

So from beginning to end, this final section of the book of James (5:12-20) is bracketed by and bookended by truth. When James says "above all" in v. 12, that may indicate the importance level of this subject, or it may signal the final section of the letter, or both (similar to how Paul says "finally, brothers" in other letters when he builds up to his final appeal and major reason for writing). This final section begins and ends with the truth as the subject of utmost importance. It is critical that we speak the truth, worship in truth, pray in truth, and let the truth pervade and inform all of our life:

- in what we confess truthfully to others (v. 16) and God (13)
- we need truth when things are happily going well (v. 13b)
- when our suffering has us in a less cheerful mood (v. 13a)
- in everyday conversation (v. 12; our yes should mean yes, and our no should mean no, without having to use oaths – we should say what we mean and mean what we say.)

### 1. Speak Truth to Others (v. 12)

*But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no ...*

Notice first he's speaking to his "brethren" (his spiritual family who 1:1 tells us were part of his ethnic family of Israelites as well). To our culture, "do not swear" may sound to you like a command not to use swear words or profanity as defined by our language and decency standards, but to the Jewish culture of 2,000 years ago that this is written to, this has more to do with swearing to tell the truth.

The historical context has been explained this way: ‘The Jewish system of swearing oaths had its roots in the Old Testament. In a time when written contracts did not exist, oaths served to bind agreements between people. To take an oath was to attest that what one said was true, to call God to witness to that, and to invoke His punishment if one’s word was violated. To call God to witness to the truth of one’s promise and to invoke His judgment if one defaulted on that promise was a very serious matter.’<sup>1</sup>

In the Ten Commandments, #3 was: “*You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.*”

That was not an absolute prohibition of invoking the name of the Lord in an oath / vow, but it must be invoked seriously, reverently. Deuteronomy 6:13 “*You shall fear only the Lord your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name.*”

Exodus 22:10–11 “*If a man gives his neighbor a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any animal to keep for him, and it dies or is hurt or is driven away while no one is looking, <sup>11</sup> an oath before the Lord shall be made by the two of them that he has not laid hands on his neighbor’s property; and its owner shall accept it ...*”

So there are occasions where a solemn oath or vow is appropriate to ensure the truth, and it seems consistent with that passage that swearing to tell the truth in a court of law, with God’s help, on the level of God’s Word, being under oath with serious consequences if you are untrue, that seems to me to be consistent with Scripture. Jesus Himself spoke under oath at His trial (Matt. 26:63-64). The OT is full of godly men taking godly vows and oaths, and Paul in His inspired NT letters sometimes calls upon God as His witness to the truthfulness of what He is saying in a formula similar to an oath (Rom. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 1:20; Phil. 1:8; 1 Thess. 2:5).

James is *not* forbidding solemn vows (ex: marriage) before God and many witnesses to pledge love for better or worse till death. Because men tend not to always tell truth, the OT allowed oaths. The Scriptures didn’t forbid all oaths or vows, but warned of breaking them or using them casually or rashly (Lev. 5:4; Num. 30:3-15). Better to never invoke God’s name in a vow or to never swear at all than to make and break an oath or vow (Dt. 23:21-23).

The Jews understood the seriousness of invoking God’s name to swear an oath, and some of them began to swear by lesser things and had lesser standards of truth. Some rabbis actually practiced, if not taught, vows to the Lord, or oaths in the name of the Lord were binding, but you didn’t have to keep your word if you swore by other things (heaven, earth, your head, the temple, Jerusalem – some said toward the city, not by it, etc.).

Matthew 5:33 “*Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.’*<sup>34</sup> “*But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,<sup>35</sup> or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.<sup>36</sup> “Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.<sup>37</sup> “But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; anything beyond these is of evil” [or ‘the evil one’]*

Matthew 23 gives further insight to this issue. Jesus knew some rabbis misused the Scripture about vows to the Lord or oaths by the Lord as being binding, and taught they could use oaths and vows by earthly things as less binding. But Jesus says by His own authority basically “don’t swear at all by those things. Just say yes or no and mean it. Speak the truth always.”

**23:16** “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘**Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing** [this was a Pharisee religious version of crossing fingers behind your back]; **but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.**’<sup>17</sup> “You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold?”<sup>18</sup> “And, ‘**Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.**’<sup>19</sup> “You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering?”<sup>20</sup> “Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears both by the altar and by everything on it.”<sup>21</sup> “And whoever swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it.”<sup>22</sup> “And whoever swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it. ...

That’s some of the cultural baggage and background the original readers of James grew up with. We grew up with different phrases we considered especially binding:

- “cross my heart, hope to die, stick a needle in \_\_\_\_\_”
- “I swear on my mother’s \_\_\_\_\_”
- “I’ll swear on a whole stack of \_\_\_\_\_ on top of a Bible bookstore!”
- “I swear by the moon and the stars in the sky I’ll be \_\_\_\_\_ and I swear by the shadow that’s by your \_\_\_\_\_”
- “To be completely \_\_\_\_\_ with you...” (does that mean up until now, you haven’t been honest or truthful?)

It’s been said that the more someone has to swear they’re telling the truth *this time*, or say “no, really, honestly, for reals ...” is more of an indictment on the protesting person’s usual lack of trustworthiness and truthfulness, like the boy who cried wolf.

Speak the truth to others all the time, James is saying. Just say yes or no. Your truthfulness as a pattern develops trustworthiness. You don’t need to bring God into it, or grandma’s grave, or stand on top of a Bible bookstore or stick needles in eyeballs; just be truthful!

You don’t need to swear “by the moon and the stars in the sky,” just be there and prove your loyalty in actions. You don’t have to sing “like the shadow that’s by your side” (how romantic?)

Re-read Jas 5:12: *But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no* [NKJV “let your yes be yes, and your no, no”]

Question: Does this mean it’s always wrong to make oaths or vows or pledges (to a country, a flag, a group, to a marriage or ministry)? I don’t believe James is teaching that for a number of reasons:

1. This same James counseled Paul in Acts 21 to go along with their men in taking a vow and to be purified
2. We know the context of *deceptive* swearing from Jesus

3. We know it wasn't sinful when Jesus spoke under oath
4. We know it's not sinful when God swears by His own name, and commanded Israel to swear by His name.
5. In the actual text of v. 12, it says not to swear *either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath* – this is the Greek word meaning “other of the same kind” rather than the Greek word for “other of another kind of oath”

‘James, then, prohibits not official oaths, such as in courts (for none of the sayings in Jewish or Christian sources touches on these ...), but the use of oaths in everyday discourse to prove integrity. The [Christian] ought not to use oaths, for his yes or no should be totally honest, making oaths unnecessary; truthfulness is the issue. Since God holds one to this standard, oaths are dangerous, for they make some speech more honest than other speech. Thus they must be avoided to keep ... deceptive[ness] from bringing God's judgment (in the final judgment, as the context shows) upon one when he is less than truthful.’<sup>2</sup> [unrepentant untruthful unbelievers]

John MacArthur argues that the judgment at the end of v. 12 ‘is not God's chastening of believers. *Krisis* (**judgment**) is never used in the New Testament to refer to believers' chastening (a different word, *paideuō*, is used; cf. 1 Cor. 11:32; Heb. 12:6–7) ... James certainly does not teach that believers will never err with their tongues (cf. 3:2). Christians may lapse into falsehood on occasion, though lying will not be the unbroken pattern of their lives.

But that is not James's point here. The sobering warning he gives in verse 12 is that ... this is another test of living faith. Those whose lives are characterized by a pattern of lying give evidence of having an unregenerate heart. And the Bible teaches that liars, spiritual children of the father of lies (John 8:44), will be sentenced to hell (Rev. 21:8, 27; 22:15).<sup>3</sup>

But Jesus is the way, *the truth*, and the life, and those who repent and come to trust in Him as Lord to save from hell, they'll find Him to be a Savior “*full of compassion and mercy*” (v. 11b). If you do not yet worship Christ in spirit and in truth, come to Him today for mercy. Turn from your false ways to the truth of the gospel;

- that Jesus died on the cross as a substitute for sinners
- and if you trust His life not what you've done with yours
- if you trust in His death in your place, and if you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead
- if you know your only hope to be with the Father is through Jesus, the way, the truth, and life, you can be saved!

Christ always spoke the truth, and those who know Christ should speak truth to others, and ...

### **#2 Speak Truth to God (v. 13)**

<sup>13</sup> *Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray ... Don't complain to others (v. 9), cry out for mercy to the Lord who is full of deep mercy and compassion. Tell Him the truth in prayer.*

O what peace we often forfeit,  
O what needless pain we bear,  
All because we do not carry  
Ev'rything to God in prayer.  
Have we trials and temptations?  
Is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged,  
Take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Are we weak and heavy-laden,  
Cumbered with a load of care?  
Precious Savior, still our refuge  
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Go to God when you suffer first and foremost. Don't run to others or any human refuge, run to God as your refuge as the Psalms say, as your all-in-all, believing His grace is sufficient for you and His power is made perfect in weakness as Paul says (2 Cor. 12). Cast all your cares on the merciful and compassionate Lord, for He cares for you, as Peter says (1 Pet. 5:7). Human sympathy will never reach the depths our Lord can reach, our Lord who can sympathize with our weaknesses and sufferings as He Himself suffered them on earth, so He is able to help those in need who come to His throne of grace, as the book of Hebrews says (4:16).

And the great incentive in the context we have to pray and pour out our soul and all its hurts and hopes and concerns to this great God is the fact that God's compassion is great (v.11b). God is *full of compassion and mercy*. I was listening to a preacher this past week who did an in-depth theological study as a dissertation on Christ's emotions, primarily as revealed in the gospels, and his conclusion was that the primary emotion of Jesus by far in the gospels is the word "compassion" (more than 1 word that can be translated this).

When Moses asked God "show me your glory," God explained man can't see it all and live, but He hid Moses in a rock and it says Ex 34:6: *Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious [some versions have "merciful"], slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; <sup>7</sup> who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin ...*

That's the very glory, nature, and essence of God's very character. We can never get enough or speak enough of His abounding mercy and astounding compassion. Part of speaking the truth to God in prayer is praying truth about God to God. Notice *how* Moses prays to God in Israel's suffering: Numbers 14:17 (NKJV) *And now, I pray, **let the power of my Lord be great, just as You have spoken, saying,** <sup>18</sup> 'The Lord is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression ... <sup>19</sup> Pardon the iniquity of this people, **I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy ...**'*

The greatest of sins or suffering are met by God's greater mercy, and there's no greater appeal in prayer than to God's attributes.

Even after sins like adultery and murder, God answers this prayer:

Psalm 51:1 (NIV) *Have mercy on me, O God ... according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. [TURN TO PS 86]*

Tell God the truth in prayer, tell Him about your sin and suffering and sorrows. Confess and call upon His compassion. He already knows the truth anyways, why not tell Him? Prayer is a means of grace, a channel of great mercy and full compassion. There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus but there is abundant compassion and mercy for those in Christ who plead for it.

Psalm 86 (NASB95) *A Prayer of David. <sup>1</sup> Incline Your ear, O Lord, and answer me; For **I am afflicted and needy.***

*... <sup>3</sup> **Be gracious to me, O Lord, For to You I cry all day long.***

... <sup>5</sup> *For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, And **abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You.*** <sup>6</sup> *Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer; And give heed to the voice of my supplications!* <sup>7</sup> *In the day of my trouble I shall call upon You, For You will answer me.*

A reason God ordains we suffer is to satisfy us with His magnified mercy, the greatness of His graciousness and compassionate care.

<sup>13</sup> *For **Your lovingkindness toward me is great,** And You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.* <sup>14</sup> *O God, arrogant men have risen up against me, And a band of violent men have sought my life, And they have not set You before them.* <sup>15</sup> ***But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious [NKJV “full of compassion”], Slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth.*** <sup>16</sup> *Turn to me, and be gracious to me; Oh grant Your strength to Your servant ...*

I was struck by how often God’s mercy, grace, compassion, and love is spoken of as full, great, abundant, rich, overflowing, etc.

Psalm 145 (NKJV) <sup>3</sup> ***Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; And His greatness is unsearchable ...***

... <sup>2</sup> *They shall utter the memory of **Your great goodness,** And shall sing of Your righteousness.* <sup>8</sup> *The Lord is gracious and **full of compassion,** Slow to anger and **great in mercy.***

Ephesians 2 (NASB95) <sup>4</sup> *But God, being **rich in mercy,** because of His **great love** with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the ages to come He might show **the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.***

Isn’t that encouraging? If that truth lifts your spirit, say AMEN!

If that doesn’t do anything for your soul, are you spiritually alive? Or are you still dead, needing to be made alive or revived? Do you know of this rich mercy and the surpassing greatness of this grace? If that doesn’t encourage your soul, or make you more hopeful and cheerful in God, if that doesn’t make your soul want to praise God, will anything? This is the natural progression of James 5:13; prayer to praise. <sup>13</sup> *Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises [NKJV “sing psalms”]*

From what I can tell, OT believers and NT believers sung the psalms of Scripture as their primary worship in song to glorify God and gladden their souls. It should be natural for a child of God to speak truth to others, and to speak truth to God in prayer and praise (even singing God’s truth), in hard times and happy times. Of course it’s *not only when we suffer* that we are to pray (we’re told to at all times) and it’s *not only when cheerful* that we are to sing. The Psalms tell us to praise and sing to the Lord at all times, and the added blessing is that the very act of singing truth to and about God can make us cheerful even in times of suffering and sadness.

Both Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3 tell us we are to speak to one another, instruct or admonish one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. When we sing songs with solid biblical truth, when we read or speak the biblical psalms, there's a 3<sup>rd</sup> dynamic:

1. Speak truth to others
2. Speak truth to God
3. **Speak truth to your soul**

I don't know if you realize or appreciate the blessing and gift God has given to us in songs that potentially can impress His truths on our hearts in deep ways He intends to speak truth deep to our soul in the process. It's an aspect of praise I think is under-recognized, under-utilized, and in my experience, under-emphasized.

I don't think it's an overstatement to say that this discipline can revolutionize your life: observing how in the psalms in the midst of great suffering, they sang truth to God and spoke truth to their soul

It's not only in psalms we see a biblical writer speaking to himself. Jeremiah: ***My soul, my soul! I am in anguish! Oh, my heart! My heart is pounding in me; I cannot be silent, Because you have heard, O my soul, The sound of the trumpet, The alarm of war.*** (Jer. 4:19)

But they didn't just listen to themselves (feelings, emotions, etc.), they spoke to themselves. They addressed their soul with God's truth. Rather than feed self and focus on self, they turned on self, corrected self, confronted self, counseled self, challenged self. Don't just be encouraged the psalms contain many of the emotions you feel, be helped by how the writer dealt with emotions/feelings!

In the midst of fighting and fear in Judges 5, we read these words:  
v. 21 "***O my soul, march on in strength!***"[spiritual warfare within]

Psalm 146 <sup>1</sup> *Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul!* <sup>2</sup> *I will praise the Lord while I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.* <sup>3</sup> *Do not trust in princes, In mortal man, in whom there is no salvation* [notice he's speaking to his soul: "don't trust in man or any thing from man as a deliverance" preach to yourself]

Do you realize God doesn't need us? He doesn't need us to tell Him anything that He doesn't already know! God was sufficient for eternity past as Father, Son, and Spirit, not deficient or needy or lonely or lacking or dependent upon us creatures. Whether we praise Him or not, God is all-glorious and great and glad in the fellowship of the Trinity, and He is glorified whether or not *our singing* is a part of it. But He has given us the incredible blessing of being able to glorify God and enjoy God in worship and song, not because He needs to hear it, but He is worthy of it, and because us unworthy insufficient dependent creatures need Him and need it. It's our souls that need to hear the truths we sing to God and we need to keep telling ourselves God's truth and to praise Him regardless of how we feel, and not to look to man but to God alone.

Psalm 103 <sup>1</sup> *Bless the Lord, **O my soul**, And all that is within me, bless His holy name.* <sup>2</sup> *Bless the Lord, **O my soul**, And forget none of His benefits; [God's not going to forget them but we will if we don't keep speaking this to our soul, commanding our soul to this]*

<sup>3</sup> *Who pardons all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases;*

<sup>4</sup> *Who redeems your life from the pit, Who crowns you with **lovingkindness and compassion**;*

<sup>5</sup> *Who satisfies your years with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle.*

<sup>6</sup> *The Lord performs righteous deeds And judgments for all who are oppressed.* <sup>7</sup> *He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the sons of Israel.* <sup>8</sup> ***The Lord is compassionate and gracious, Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.*** <sup>9</sup> *He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever.* <sup>10</sup> *He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.* <sup>11</sup> *For as high as the heavens are above the earth, **So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him.*** <sup>12</sup> *As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.* <sup>13</sup> ***Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him ...*** <sup>22</sup> *Bless the Lord, all you works of His, In all places of His dominion; **Bless the Lord, O my soul!***

Psalm 104:1 *Bless the Lord, **O my soul!** O Lord my God, You are very great; You are clothed with splendor and majesty ...* <sup>35</sup> *Let sinners be consumed from the earth And let the wicked be no more. Bless the Lord, **O my soul**. Praise the Lord!*

Psalm 94 <sup>18</sup> *If I should say, "My foot has slipped," Your lovingkindness, O Lord, will hold me up.* <sup>19</sup> ***When my anxious thoughts multiply within me, Your consolations delight my soul.***

Do you see this dynamic? God sustains us in grace even when we slip, and even when anxious thoughts multiply within me, instead I can choose by grace to focus my soul to delight in God's comfort! Instead of listening to anxious thoughts, you can take them captive and make them obedient by speaking God's thoughts to your heart!

Jerry Bridges says we need to speak the gospel to ourselves daily. We all talk to ourselves every day, virtually every moment. The question is whose thoughts will we listen to, ours or God's?

C.J. Mahaney (in a message we listened to in counseling SS class): 'No one is more influential in your life than you are, because no one talks to you more than you do. You are in an unending conversation with yourself. This conversation never ceases ... Even though this conversation is constantly taking place within us, rarely do we examine this conversation or evaluate the content of this conversation. Rarely do we consider the influence of this conversation upon our lives. And most of us don't consider this unending conversation as significant, or serious, or ultimately influential. But we are mistaken, because this internal conversation has the most influence on your soul each and every day. You are more influenced by this internal conversation than you are by your parents, your pastors, your friends, your teachers, circumstances, and at times even more than God and his Word. Apart from God's activity in our lives each day, this conversation, and the content of this conversation, is the difference-maker in your soul each and every day ... between the content of this unending internal conversation and the state of your soul each and every day. So examining and evaluating the content of this internal conversation in light of holy Scripture, and informing this conversation with the content of holy Scripture and the gospel, can—and by God's grace, will—make all the difference in your soul and in your life.'<sup>4</sup>

Ps 62:5 **My soul, wait in silence for God only** [NIV “find rest, O my soul” – he’s commanding his anxious soul to wait or rest, kind of like the hymn “Be Still My Soul”], *For my hope is from Him.* <sup>6</sup> **He only** is my rock and my salvation, My stronghold; **I shall not be shaken.** <sup>7</sup> *On God my salvation and my glory rest; The rock of my strength, my refuge is in God.* [great verse to memorize!]

Psalm 42 was a psalm written in troubling times, emotional painful tearful fearful times, feeling oppression, even depression.

<sup>3</sup> *My tears have been my food day and night, While they say to me all day long, “Where is your God?”* [he’s listening to himself, to his emotions and feelings, his tears and fears and doubts within] <sup>4</sup> **These things I remember and I pour out my soul within me ...**

[notice in v. 5 he moves from listening to himself to talking to self]

... <sup>5</sup> **Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him For the help of His presence.** <sup>6</sup> *O my God, my soul is in despair within me; Therefore **I remember You** ...* [contrast v. 4a]

He questioned his soul (*why are you in despair*), commanded his soul (*hope in God*), committed his soul (*I shall praise him*), and counseled his soul by speaking truth to it (*the help of His presence*) but has to keep correcting and redirecting his thinking (in v. 6 his soul is in despair again, but he chooses to remember and trust God)

<sup>11</sup> *Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.*

**Ps 43:5** *Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.*

Lloyd-Jones: ‘Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself? Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them, but they start talking to you, they bring back the problems of yesterday, etc. Somebody is talking. Who is talking to you? Your self is talking to you. Now this man's treatment [in the Psalms] was this; instead of allowing this self to talk to him, he starts talking to himself. 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul?' he asked. His soul had been depressing him, crushing him. So he stands up and says: 'Self, listen for a moment, I will speak to you.'....

The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, preach to yourself, question yourself. You must say to your soul: 'Why art thou cast down!—what business have you to be disquieted? You must turn on yourself, [admonish]self ... exhort yourself, and say to yourself: 'Hope ... in God.'<sup>5</sup>

That can transform your thinking: “most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself,” i.e., listening passively to your thoughts and feelings and emotions rather than speaking truth to your self. We are so used to listening how we think and feel, but biblical change is renewing thought patterns (Rom 12:2) in the truth of the Word.

Mahaney again (message on GCBC website): ‘talk to yourself. The psalmist does not repeatedly and endlessly review and rehearse and describe the state of his troubled soul. He does not ignore his soul. He does not excuse his soul ... instead, he interrupts his soul. He interrupts this unending conversation taking place within his soul. He questions his soul. He interrogates his soul. He challenges his soul. He rebukes his soul. And he exhorts his soul to trust in God. And this, ultimately, makes all the difference in his soul, and this will make all the difference in your downcast soul as well. Too often this practice of talking to yourself and talking to your soul is neglected by those who are troubled in their soul ...

See, what we have each day is an internal conversation that never ends. It is ceaseless. It continues always within us. And so each day, throughout the day, we have two simple choices: We can either spend the day listening to ourselves, listening to ourselves in our constantly changing feelings and circumstantial interpretations, or we can spend each day talking to ourselves. We can talk truth to ourselves. We can preach the gospel to ourselves, and we can address our troubled and tormented soul with Scripture and ultimately the gospel ... The more time you spend talking to yourself [truth] and speaking [truth] to God, the more time you spend speaking the gospel to your soul and humbly reminding God of his promises, the less time you will spend listening to your soul [its emotions/feelings], and the more you will experience a joyful and hopeful soul rather than a downcast and a troubled soul.’<sup>6</sup>

What a compassionate and merciful God who has given us such a sufficient Word with such practical help for our souls! May we put into practice these truths that have helped so many. May we speak truth to others more, speak truth to God more (taking all our cares to Him in prayer to the friend we have in Jesus) and may we put off old ways of thinking and put on biblical patterns of thinking by speaking truth to ourselves more, the mind-renewing, heart-changing, peace-giving, soul-satisfying truth of our sufficient God.

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, *James* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1998), 265–266.

<sup>2</sup> Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James : A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), 189–191.

<sup>3</sup> MacArthur, 271–273.

<sup>4</sup> [www.goldcountrybaptist.org/home/1477/1477/docs/Psalm%2042%20Transcript%20Mahaney.htm](http://www.goldcountrybaptist.org/home/1477/1477/docs/Psalm%2042%20Transcript%20Mahaney.htm)

<sup>5</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Its Cure* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 20–21.

<sup>6</sup> Mahaney, *Ibid.*