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I will be reading this morning from James chapter 1 verses 21 through 27. So get rid of all that is wrong in your life, both inside and outside, and humbly be glad for the wonderful message we have received, for it is able to save our souls as it takes hold of our hearts. And remember, it is a message to obey, not just to listen to. So don't fool yourselves, for if a person just listens and doesn't obey, he is like a man looking at his face in the mirror. As soon as he walks away, he can't see himself anymore or remember what he looks like. But if anyone keeps looking steadily into God's law for free men, he will not only remember it, but he will do what it says, and God will greatly bless him in everything he does. Anyone who says he is a Christian but doesn't control his sharp tongue is just fooling himself, and his religion isn't worth much. The Christian who is pure and without thought, from God the Father's point of view, is the one who takes care of orphans and widows and who remains true to the Lord, not spoiled and dirtied by his contacts with the world. Good morning. I really like that verse and I really like that translation of it. So I was speaking last week with Marlene Pedego, who was last week's speaker, and we, the subject of friends and what friends believe, came up and we started talking and it got me thinking about wanting to look into that and understand it a little better. So this morning we're going to talk about our denomination, which is the Society of Friends, and if you are new here or a guest or whatever, please understand that you are absolutely welcome here no matter what your denomination is. We are just people who love worshipping Jesus, and if that's you, then you are absolutely welcome among us. I want to talk about this today, not because I'm trying to force some denomination on you, but because I truly believe that every denomination does something really well and that there's something we can learn from all of them, but I think most of all we ought to understand what it is that our church's denomination believes. We are going to be talking about friends' testimonies, and normally when you hear that word "testimony" in a religious arena, what someone is talking about is, "Hey, share the story of how you became a Christian." And that's true, that's that definition of a testimony. But when we talk about friends' testimonies, a testimony is an account or a declaration. Like when someone is in court and they give their testimony on the stand, they're giving their account of how things happen. The friends believe that your testimony as a Christian has to be more than just what you say, it has to be how you live your life. And so our greatest testimonies are our lives and what we do with them. And so as we talk about these, what we're really talking about is not ideals that we believe but actual the way that we live our lives. And I kind of grouped these into two categories, spiritual testimonies and social testimonies, and we're going to start by talking about some of the spiritual testimonies of friends. The first one is veracity. A lot of the literature on these subjects was written by people with much better vocabularies than me, and so I had to do a lot of Googling definitions. Mr. D. Elton Trueblood was the one who listed this particular testimony, veracity. And he wrote an article called "A Radical Experiment," referring to the movement of friends as being a radical experiment in religion. And he said this about the founder, George Fox. "The lone struggling George Fox was indeed seeking what William James called a religion of veracity. He could not be content with shams. He saw through the artificial. This drove him beyond the conventional aspects of Christianity." Veracity is authenticity. It is the desire for your life to reflect the things that you say that you believe. Isaiah 29.13 says, "Then the Lord said, 'This people draw near with their words and honor me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from me, and their reverence for me consists of tradition learned by rote.'" We don't want that to be true of us. At least, I hope you don't want it to be true of you. I know you don't want it to be true of me. I want what I am involved with here, and I want my walk of faith to be more than just lip service. I want to draw near to God with my heart and not just with my words. This particular testimony of many of these are, I think, very important and apply very well in our current society, because we live in a society that doesn't like artificial, doesn't like people who say one thing and do another. People are looking for the real thing. If we can learn how to live our lives with veracity, if we can learn to live our faith with veracity to actually practice what we preach, as it were, I think that we will be a good witness and share a good testimony with the people around us. Our next testimony is immediacy. When I first read immediacy, I thought, "Oh, so it means it happens right away." No, sorry, I did not get good grades in English class. Immediacy is talking about how we have direct access to God, that there is nothing standing between us and God. Once again, Elton Trueblood is saying, "Far too much religion is a matter of what people take at second hand from others without a sense of first-hand knowledge. No Christianity necessarily makes men dissatisfied with that knowledge, which is knowledge about, and leads them to seek that knowledge, which is acquaintance with." When George Fox in the mid-1600s was living his life, he was getting very fed up with all of the artificiality and the shams that we were talking about. He kept going to person after person, preacher after preacher, saying, "Help me find what I'm hungry for. Help me find the thing that I'm missing." He couldn't find a single person who could lead him there. One day he was out alone by himself with his Bible, and God spoke to his heart and said, "There is one who can speak to your condition, namely Jesus Christ." That's when it clicked for him that we have direct access to God. We no longer need the priests and the intermediaries to move on our behalf. When Jesus was crucified, the veil in the Jewish temple was torn. The veil was what separated the glory of God from the people, and only one high priest could go back there one time a year. That veil was torn, symbolizing that the thing that separated God from man had been removed. In 2 Corinthians 6 we read, "For we are the temple of the living God. Just as God said, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.'" We have immediacy. We have direct access to God. In the Friends Church this shows up two very noticeable ways. The first is how we worship. As we had this morning, we had our time of quiet, which is referred to as open worship. This is the time when John 4.24 says, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." That is the point in our service when we stop, we halt all of our outward activity, and focus inwardly on the spirit of God within us, and worshiping and loving Him directly with our spirits. And there are some Friends Churches who spend their entire hour worshiping in that form. The other way that immediacy is seen in the Friends Church is in our Church government. Rather than just having a pastor controlling everything or a tight-knit group of elders, our government is done by all of us, again, getting together in the silence and seeking to discern what is God's will on these situations. And that's what's going to be happening today, right after our monthly meal. We are going to come together, and we are going to quiet our hearts before God, and we are going to try and see what He would have us do. And it's supposed to be a time when people stop arguing for their opinions and what they want, and people come together to try and discern what it is that God wants. And there are times when maybe what we are discerning is not necessarily what we want to have happen, but because we have come together and we have sought the will of the Lord, even when it works out in such a way that maybe we didn't want it to work out that way, because we feel that God is leading us that way, it becomes very peaceful and everyone respects the outcome of the situation, because we all agree and believe that it is what God wants. Colossians 1.9 says, "For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding." And this is the point of how we do our government, is that we can all be filled with the knowledge of His will. Our third spiritual testimony we are going to talk about is holistic. On the web resource called a brief introduction to Quakerism, they say Quakers believe that all of life has the potential to be sacramental. That is to say, the reality of God's power and love can be embodied and experienced in every aspect of life. Rather than placing our emphasis on specific days, times, rituals or ceremonies, friends place our focus on the possibility of God's presence in every moment and action. And in 1 Corinthians 10 we read, "Whether then you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." I'm pretty sure that's the verse I quote the most when I'm up here. Friends historically have referred to this place not as a church but just as a meeting house and they refer to this day just as first day, not Sunday. You see historically friends try to de-emphasize what other denominations try to emphasize as being more special, more sacramental. And the friends de-emphasize that because they want to point out that your whole life is sacramental. Every day should be holy and special. Every place should be holy and special. The power of God should flow through you at all times. Our hearts should be full of worship at all times. And so this testimony is called holistic because really the faith that we practice and the walk that we have with God should permeate everything we do all times and all places. Our fourth spiritual testimony is fellowship. In that same resource we read, "All friends believe that to be fully faithful to God, our individualism will be brought under control and we will be gathered into community that seeks to know and live out the divine will." And Romans 12.5 says, "So we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another." To truly live out what we believe, what we say we believe, we must acknowledge and recognize that God is the head and that we are all members of His body and that God does not save any one of us so that we can be spiritual hermits and live by ourselves. There are definitely times that you need to get along with God, absolutely. You should do that every day. But He also brings us into a family and He's made each one of us imperfect and broken so that we must rely on each other. Because God exists as the Trinity, the three perfectly together as one. And we are created in His image and we are to be brought together perfectly, perfect peace and unity and harmony. We are to reflect exactly what that is and so He has created us to be that way. He has created us to be in fellowship. And Ephesians 4.3 says, "Being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." That is the command to us. Be diligent to preserve this family. Come here and expect to have your needs met but also look for ways that you can meet the needs of others because God has equipped us all in some way to serve the people around us. Our fifth spiritual testimony is urgency. This is Elton Trueblood again. "Those who have had a direct sense of the divine presence cannot stand idly by while other men and women go on in relative darkness. Those who seek to experiment with radical Christianity are bound to be shaken out of all easy respectability, shaken to the middle of their lives. It is inevitable that they, in commitment to the will of the living God, became evangelical in mood and missionary in intention." First John 3.17 says, "Whoever has the world's goods and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?" This verse is talking about the world's goods but it just as easily applies to what we have found in our spirit. Just as easily applies to our walk of faith. If God truly is life-changing for you, if he truly is the most wonderful thing you have ever discovered, and I hope you realize that, then you should look around at the people who are still around you who are living and walking in darkness and you should feel a sense of urgency to want them to be part of this, to want them to find what you have found. And there's different ways to share that with them and one of the best ways is to live out these testimonies that we're talking about. When people see a changed life that you're living, then something will spark inside them. The Holy Spirit will touch their heart and say, "Look at that person. Look what's going on. Why is it when the rains come down and the floods come up in their life that they don't get battered around like the way you do?" and they'll come to you and they'll say, "What is it? What's different about you?" We should feel that sense of urgency. If we're truly living out, if we truly believe what we say we believe, if we truly believe the things we sing in the songs about how great God is and how much he means to us and how much he's done to us, then there should be a sense of urgency and a life that reflects that urgency. So those are the five spiritual testimonies that I wanted to talk about. Now let's talk about the social testimonies. These often get a lot more attention. First is simplicity. Quoting again, "This testimony includes seeking to lead lives of material simplicity, trusting that God has indeed provided for the needs of all, but recognizing that material luxury leads to spiritual deprivation." This one always ruffles feathers. And I think that's because the society we live in, so much of our society is geared around the pursuit of wealth and property and so on. Our whole educational system is set up so that you can get a good job and make the most money you can with your life and retire as early as possible. It's all about stuff and money and comfort. But the Bible says that God takes care of his children. The Bible says that God will make sure that you always have clothes to wear and food to eat, and that you can and should be content with just a simple life, and that when you chase after more than that, that it leads to spiritual deprivation. And there are several verses that agree with that. Jesus says in Matthew 19, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again, I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." And I've heard lots of well-meaning people try to explain away that verse, "Well, the eye of the needle is talking about a certain entrance into the city of Jerusalem," and all this. And no, what Jesus is saying is that wealth makes it difficult to live the spiritual life that you've been called to to find salvation. Luke 16, 13 says, "No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." And in 1 Timothy 6, we read, "If we have food and covering with these, we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare, and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some, by longing for it, have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." It is so sad to know that the love of wealth is powerful enough that it has actually led people away from the faith of Jesus. And so friends have this testimony where we deliberately live simple lives to show the world that we have something better than the materialism that they are chasing after. And this is something that this is a message that the world needs to hear. I mean, I personally, I know people, and I personally have had the experience where I have been obsessed with purchasing something, and then finally I buy it, and within a week I'm bored with it. We see that a lot in kids, but it happens to adults and everyone. And that's because there is a hole in people, and they are missing something that they think that their stuff is going to fill, and it's not. And so by living a life of simplicity, we can demonstrate, yes, we have found what fills that hole, we have found what we are missing, and it is not purchased with money. Our second social testimony is peace. Hebrews 12, 14 says, "Pursue peace with all men and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord." Matthew 5, 9 says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." Romans 12, 18, "It is possible, if possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." Romans 14, 19, "So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another." Peace is not just talking about war. Friends have historically been against war, and that's a good thing. War is bad, and we should be against it, but peace is so much more than that. And I think that that is especially relevant now during this political season, when there's so much fighting going on over people who just disagree on how things should be done. There's so much hate and vitriol over just ideas of how we should go about things. And rather than having peace and discussing and finding the compromise and finding the place where we can all live together, it is war. It is war on the campaign trail, it is war on the internet and on Facebook. And so friends strive to live a life of peace, not just the peace that brings about an end of war, but the peace in all the little things, all the little conflicts that go on in our worlds and throughout our lives. Those are the peacemakers. We try to be peacemakers in all things. And Jesus is the greatest example because he made peace with us through his blood, as it says in Colossians 1-20, "through him to reconcile all things to himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross." Jesus went to the cross and shed his blood in order to make peace. And if he is our master and we are his disciples, then we should be willing to go to whatever our cross is in order to be peacemakers. Our fourth social testimony, our third social testimony is integrity. Matthew 5.33-37 says, "Again you have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.' But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of his feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be yes, yes, or no, no. Everything beyond these is of evil." You know, historically, friends have never put their hand on the Bible and swore an oath when they testify in court. And this is because when you place your hand on the Bible and swear to tell the truth, what you're really saying at that moment is, "I swear to tell the truth now, because throughout the rest of my life I make no such promise. Throughout the rest of my life you may or may not get the truth." And Quakers refused to take that oath because they believe that the truth is as holy as the book they are swearing on, and that every moment of their life they should be speaking the truth, even if it's difficult. There's so much opportunity to have integrity in this society. So much, you know, even when some guy gives you too much change at the register. You know, have integrity. Tell him, "Let him know you made a mistake." There seems to be a trend in our society that if it's not that big a deal and if you can get away with it, then absolutely get away with it. But when our integrity is unmovable bedrock, when there are no gray areas, that's when people will look at us and say, "Wow, something is different." That person's life has been changed by something. Our fourth social testimony is community. Galatians 5.14 says, "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" There is a lot of people who deceive themselves into thinking that they are caring about the community by just taking care of one part of it. Well, I take care of that group of people, so I am caring for my community. But our communities include everyone. Even those people that are difficult and undesirable. And that is why throughout history, friends have been so involved in prison reform ministry. It's so easy to say, "Well, they're prisoners. They brought that on themselves. I don't really care what happens to them." And it is specifically because of this lack of caring towards those people that friends have said, "We need to stand up and do something because no one else is doing it." Friends have said, "My neighbor, when I'm supposed to love my neighbor, is everyone. I don't get to pick and choose who my neighbor is. And so if there is someone being overlooked, then I need to take special care and special attention to look out for that person." Our final social testimony is equality. Acts 17, 26 says, talking about God, "He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation." He made from one man every nation of the earth. And Paul tells us in Galatians 3, "There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither slave nor free. There is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus." It is because our common ancestor, Adam, was brought to life when God breathed the breath of life into his lungs. And friends look at every human being and say, and look at that person and say, "The breath of God is in that person. A little bit of the light of God is in every single one of us." And that is why friends have always been the first to cross boundaries of race and gender and to put an end to slavery. The friends were the only denomination that kept all the promises they made to the Native Americans when people were first coming to this country because they didn't see them as lesser people. Every human being is created in the image of their God and deserves exactly the same love and respect as we feel we are entitled to. And so we can have this testimony when we go through our lives and we look at the people who are serving us, when we look at the people who appear to be less than us, who appear to be different than us, and looking at them with all the love and compassion that we want shown to us, that we have had shown to us. And so friends, I close by saying again I'm not trying to convert anyone to a specific denomination but I would encourage you to look at your life, look at how it is being lived, think about the words of the songs we sing and ask yourself, "Does my life truly reflect the things that I'm singing? Does my life really reflect the things that I say that I am a believer of on Sunday morning when I get to work on Monday?" Let's pray. Heavenly Father, You are great and glorious and You have created us all and brought us into this family but You have called us, You have called us out of this world of darkness to be salt and light, not dim light, not bland salt, God, but You have called us to be that which is transformative and earth-shaking. And God, please open up our hearts to the areas where we need to work on this, convict us of where our words do not match up with our behavior, and fill us with Your light and Your goodness and the power and the love that we need to live out our beliefs in our lives, in our societies, in our communities. In Jesus' name, Amen.