

LIVING out LOUD

James

Studies in Practical Christianity

Session #4 Don't just sit there

James Chapter 2 Verses 14-26

*“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves.
Do what it says.” – James 1v 22*

Sladebrook Evangelical Church

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Introduction and Aim of this Teaching Series:

The book of James is often considered to be the most practical book in the Bible. Apart from the logical lessons of the Proverbs and, of course, the unavoidable challenges we find in the Sermon on the Mount that is probably true! As the half-brother of Jesus, James shoots from the hip; having witnessed firsthand what a life before God should be lived like, he speaks clearly with penetrating truths that leave little room to manoeuvre or excuse.

James wrote with divine insight that cannot be compromised. His epistle, written to scattered saints in need of encouragement, comes fresh upon each reading. Some books of the Bible require not only careful examination, but also careful interpretation, as different views can surface and political persuasions are formed. Not so with James. The challenge of this short book of 108 verses is not so much interpretation, but application! The meaning is all too clear and the challenge unequivocal. James' message throughout is clear: Practical Christian living reflects genuine faith that goes on to transform our lives. So says James, if you believe it, your life should show it!

The aim of this series is to highlight this teaching and the need to "Live it out Loud" personally and within our corporate context. James wrote to Jewish Christians facing all sorts of trials and who due to their heritage, were tempted to resort to the thankless task master of law keeping, rather than to Christ. James' message is clear: We are to aim for all that God intends us to be; not by merely verbalising a creed, or looking back to law, but by expressing a radical, counter cultural Christ-life that defies the wisdom and ways of this world. As a local church, we need to hear James' words again and heed their heart beat if we are to embrace all that Christ would have for us, both within the fellowship and as we reach out to those yet to see what genuine faith looks like: As God's people, may we learn to "Live out Loud" the truths we discover during the time we spend in the book of James.

LIVING out LOUD #4: Introduction

Living out Loud means exactly that! New life in Christ should totally transform us in ways that show. Merely verbalising an orthodox gospel, full of accurate, sound theology is not enough. Neither is simply reminiscing about a day when one once “prayed the prayer” or first believed in Jesus. Of course there is nothing wrong with these things, in fact they have often been the essential starting point from which many great lives have gone on to be lived for Christ. However, it is dangerously misleading, as James points out in this notorious section of his letter, when so called Christians rely only on misty memories or well worn words as an assumed ticket to heaven, rather than by living lives that continually demonstrate the vitality of gospel grace.

James wrote to Christians facing trials. He warned them not to be double minded (1v8) angry (1v19) or worldly (1v21) and especially challenged anyone tempted to show favouritism or form fleshly judgements! (2v1-12) Warning of holy hypocrisy he said: *“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”*(1v22) At this point in his letter, he exhorts his listeners not to capitulate, but to exhibit authentic Christianity, not some inferior alternative. It is a call not to be fickle but faithful in the midst of adversity. To emphasise this point, James turns to the vital relationship between faith and deeds. Where some may seek to separate the two, claiming to be Christian in word, or by deed, James presents the complimentary case for both; where only a correct understanding of dynamic deeds underpinned by foundational faith authenticate Christian experience.

Theological polarities are tested in this section of James’ letter: Whereas Paul often made reference to faith as the sole means of our salvation and a grace gift from God, (Eph. 2v8-9) James reinforces that such faith should work itself out as evidence that the Christ life has come and continues to sanctify God’s people. (2v26) Scripture presents us with two sides of the same coin: As Paul reminded the Philippians, *“Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear.”* (Phil. 2v12 NLT)

James refers to the destitute (2v15) and the demons (v19) to expose what he considers “dead” and “useless” faith. Empty words and token gestures never characterised Christ and neither should they be seen in His followers! He reminds us of the Old Testament exploits of Abraham, whose faith provoked extreme action and Rahab, whose unlikely but willing intervention God used to push His purposes forward. God “credited” (v23) and “considered” (v25) their faith fuelled deeds as righteous. If the same is to be true of us, we must forge a living faith that works itself out as we learn to fully live for Christ.

Don't just sit there

*James reinforces the relationship between faith and deeds; arguing that a life transformed by Christ overflows with an authentic new nature. The true Christian not only receives by grace what he needs **from Christ**, but produces compelling evidence of that fact by living supernaturally **for Christ**.*

1. V14-17: Worthless Words: How flat line faith is no good to anyone

Empty words are spiritually superficial and worthless. The true child of God produces Spirit-fuelled deeds that back up a genuine confession of faith.

2. V18-19: Beyond Belief: How orthodoxy alone is never enough

Biblical salvation emphasises "faith" as living and militant; it is always visible, credible and therefore believable. Genuine faith produces genuine fruit.

3. V20-26: Righteousness Revealed: How living faith leads to lasting change

James refers to the Old Testament examples of Abraham and Rahab, of whom righteous actions were the inevitable outworking of their genuine faith in God.

LIVING out LOUD:

- *Do you struggle with the tension between faith and deeds? Explain how you attempt to demonstrate both in your Christian life.*
- *What do "dead faith"(v14-17) and "useless faith" (v18-19) look like?*
- *How was Abraham's faith made complete by what he did? (v21-24)*
- *How did Rahab's belief affect her? (v25)*
- *Try to summarize James's closing analogy (v26) on faith and actions.*
- *What implication does this have for the way we talk to others about "faith"?*
- *What has God been asking you to do that you keep on ignoring? Why is it so difficult to do?*
- *In what ways can you bring your actions more in line with your beliefs?*
- *Spend some time praying that God will help you to produce works that will reveal your true faith. Attempt this week to demonstrate your faith to those around you. Think of some tangible ways in which you can promote the Gospel in both word and deed.*