

Book of James

Sermon #4: Just Do It

James 1:19-27

Dr. Matt Cassidy ---- September 11, 2022

Hey, if you'll turn in your Bibles to the Book of James, it's going to be towards the back. We're still on our first chapter. I want to tell you that James is going to teach us how to live an authentic faith today.

If you'll just paint this picture with me ... picture this as maybe a movie. So here it starts. It's April 1945. There's this older, distinguished man, and he's riding a bicycle. He's got his briefcase strapped to the bike and he's feverishly racing down this somewhat narrow road because he's late for a meeting and he presides over that meeting. And April 1945—the time is running out and he needs to get there.

Now I say he's distinguished because he's from an affluent family, and he's affluent, and also rather intelligent. He's had a wonderful education. Because of their wealth, his family spared no cost in giving him what everyone in this room would consider an enviable experience educationally. He grew up on the classics. He studied the classics from Greece and Rome and even China and India. He ended up specializing in European Renaissance literature. His name was Dr. Otto Thorbeck. And he's the chief judge of the region. That's why he's in such a hurry. His train ran out of gas, and so he borrowed a bicycle, and now here's this judge racing to this courtroom, because in that courtroom await five men, and they're on trial for their lives.

Now what's interesting about these five men is that they had an identical educational experience. It wasn't their education that got them arrested. They grew up studying the classics from all around the world. They, like Otto, had memorized huge sections of the Old and New Testament and knew about the teachings of Jesus Christ.

And the contrast between these five men and this judge—what a difference. And the judge got there in time. At the end of the evening he declared these men guilty and he sentenced them to death the next day, because in April of 1945, they were running out of time.

So, on Monday, April 10, the five men woke up as they normally did as adults. They woke up and they prayed. And this time it was Dr. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's turn to lead the study,

and he preached to his fellow prisoners. They marched them outside in the courtyard, stripped them naked and mocked them, each mounted their gallows, and they were hung until dead.

The Nazis left them there because they were running out of time. You could feel the Allied Forces coming in your feet, and they needed to leave. But before they did, this judge wanted to make sure these five men paid with their lives.

How does that happen, this chasm? All of these men were exposed to, arguably, the greatest culmination of wisdom in human history. And the chasm in their destinations, the differences in how these men chose to live their lives, couldn't be more drastic.

Joseph Goebbels, who was in charge of propaganda for the Nazi regime, had a doctorate in comparative literature. He could have taught Bonhoeffer in one of his classes. Not one Nazi leader failed to have a brilliant education.

So, what is it with truth? Truth can't change people. It can't. It just sits there. Now truth has potential. It has the potential of an acorn. If an acorn is put in the right soil it can split a boulder; it can reroute a river. An oak tree can survive civilizations.

Or an acorn can fall on a sidewalk and be washed into a gutter and be lost.

The difference in potential of truth in these six men—martyrs and a murderer—that's the difference. And so, today, we're going to look at how you and I can make sure that we live a life exposed to the ultimate truth that man has been exposed to—the Word of God. How can we make sure that we live a life that is a blessing to God and a blessing to other people as we are blessed by God? How do we thrive in the context of living out our truth?

How To and How Not To Live the Authentic Christian Life

And James is going to tell us that in James 1:19-27. He's going to tell us how to and how not to. The title looks like this: "How to and how not to live the authentic Christian life"—how to and how not to. He's going to have three big paragraphs, and each one's going to have their own topic. They're all contributing to this big idea.

And just for clarity's sake, here are the three big points. How to cultivate a listening soul; put your faith to practice; and then three areas where you can actually practice. So, there's what it looks like.

I. How to Cultivate a Listening Soul

Here's the first point, and that is how to cultivate a listening soul. Now I chose the word "cultivate" to give a shout-out to the women's discipleship ministry. There it is. If you ladies want to be discipled, go online ... Cultivate ... go there.

Actually, one of the bigger reasons is that the Bible truth for which James is going to use a metaphor here is the idea that this seed of truth that's found in the Bible will be implanted in our souls. So, the idea is that it's a seed to grow from the inside out (that's how we change miraculously by the Spirit), and it's up to us—God's truth, God's grace has great potential—but it's up to us to determine the health of the soil into which that truth is implanted.

James 1:19-20

Know this, my beloved brothers, but let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger, ²⁰ for the anger of a man does not achieve the righteous life God desires.

And so, in the first section James is going to give us five ways to make our soul acceptable to God in receiving of this truth so that it might flourish. Verse 19 and 20 give us the first three. He says this: "Know this, my beloved brothers, but let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger, for the anger of a man does not achieve the righteous life God desires."

He says, *Look, you know this*. I think we do. These are three things that are pretty simple to understand but maybe not so easy to apply. He says that the first one is that you have to be eager to listen. It just means that you're listening or hearing the truth with an open heart so as to change. You're hoping to see or read or understand something that could change your life, and you're willing to do that. In a word, it means "teachable."

The second thing we should know to prepare our soil is shhhhh! ... stop talking! "Be slow to speak," he says. Restrain your talking. Fear this attribute of God. He is patient. He's not rude. He won't interrupt. And if we do all the talking, He'll just wait. And when you stop—if we stop talking—we might be able to hear Him.

So, James is saying, *Look, you need to be teachable, and you need to be quiet.* And then, finally, he says that you need to quench your anger because you can quench your anger or your anger will quench God's truth in your life. You have to be calm. Anger makes us dead to the truth that God's leading us to, what He's speaking to us, whether it's the Word or the Spirit speaking to our spirit. And of course, anger means the raging anger that's notable—Who's in charge? *I want to talk to your boss*—that kind of anger--yelling at the children or your mate.

But also, it's the cultural passive/aggressive *Oh, bless his soul. Bless his heart*—that kind of anger. And then there's the anger that turns inwards; an anger towards yourself which in some expressions of depression is anger inward.

But whatever the anger and whatever way the anger is being expressed, James is talking about the deeper recesses of our souls where the springs of our life are running, and they're running rapidly, furiously. And when that happens, however it expresses itself, we're saying that God is not running the universe as He should be. He's not expressing His love or His power the way we would want Him to, and so there's an anger that's taking place. And that anger keeps us from hearing Him. We can't respond to what we can't hear.

Here's a wonderful quote: "Never is the ear more firmly closed than when anger takes over." In a few sentences earlier, James says, *Look, when you encounter various trials, ask the Lord for wisdom and He'll give it to you plentifully.* Right? ... if you can hear over the rage that's happening in your heart. But you can't. You've got to get rid of this anger.

So, James is telling us to be teachable, he tells us be quiet, he tells us to quench this anger to make our soils right; to hear the truth and respond to it.

James 1:21

Therefore, put aside all filthiness and rampant wickedness, and in humility receive the Word implanted in you, which is able to save your souls.

He's going to give us two more reasons in verse 21, two more ways to get our souls right. He says, "Therefore, put aside all filthiness and rampant wickedness, and in humility receive the Word implanted in you, which is able to save your souls."

So, we're cultivating a listening soul by pulling weeds and taking out the poisons. I think many of us are involved in some kind of gardening or lawn care or whatever. You can't do much

with the idea of planting anything until you clean out all the weeds. They'll choke out the nurturing potential of the seed. And then you have to get the fungus and all those other things. You have to put them aside and get them out of there. The phrase "put aside" is vividly described in a book called *Hebrews*, where the writer is trying to give us a picture of dropping those sorts of things. The picture is of a sprinter or a runner about to mount up into the blocks. What do they do before they get in the blocks? They take off about everything. They're running with very little clothing on because that clothing inhibits them. So, they take off the sweats. Take off all the things that you brought into that, put it aside, get rid of it. And he's saying to get rid of all filthiness and every remnant of wickedness. Today we would say, "You've got to come clean. Just go all in on this."

James is saying, *Choose*. You want to be a spectator and in the bleachers? Great. You get to wear your jacket and long pants and your street shoes. But if you think you're going to hear God's voice and have the ability to respond to that courageously, no, no, no. Bleacher people don't do that. If you want to get into authentic Christianity and really live by the Spirit, you've got to drop moral filth. You're shedding some dirty, smelly weight vest. You don't need that in your life. Get rid of all of it, even the remnant of it. And he's saying that so that this acorn of Bible truth can flourish—so truth can flourish.

And his last attribute for a healthy soil is the idea of humility here. He says, "... in humility receive the Word implanted in you ..." Humility here—the word is actually "meekness"—is not loss of power or lack of power. It's actually a strong person that is using their strength to be kind and gentle instead.

Just to summarize the first paragraph, James says, *Look, truth does not change a human soul. It only has the potential to change a human soul*. And so, the responsibility is on us. It's the condition of the soil that makes the difference. And some of you who read your Bibles might be thinking, *Hey, this sounds very familiar*. It is. You're probably recalling Jesus' famous sermon that you can read and use it as a test. It's in Matthew 13. It's the parable of the soils. There are four different soils, and Jesus says there are four types of souls out there. The seed of truth is being spread; how are you responding to that? That's the part that we have to do. Maybe you ought to read Matthew 13 and take the test. See what soil you have.

James says right here that you, me—we're responsible for the receptivity of that truth. And we're trying to get to this place where we're humble and can receive it. Sometimes here at

Grace, a literal, physical expression of humility is that when people pray, they'll pray with their palms up. It's like this: *My hands are open, so my soul is open. My heart is willing to receive. I want to hear this from You.* Not a bad discipline. Really, honestly, it does help. It's your physical body helping the non-physical part of your life open up in humility.

II. Put Your Faith to Practice

So, how to and how not to live an authentic life ... the first part is just cultivating a listening soul. And now he's going to say, *Put your faith to practice.* He'll spend a lot of time here, and so will I.

James says, *Look, you are either a doer of the faith or you're just kidding yourself. There's nothing in between.* There's this gulf and chasm between those—there's no blur—it's either/or. And when you read this, I want you to see how pervasive this value is. He's going to repeat and restate this. He's going to say, *It's this, it's not that.* He's going to go back and forth. And he's going to say, *If you think you can have both, you're deceiving yourself; you're lying to yourself.*

I want you to see this so much in the style in which he writes it, repeating and restating, that we changed the fonts around. So anything you DON'T do—you're not supposed to do—we've got that in italics and it's underlined. And then the things you're supposed to do—the things you DO—are in all caps. That's appropriate for this coach. And then if you mix up living by faith and just pretending, we'll put that in the red zone. That's you and I kidding ourselves. With all those helpful keys, let's read it with that in mind so we can better understand the meaning.

James 1:22-25

Do not merely listen to the word, and **so deceive yourselves. DO WHAT IT SAYS. ²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after look at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and CONTINUES TO DO THIS—not forgetting what they have heard, BUT DOING IT--- they will be blessed in what they do.**

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James 1:22

Do not merely listen to the word, and **so deceive yourselves. DO WHAT IT SAYS.**

So there's the back-and-forth, the don'ts and dos. And here he is in verse 22 with a single-sentence summary of the writings of James: “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” Insert the Nike logo right there. *Just do it.*

And this is the hub from which all the spokes of the teachings of James are going to come off. You have to do it. If you're able to recite the doctrines or the promises of God and you even say you believe in those promises and agree with those promises, but you're not doing those things, James says you're lying to yourself. You're deceiving probably not just yourself—other people know this. Because according to James, you can't know what a Bible truth is unless you do that Bible truth. You have to practice them. There's no separation between what we believe and what we practice or what we do. You can't say you know unless you do.

James 1:23-24

Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

Look at verses 23 and 24: “Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.”

So, in this illustration that he’s using, it’s often easy to get confused that he’s looking at himself and immediately leaves—like he’s in a hurry and doesn’t see himself. But actually, the word “look” here is to glare, not to glance. It’s not in a hurry. He’s gone to the Bible study all year long that’s been focusing on these doctrines. He’s got a binder full of notes. He’s teaching to his kids on devotion night. But he’s showing all the signs of verses 19 and 20, that he’s famous for his anger, he’s outspoken and opinionated, he’s carrying around remnants of wickedness. That person, he’s saying, is kidding himself. That’s not authentic Christianity. That’s not the real thing at all. Wake up.

This will help us see this. It’s not being angry—it’s just stating what’s real and right and true. I had a friend start boxing a number of years ago. And he would call me up and say, “I’m a boxer.” And I would say, “Well, yeah ...” So, I’m going to insert James’ word for multiple conversations so you can see what James is up to.

The first phone call from my friend, he said, “Hey, I’m boxing. And it is awesome. I have never worked out so hard in my whole life.”

And I said, “Oh, good. Just so you know, that’s not boxing. That was punching in front of the mirror. And so, if you think it is, I think you’re kidding yourself. It’s not boxing.”

The next workout, the next phone call: “I’m a boxer now. I’m mean, I’m banging on that heavy bag.”

I said, “Yeah ... but no. You’re a poser. That’s just hitting a bag. That’s not boxing.”

Weeks later—another phone call. “I get it now. I worked the mitts today. I worked so hard, I had to run for the trash can to throw up. Now I’m boxing.”

And I said, “You’re deceiving yourself. That’s aerobics. That’s not boxing. Get yourself in a ring where someone else is punching you. Then we’ll talk.”

About a month goes by. He calls me up: “That was a terrible experience that I just had. I didn’t realize I didn’t have the speed and reflexes to get out of the way of this other guy’s punches. And you know, punches hurt. They hurt a lot.”

And then I said, “Now you’re boxing. That’s the real thing. If you stay with it, you’ll become a boxer. But now you’re playing for real.”

You can’t learn boxing unless you’re boxing. You can be punching at the air or at a heavy bag or some moving mitts, but that’s not boxing. Boxing is giving and taking. All that other stuff? You’re just kidding yourself, because you learn so much about any skill by doing it and failing it and choosing to get back up. Intellectual understanding is not the same as knowledge; it’s not the same as doing.

And James here ... living by faith hurts. It does. And because you learn by doing and failing and choosing to get back up. (Wait---I said that completely wrong.) Learning and failing is not failing; failing is NOT living the faith. That’s when you’re deceiving yourself. So, trying to live the faith out and falling is just living by faith. That’s just sloppy faith learning. When your child is learning to walk and they fall, that’s not failing; that’s learning how to walk. Failing is staying in the stroller or the walker.

James 1:25

But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and CONTINUES TO DO THIS—not forgetting what they have heard, BUT DOING IT—they will be blessed in what they do.

And James is saying, *Learn how to do it*. The difference between martyrs and murderers is the doing of the truth. It says it in verse 25: “But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.”

So, he shows up four steps. This is how you do it and not just talk about it. It’s not about knowledge; it’s about doing.

The first thing he says is to look intently. You know, you're pondering it because there's a test. A real-life experience is coming.

And then you continue to do it. I don't think they do this anymore, but when I was elementary school you got this conduct grade. And there were categories such as "Plays well with others" and "Doesn't run with scissors"---I don't know. But one of them was "Follows instructions well." That's what James says—you're actually doing it.

And then he says, *Don't forget what you've heard.*

And then finally, he says, *And then you put it into practice again.*

So, this teaching is so critical. So much so, that I want to spend a little more time trying to emphasize the different ways that we look at truth—the different ways we can look at the Bible and come away with it. Same thing—same little booklet—looking at it two different ways.

You're reading an owner's manual. I know that's a foreign phrase to some of you men in the room. But when you buy something it's often accompanied by an owner's manual. And sometimes you'll look at the owner's manual—let's just say I'm putting in a Bluetooth speaker, and I'm looking at it, thinking, *Yeah, uh-huh, sure ... yeah, sure. I'm going to plug it in and I'm going to try it out.* And it doesn't work. And I'm not going to go around saying, *I'm a speaker installation expert.* No. Because it doesn't even work.

Now the second time when I go back to the owner's manual I'm reading it intently, because there's a test and Melinda's looking over my shoulder saying, "You said you knew how to install this thing." And then I continue to do it. That means I'm practicing what the owner's manual said. It said, "Hit any button," and I can't find the "any" button.

So, the next part says "Do not forget." So, I go to a YouTube video or some other video where a high school or junior high kid is showing me how to install this Bluetooth speaker. Then I go back, and it says "He practices the truth." And he says this again. And I do it and it works, and I've got six other speakers to install. And by the last one, I'm killing it. I'm remembering what I'm supposed to do. Cock-a-doodle-do, I'm a speaker installer. Right?

And we do this with every skill, every craft, everything that we're learning how to do, whether it's sewing or any sport. Do you remember during COVID when we are learned how to bake bread? I mean, a lot of yeast died during those days. But we became bread makers, right?

So, you get that part. So, James is saying that you've got to do it to grow in it. You just look at an aspect or an attribute of authentic Christianity like forgiveness, and then you read

intently about forgiveness, and then you give it a try. *Oh, that hurts*. But that's not failing, because you tried. And then you go back and you look at it again and you don't forget what it says this time. And then you practice it again over and over, and after a while, you're becoming a forgiving person. James says, *Yeah, that's it---you've got to do it, though. You have to do it or you can't grow in it.*

You do that with generosity. It hurts at first, and then you become a generous person. To be an evangelist you have to go and share your faith—*ayyy*. So, you take a class. Good, you need to. But that doesn't make you an evangelist. Write a paper on it. Perfect. Go do it. Because when you do it, you learn and you become that. Because when you actually do it, you come back and say, *Note to self: start with breath mints*. And you can't learn that writing papers or memorizing doctrine. You have to do it. Living by faith hurts. And you fail and you pick yourself back up. *Wait, I did it again*. It's not failing to try and live by faith. It's failing by NOT living by faith. That's when we're deluding ourselves. Because doing living faith—just do it—and learning is part of the process. Just do it. Even in bad form. And then relearn how to do it right.

And what happens when we do this? It says we're blessed. What's happening here is that this seed that's been implanted in our souls that has this soil that we've worked on to make sure it's nurturing is starting to take root. The Bible teaching is starting to take root and we're becoming mature and complete and lacking in nothing. What happens is that we stand back and we say, *I'm becoming like Christ in this part of my life. I'm becoming compassionate, gregarious, enjoyable to be around*. And it's not from knowing the Bible's truth; it's from doing those things.

III. Three Areas to Practice

So, here's our outline again. It's how to and how not to live the authentic Christian life. We're cultivating a listening soul. We're putting our faith to practice. And then he's going to give us three examples of how to practice. That's going to happen in verses 26 and 27. This is classic James. He's going to say, *Don't do it this way; do it that way*.

James 1:26

If anyone thinks he is religious and yet does not bridle his tongue he deceives his own heart. This man's religion is worthless.

So, in verse 26: "If anyone thinks he is religious and yet does not bridle his tongue he deceives his own heart. This man's religion is worthless."

So, number one, or A—whatever. Shhhh ... again, he's saying to just be quiet. Fear this attribute of God. He's polite. He will not interrupt us when we're talking all the time. When we have all the answers we can't hear Him. There shouldn't be a gap between truth and our tongue.

James 1:27

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

The next thing we should do in verse 27: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world." For our lives to change this way, it's going to change from the inside out. He's saying there shouldn't be a gap between truth and compassion. And he's using two examples here from people who are victims of circumstances, either orphans or widows, people that can't take care of themselves.

And by the way, just pause. I'm going to come over here. The application of this is not to be the guilt-ridden, busy American Christian that is just moments away from burning out. If you've been here a while, you know that's not our model. But that's a pretty popular model out there.

The model he's talking about is an internal change in one's soul that causes a person to have life change from the inside out; that causes us to face out. It calls us to face out. And so, in our vocabulary at Grace we would say that every believer's a minister on call. We're waiting and we're listening for God's voice to speak to us. And then we're going to respond because we're doers, not talkers. And we're going to look for opportunities for compassion, wherever they

might be. There's no gap between the truth that we might receive and the compassion that we show.

We're quiet, we're compassionate, and the last thing he says is "to keep oneself unstained by the world." There's no gap between truth and the uniqueness that a Christ-follower is to have in our culture. It's very easy to go to one wrong extreme to the other.

It's easy to go and imitate the culture and just blend in and not make noise or ruffles or draw attention to yourself. And basically, a lot of times, it's putting on a remnant of some sort of wickedness. That's not it. That's just pretend.

And the other model is just as attractive, and that is to just isolate yourself over here and find yourself an alcove where you don't really have to live too much by faith where there's hurt and fear. That's just pretend as well. You're deceiving yourself if you're calling that faith-filled living.

James is saying, *No, no, no, you insulate yourself in the winter of the culture and you go out there and you live by faith in a way that expresses itself in compassion, not with anger, not with all these opinions about various things, but rather, in kindness, in love.* And you find yourself standing apart from the culture because you're not being contaminated. You're unstained by the world.

James is talking right at us, isn't he? He's a coach. He just says, *Do it, and don't call yourself a Christian unless you're doing it. You're deceiving yourself.*

This section reminded me of a story I heard when I was a new believer. I was going to church and the pastor there was a former evangelist. So, most of his friends were former evangelists. They used to tour together. And one of his friends had become a pastor of a local church. And there's a pretty big learning curve going from being an evangelist to being a local pastor. And so, he was kind of learning some things. Here's how it went. His first sermon at his new church rung every bell. I mean, the people all but stood up and clapped, like *This is our guy. I knew we chose right. He's killin' this!*

The second week he gives the exact same sermon, and so the people thought, *Well ...* I mean, he was an evangelist. He gave one talk thirty-six times. So, maybe he's thinking that could work again.

But you know what? They took notes, they heard some things they didn't hear the first time. So, that was okay.

The third week he gave the same exact sermon. And so, the leadership does what they do in some of those churches. While he's meeting people after the sermon, they met in the lobby. And when he came out to leave, they said, "Hey, preacher, come on over here. One sermon, three times ... we're going to want another sermon."

And he said, "When you get this one right I'll give you another one." James is doing that. Three paragraphs, one message. He's going to keep giving it until we get it. Authentic Christian living is not the ability to recite, to know, or even to believe in various doctrines. You have to do it. You have to live in a way that shows in your choices that you believe that God is all-loving and can't be any other way; that God is sovereign and in control of the universe and He can't do it any other way. When you do that, you'll learn things that you can't learn by just reciting. When you do that, you'll experience things that you can't experience by deceiving yourself. You'll experience blessing. That's what it says right there in the passage. You'll experience a blessing. You will be a blessing. You will be a blessing to other people and you will be a blessing to God, the King of the universe, as well.

So, James is calling us out. Don't be a poser, a wannabe, a self-deceived person that calls themselves a follower of Christ. Be a doer. Get in the game. Maybe get yourself a black eye. That's not failing; that's learning. That's how you live the Christian life.

What if we were a church who followed that? Let's pray for that.

Lord, I'd ask, first of all, that Your Spirit would speak to us and let us know if we're carrying remnants of wickedness, if we're trying to play both sides, if we're trying to fit in nicely and still claim that we're living the authentic Christian life; that we would hear these words from James that we're deceiving ourselves and probably no one else and certainly not You. And we are grateful that we're getting called out.

Now, Lord, I'd ask that You would give us a humble heart. Fill our palms up right now, if You want. And help us to receive Your Spirit's direction. And we pray that the Spirit would give us the courage to do, to practice, to fall and get back up; to become like Christ in this part of our life. We do this so that You would be blessed, so that people around us would be blessed, and so that we would be blessed, because James said we would. Receive this from us, Lord, with humble hearts and a humble church. In Jesus' name. Amen.

