



## **JAMES - Faith in Action**

### **Real Faith Obeys (3/9)**

#### **SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**CONNECT:** What could help remind you everyday of who you are in Jesus?

#### **Warm-Up**

1. What's an image or personality that comes to mind when you think of a 'stereotypical Christian'?
2. As Christians, why is it so important that our lives line up with what we say we believe?

#### **Read James 1:19-20**

3. According to James, what are the things that we are to be 'slow' at? Which do you find most difficult?
4. In what ways does our culture sometimes enable a reluctance to listen, quick speech, and a rapid escalation of anger?
5. What does James mean by "anger"? How is anger a problem that begins in the heart?
6. How does Exodus 34:6 describe God's anger? How is his anger different from ours?
7. How have we been saved from facing God's anger that we deserve because of sin? How might this help us be slow to anger?

#### **Read James 1:21-25**

8. What is the 'implanted word' that James talks about here? What do Jeremiah 31:33 and Ezekiel 36:26-27 have to say about this?
9. What is the role of pride in anger? What is the role of meekness in accepting the word?
10. How does James describe the person who doesn't do what the word says?
11. How is accepting the word of God different from just 'trying really hard to do better'? What's the role of the Holy Spirit in this?
12. Is there an area in your life where you need to bring your action more closely in line with God's word?

#### **Read James 1:26-27**

13. According to verse 26, what does an unrestrained tongue reveal about a person's faith?
14. James calls caring for orphans and widows "pure religion." Why do you think he chose these examples?
15. How can we live in the world and as part of it while resisting being 'polluted' by it?

**APPLY:** Based on James 1:19–27, if someone looked at your life, what would show them you're a follower of Jesus?

**PRAY:** *Lord, help us to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. Cleanse our hearts from anything that keeps us from receiving Your word. Give us courage to be doers, not just hearers, living out Your truth daily. May our words honor You, our hands serve the vulnerable, and our lives remain pure in a world that distracts. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

**TITLE:** Real Faith - is Obedient

**LOCATION:** St John's Wishart 9AM

**BI:** God calls on us to be hearers and doers of his word

**STRUCTURE:**

- 19-20 - Slow to Anger
- 21-25 - Humble Doers
- 26-27 - Proactive Carers
  
- When the people of the world think of a Christian, what do you think they think about?
- People may think of someone like Ned Flanders from the Simpsons
  - Flanders is the neighbour to the Simpson family
  - He's a happy type person even when bugged by Homer
  - He loves going to church, he holds conservative values - is a bit of a goody-too-shoes type of guy
  - Has an epic moustache and wouldn't hurt a fly.
- People may think of TV evangelists, staring down the barrel of a camera lens - telling their watchers to give money to them to fund their private jet expenses.
- People may think, unfortunately, of cranky and judgy people - who are just angry at the world!
  
- But what does James say a Christian must be like?
- If James was to answer this question - "What should the life of a follower of Christ be like" what would he say?
- Well - we've got the answer right here in front of us in James 1:19-27
- And it's quite simple - the life of a follower of Christ should be someone who hears God's words and puts them into practice!
- We are called to be doers who act!
  
- **Slow to Anger**
- After reminding us last week that Sin breeds death, but God is the father of Life and that HE has called us into life in Him, James writes this:
  - V19 "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God."
  - Let EVERY Person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.
  - Every person.
  - Not just some people - every person is to be slow to anger.
  - Being quick to listen is not an optional extra, it's not an add-on - it's what every person is called to be.
  - It's not like a spiritual gift
    - You know Bob has the gift of patience BUT I don't have that gift so I don't need it!
  - No - every person is commanded to be quick to hear and slow to anger.
  - And it's not just the alert people, or the people who have had ample rest and relaxation, it's not just for the people who have an easier life - no this is for every person in every situation.
    - *I don't know about you - but when I'm feeling emotionally topped up and mentally fresh, it's quite easy to be patient and slow to anger.*
      - *Car wanting to get into the lane and cuts me off - no worries!*
      - *Kid dropping food on the floor - oh how cute and precious!*
      - *Computer being slow - oh that's fine!*
    - *But when I've had less sleep overnight, or when I've got a lot on my plate - it's a completely different story*
      - *Car cuts me off - how dare you!*
      - *Kid dropping food on the floor - How annoying!*
      - *Computer being slow - complete frustration!*

- But in every situation - we are called to be slow to anger!
- But James isn't just talking about situations that we find ourselves in, he's talking mainly about relationships with each other and other people!
  - Be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.
- I'm sure we've been on the opposite side of this with some people
  - You may have experienced trying to explain something to someone who just interrupts you with their own point of view; Or they just quickly flare up without hearing you out.
  - It's quite frustrating isn't it? It's really quite demeaning and patronising isn't it?
  - On the flip side - when you try to tell someone something and they listen intently, or you try to explain something and they don't interrupt you, and are slow to speak - that can be such a gift isn't it?
- Well - every person is to be like this with one another. St John's ought to be a place where people are eager to listen and slow to speak and anger.
- And this is quite counter-cultural at the moment.
- In our western world - it's often the case that the person with the most words and the loudest mouth wins!
- People are quick to dismiss the other person's view and not pay any attention to what they are trying to say.
- People are quick to get enraged at people who may hold a different view
- Social Media is the breeding ground for this type of behavior!
  - We recently ran an ad on social media for our public lecture - and let me tell you, a lot of people have been quick to speak and quick to get angry about it!
- But not so with us.
- Even when we are tired, even when we are under pressure or under stress.
- Remember James' original audience would have included Christians who were beginning to undergo persecution.
- And under persecution it would have been easy to get angry and easy to get snappy with each other and the persecutors - but even so, the call is the same. Reign it in!
- Now it's important to note here that James isn't saying that we must deny our emotions and just never experience that feeling of anger.
  - I don't think that's realistic or healthy!
  - After all, our emotions are part of our bodily functions - that yes, have been corrupted somewhat by the fall, but are being renewed day by day...
- But It's also important to remember that we aren't just helpless victims to our emotions or thought patterns - we actually have more control than we actually think!
- I think that feeling of frustration and anger will always be a part of us - but James is writing to urge us to not let that anger get control of us! Or get out of control! Don't let rage simmer - don't harbour that anger, but talk to God about it!
- And if sinned against, be slow to anger and move towards forgiveness!
- And why?
- Because V20
- "For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God."
- Anger does not produce or match up with the righteousness of God.
- Human Anger isn't in line with the type of character that God desires because God himself is slow to anger!
- In the Old Testament, God is described like this:
  - Exodus 34:6 "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,"

- The fact that God is slow to anger is mentioned 9 times in the Old Testament!
- And when God does get angry - his anger isn't like ours.
  - Our anger is often selfish, prideful - corrupted by the fall
  - His anger at sin and all that is unholy is perfect and good
- And some may say
  - Well - Jesus turned the tables in the temple and Got angry - so that gives us permission to get angry and lash out
  - To which I would respond - well that's Jesus. He's the perfect Son of God. His anger isn't like ours.
  - And in those 33 years of his earthly life - that's the one occurrence that we see of Jesus' anger, you could possibly class his woes to the Pharisees as words of anger but that only makes 2 - so he himself is slow to anger - so it should be with us.
- And this is the great news - is that God is slow to anger with us!
- Because of our sinfulness and our rejection of him - we deserve his anger, his wrath!
- But God in his love for us, has provided through Jesus a way for that anger to be taken away.
  - Jesus has taken the cup of wrath or anger - on our behalf by his death on the cross, and destroyed it!
- And instead of anger, we receive God's mercy and forgiveness.
- And so because God has been slow to anger towards us - it makes sense that we ought to be slow to anger towards others.

### - **Humble Doers**

- James continues to outline what this looks like:
- V21 "Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls."
- Because we are to be slow to anger, James urges us to take it all off -
- This has the image of dirty and filthy clothes!
  - *I remember in grade 9 when we were playing Rugby playing in the rain - we were playing on grounds that were good at draining, apart from the cricket pitches in the middle.*
  - *They had clay in them and became more of a bog of mud.*
  - *So naturally, after the game we had a slip and slide competition in the mud!*
  - *Our clothes were unrecognisable by the end!*
  - *Before getting in our parent's cars - we had to take them off and put fresh clothes on.*
- And James says that anger and sin is like having dirty clothes on - and so he urges us to take off the old way of doing things.
- And instead, receive with humility or meekness the implanted word
- That's a fascinating phrase isn't it? The implanted word?
- What does it mean?
  - Well, this is a clear reference to what we heard in our Old Testament reading from Jeremiah 31.
  - Jeremiah is writing about the new covenant, the new promises that will come in when the Messiah comes.
  - And specifically the promise of having the Law or the Word implanted within us.
  - Jer 31:33 "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people."
- We have the law or the Word implanted in our hearts
- This is what is going to save us - receiving that word
  - Anger and wretchedness won't save us, filthiness won't
  - But receiving the promises of God - that will save us. Repenting from our sins, and turning to God - that will save us

- And - Letting God's word go to work on us, not hardening our hearts towards it, having humility and meekness - that's what's required of us!
- Pride leads to anger, humility and meekness are the things that allow us to enter into the Kingdom of God.
  
- And this is what it means to receive it: Do it.
- V22 "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves"
- In talking about the "word" here - Is James talking about the Law - as in the Torah - that all the Jews were supposed to follow?
- In V25 - James also talks about the perfect law and the law of liberty.
- What is he talking about?
- Well it's clear that James doesn't mean the Torah - he himself knew that they couldn't keep it as he says in Acts 15 at the council of Jerusalem
- James is most probably talking about the law as interpreted and fulfilled by Christ!
- Essentially - do what Jesus tells us to do. In Jesus' words there is freedom and wisdom!
- Jesus calls on us to repent and believe in him - and take up our cross and follow him! Give everything over to him.
  
- The person who Hears Jesus' words and doesn't do them - hasn't really received them.
- In fact Jesus himself says in Matthew 7 that whoever hears his words and doesn't practice is like a foolish man who builds his house on the sand and it gets blown down.
- But whoever hears Jesus' words and puts them into practice is like a wise man building his house on a solid rock...a solid foundation!
- James also gives a little parable in the next verses:
- V23 "For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like."
- The person who hears the words but doesn't do them - is essentially a forgetful fool!
- V25 "But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.
  
- Now let's make it clear again - we aren't saved by what we do. We aren't saved because of our actions - we are saved completely by the grace of Christ. Justified.
- But being a saved person - having been justified - always leads to living a saved life and doing stuff FOR Christ.
- The one who takes Jesus' words seriously:
  - Words such as: repent and believe, love your enemy, pray for those who persecute you, give to the needy, do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, deny yourself and follow me:
- Whoever takes those words seriously and does them - will be blessed in their doing!
- Essentially - James is saying that obedience to Jesus really matters.
- Becoming more like Jesus really matters, and the theological word for this is sanctification. Sanctification really matters.
- And we don't just grit our teeth and just get to it by ourselves as we try to obey,
- But, God has implanted his Word in us - and has given us his Spirit to help us and to sanctify us and point us to Jesus.
- We just need to remember to have the humility and meekness to receive that word and do it! Allow God to do his work in us!
- And also - remember the blessing it is to be saved as a people growing in holiness day by day.
- We have our brothers and sisters here to encourage us, sharpen us, rebuke us, lift us up - we need one another for us to keep growing in Holiness and our doing of the word.
- It's not a solo effort and praise God for that.
  
- **Proactive Carers**

- James continues:
    - V26 “If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”
  - Again - James tackles our speech - and this won’t be the last time either!
  - If we don’t let God work in our hearts and don’t grow in our holiness - our religion is worthless!
    - Our faith is worthless if we are stubborn and calloused.
    - Worthless if we lash out with our anger with our tongue or with our pen or keyboards on social media!
  - But what does God want instead?
  - To care for the least and the lonely - and resist the things of the world.
  - The word for visit here has the vibe of visiting a person with helpful intent...or to help look after them.
  - This call of caring for orphans and widows is so consistent throughout the whole of the bible.
  - This isn’t an exhaustive list at all! But James is laying out the bare essentials!
  - If we don’t practically and proactively love and care for those who need it most, then we’re missing the point.
  - We aren’t called to just be passive but active doers!
    - Just as Jesus lovingly cared for us and provided life for us in his death and resurrection for us - we ought to care for others!
  - And called to resist or keep ourselves from the sinful patterns and habits of the world from which we have been saved...//
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- So how is your holiness going? How is your growth in your obedience to Christ?
  - How is our growth in patience? Your growth in humility?
  - When was the last time we sat down and intentionally prayed about killing sin and actually worked at killing it? And maybe even asking someone to keep you accountable to it!
  - When was the last time you changed a habit or pattern in your life because of something you read in the bible or heard from the pulpit?
  - Because James has reminded us - our obedience really matters.
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- We started out with the question: When the people of the world think of a Christian, what do you think they think about?
    - Unfortunately - Christians have had the reputation of being angry with the world, grumpy, pushy, and sometimes nasty and judgy...
  - But I wonder - when your non-christian friends or family think about YOU and your Christian faith, what do you think they’d think about?
    - If someone was to say “Hey, you know that Bruce...he goes to church he’s really....” - what do you think they’d say?
    - Now I don’t think this is a question to dwell on...
    - But it’s an interesting thought experiment and potentially a helpful lens to think through
    - But perhaps it’s better to ask this question of someone close by..a spouse or a really close friend!
    - Because hopefully they’d say something along the lines of:
    - *Oh they’re really kind...They’re a great listener...they’re really patient and I’ve never really seen them grumpy...They’re really caring*
  - And hopefully even...and I pray that this could be said one day of me and you: *they remind me of Jesus.*