

Sep – Nov 2018

Gold Hill



A six week series in

JAMES

“But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.”

(James 1:22)

Introduction

The book of James has at times been rejected, and at times challenged because of its approach to faith. At its heart, though, is a deep desire not just to have a faith in Jesus but to be faithful to Jesus in the way we live, speak and behave. It is a call not just to believe in our minds, but to 'Just Do It' with our lives.

We are going to be spending 6 weeks in the book of James at both our 8:15am and 10am services. As we do, we will be asking God again and again to shape us on the inside so that we are transformed on the outside. This guide is aimed to help us to do that as effectively as we can, so dig in and get active!

What this booklet contains...

In this booklet you will find, for each week in the series:

- Details of the **Sunday sermon** and space for notes
- **Study notes** for you to use, personally or in a group
- Suggestions for how we can '**just do it**' in our lives

For those who used the notes for the series earlier in the year on Deuteronomy, you'll notice there is no reading plan this time around. That's because for this series with such a focus on prayer in action, we want to encourage things to do, not just to read. You'll see that those activities are all undergirded by prayer.

Sunday Series Overview

1. 'Pressing On' (1:1-18) – Sep 30

Keeping on going when that's not easy

2. 'Hearing and Doing' (1:19-27) – Oct 7

Responding to what we hear, not ignoring it

3. 'Playing Favourites' (2:1-13) – Oct 14

Examining our behaviours so they reflect God's heart

4. 'Faith that Works' (2:14-26) – Oct 21

Faith without works is dead

5. 'Taming the Tongue' (3:10-12) – Oct 28

The way we speak shows us who we are

6. 'Living in Faith' (5:1-12) – Nov 4

Lessons in pressing on with faith in God

You can find all of these details, along with recordings as we go along at goldhill.org/james.

WEEK 1: 'Pressing On'

Sermon Notes

September 30

James 1:1-18

As the book of James begins, he recognises that life is often pretty tough, and gives guidance about how to hold on to God in faith in the midst of that. This study focuses on a few of those principles.

READ JAMES 1:1-8

In v2-4, James explores the nature of trials and faith.

When have you faced trials and hardship, and what was the effect it had on you?

What is the normal, human, gut reaction when life is hard and difficulties arise?

Have a look again at v5. **What does James advocate as a first reaction to hardship? And how would it look for you to build that practice into your life?**

READ JAMES 1:9-11

James makes a comparison between the rich and the poor. **What distinction is he trying to make?**

How do words like these challenge your perspective in life?

READ JAMES 1:12-18

James speaks of the effect of temptation for us as we follow Jesus. **What temptation affects you most?**

Does anything in this passage give you a fresh way of combatting that temptation?

Just Do It!

The habits we form will transform the ways we handle hardship and temptation. So what will you do?! Here are two things you could do this week.

1. Be honest about your priorities

Write two lists. On the first, try to be honest about what the priorities are in your life, and rank them as to what, in practice, is most important. On the second, write how you want that to be. *Ask God to work in transforming you from one to the other.*

2. Set out a plan for your prayer life

James begins with the importance of prayer, and of asking for God's wisdom. Take stock of your prayer life, and then set out a plan for how you want it to look. *Ask God to enable you to work out that plan as you try to seek Him.*

WEEK 2: 'Hearing and Doing'

Sermon Notes

October 7

James 1:19-27

What really makes us the kinds of people that God wants us to be? James has some strong words here, but they can be so life-giving if we will listen and let them be. This study is all about how we will respond.

READ JAMES 1:19-21

In these verses, James talks about how we listen and respond when challenged. **How do you normally react to challenge?**

In v21, James talks of welcoming the word implanted in us. **What is that word, and how is it implanted in us? What does it mean to welcome it meekly?**

READ JAMES 1:22-25

Are you more naturally a hearer or a doer?

James uses an image in v23-24. **What does it tell us about how we should engage with God's word?**

Let the words of this passage speak to you. **What is the balance in your hearing and doing? Does it need to be adjusted?**

READ JAMES 1:26-27

How do you think you would describe the word 'religion'? (Don't just cheat and copy the passage!)

What does James's definition reveal about God's heart, and how are you going to respond?

Just Do It!

In v27 of this passage, James's definition of religion is in two parts. Here are two things you could do this week which will help you not just hear them, but do them.

1. Choose a way to care

In James's day, it was orphans and widows. Who is it in ours? Who is it in your life? Pick a cause, a person or a part of our world, and find a practical way to care and serve. *Ask God to give you a heart that more and more responds to the needs that you see.*

2. Look after your own purity

The 2nd part is about not getting corrupted by the world we live in. What are the biggest dangers for you in that arena? Write down areas of life where you need God to keep you pure. *Ask God to strengthen your resolve as you seek to remain shaped by Him alone.*

WEEK 3: 'Playing Favourites'

Sermon Notes

October 14

James 2:1-13

It seems as though the kinds of churches that James was writing to had some pretty bad habits! He takes some time to challenge them, but how might God want to challenge us through these same words?

READ JAMES 2:1-7

James lays deep challenge in v1! **From this verse, how can you tell what you really believe? Why is this?**

James gives an illustration of their behaviour. **What is their error, and where do you think it comes from? Is there an equivalent that we might be guilty of?**

James goes on to compare the rich and the poor. **How does our society view both the rich and the poor? In the church, what do you think the answer is?**

Look again at v5. **What does James mean, and what does that mean for us?**

Does your lifestyle tell you, or tell God, that there is a problem with how you view money or those with/without it?

READ JAMES 2:8-13

What is James's basic argument in these verses?

Part of what James speaks about is being selective in our obedience to God's law. **Are there ways that you might pick and choose?**

Just Do It!

James is very clear: it is our behaviour that shows the degree to which we truly believe in Jesus (v1). Here are two things flowing from this passage we can do to show we do.

1. Consider your biases

Spend some time being honest with God and with yourself about the ways you do show favouritism. Who do you gravitate to? Or who do you wish you could ignore. We all have them, so be honest. *Ask God lovingly to reveal these things to you.*

2. Resist your biases

Having recognised them, take a deliberate step or two to go in a different direction. It might mean actively pursuing someone you find difficult or stepping out of comfortable circles of people. *Ask God to give you His grace and strength as you step out.*

WEEK 4: 'Faith that Works'

Sermon Notes

October 21

James 2:14-26

This passage is arguably the central passage in all of James. In it, he lays out most clearly his argument for why a life of action and good works is so important. It is crucial that we get this right in our lives.

READ JAMES 2:14-26

There is a lot going on in this passage! **Try to put together the basic direction of the argument that James is making.**

This passage has caused a lot of controversy over the centuries. **Why do you think that is, and what must we really avoid misinterpreting in the passage?**

(As you explore, it might help to contrast this passage with what Paul wrote in Romans in 3:21–4:12.)

Try to answer this question twice, once if this passage weren't in the Bible, and once in light of it: **What is 'faith'?**

When we talk about 'faith', does it reflect the kind of heart that James expresses here?

In v26, James makes a very stark statement. **Does this encourage or challenge you? How?**

What aspect of your faith or your life do you believe God might be asking you to invest in or work on as a result of this passage?

Just Do It!

The heart of this passage is really the heart of the whole book of James. It asks us to connect our faith and our deeds, and this is something you can do this week in that vein.

1. Write down what you believe

Make a list of things that you believe. It does not have to be everything you believe about God, or to be particularly clever, but try to write down about 8-10 things you believe in. *Ask God to draw to your attention what the vital things are that you do believe.*

2. Write down what you will do

For each of those things that you believe, take a bit of time to consider how your life can look as a result. E.g. "I believe Jesus is alive, so I will live knowing that anything is possible." *Ask God to inspire you as you go through this task.*

WEEK 5: 'Taming the Tongue'

Sermon Notes

October 28

James 3:1-12

This is one of the most practical and uncomplicated parts of the book of James, possibly even of the whole New Testament! And yet it can be so hard to put into practice. In this study, we're going to try!

READ JAMES 3:1-6

James begins not with speaking in general, but with teaching. **Why is teaching important, and what goes wrong if it is done badly?**

In these verses, lots of different images for the tongue are used. **What are they all, and what is the purpose of each different image?**

Think about your own use of your tongue. **What effect have you had with your own voice, either in a good or a bad way?**

READ JAMES 3:7-12

James seems to say that no-one will ever be able to tame their tongue properly (v8). **Do you agree with that? Why or why not?**

What motivation does James give for us as we seek to take seriously our speech?

Underlying these images, there is an idea that what comes out of our mouths shows what we are like inside. **How can we work on this?**

What commitments do you want to make about the use of your tongue?

Just Do It!

The way we speak matters. It shows what we are like inside, and this passage asks us to really hear that challenge. Here are two ways we can seek to tame our tongues.

1. Actively listen to yourself

Spend a whole day choosing to tune in to your own words and take note of them.

What words and phrases do you say a lot? What is the tone of your speech? What does this show about you? *Ask God to reveal something to you through this.*

2. Decide to say something

Prayerfully consider what it might be that God wants you to use your voice for. It might be to encourage, challenge, or speak into a situation... And then find a way to do it. *Ask God to reveal this to you, and then to give the strength and wisdom to follow through.*

(Note: in this series, we are not looking at chapter 4 of James; you might like to by yourself!)

WEEK 6: 'Living in Faith'

Sermon Notes

James 5:1-12

November 4

As we come to the final part of our series in James, there is an encouragement to press on and keep on going with patience. This study will focus on how we can build that faith and patience into our hearts.

READ JAMES 5:1-6

These are some really strong words! **What is it about the rich that James challenges in these verses? Is that necessarily true of the rich?**

What parts of that challenge do you need to listen to so that you do not fall into the trap of these 'rich' people?

In v6, James speaks of those who did not 'resist' the evil of others. **What is it in our society today that the church needs to 'resist' and not just accept?**

READ JAMES 5:7-12

Now James turns to the response of Christians in the face of all this. **What are the different responses that He calls us to in these words?**

Patience is an important theme in these words. **What lessons about patience can we learn here so that we can live as patient people?**

We are pointed to a number of examples of patience. **Whose examples do you draw inspiration from?**

The final verse here (v12) seems to be a change of topic. **Is this connected with what James has been saying, and how do we understand it?**

Just Do It!

In these parting words from James, we are presented with a choice between storing up treasures for ourselves and trusting in God. Here are some ways to make that choice.

1. Examine your treasures

What do you invest in? Think through your spending, the way you use your time, and how your thought-life looks. Note down what you think they show about your priorities and your heart's desires. *Ask God to reveal to you something of your priorities.*

2. Build up your patience

We all have ways and times in which we struggle to be patient. Take some time to honestly assess where those are, and make a note of them. *Spend some time with God asking Him to enable patience specifically for those things.*



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