

“Do As I Say And As I Do”

James 2:14-26

Series: SWORD

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February 16, 2020

I was given this bible as a birthday present in 2010. Later that year I received a bible cover to protect my bible from damage. By keeping my bible safely enclosed, it is protected from pages getting torn, having coffee spilled on it or being damaged in pretty much any way. Of course, it also makes it awfully difficult to read. And if I can't read it – how does it help that it doesn't get damaged? Unlike other books, the bible was not written for us to just read it once and then be placed on a shelf. This is a book that should be read repeatedly. It is so much more than just a good read. Paul writes:

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,” - 2 Timothy 3:16

What does Paul mean by that? He's referring to the fact that while the bible was written by man, it was inspired by God. It is one of the primary ways that God talks to us – along with prayer and through others. And when we become accustomed to listening to the things that God is telling us, we get to learn things about ourselves that we don't realize. And through this growth we begin to deepen our relationship with Him. And that helps us in our relationship with others.

But there is more to it than just reading the bible. Personally, I sometimes find that when I finish reading a chapter of the bible, I have to wonder...what did I just read? And then, I re-read it (sometimes it happens more than once). But that's just me. I'm sure that's never happened to any of you. So how do we learn from it? We learn the same way we always do. I find that highlighting, taking notes, marking passages and discussing it with others helps with my comprehension. There are also different kinds of study plans, and that is what we are doing here with this three-week sermon series on the SWORD method of study.

The SWORD method is an apt acronym as the bible refers to the Word of God as a sword:

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Hebrews 4:12

The acronym comes from the following:

Scripture
Wait
Observe
Request
Dedicate Yourself

Last week, Doug introduced this using Psalm 40 as the passage. Now in week two, we are going to look at one of the New Testament letters – The Book of James, or the letter of James.

It is widely believed by theologians and historians that the Book of James was written by James, the brother of Jesus and son of Mary and Joseph. It may have been the first book written in the New Testament, as early as between 40 and 50 AD. In his letter to new believers, he strives to explain how difficult it will be to live a life based upon a new set of beliefs. He also is encouraging these believers to live the life that we are preaching. He does this in ways that stress the things we shouldn't be doing, as well as those that we should do.

Today we are going to study James 2:14-26. I will go through the process in steps, and will explain each step as we go.

Scripture – We will start out by reading the passage. Listen in the way that is best for you: follow along with the passage from your bible, your app, the screen or from the bulletin print out. Or you can just close your eyes and listen to me. As you listen, focus on the portion of the scripture that speaks to you.

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. ¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

²⁰ You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless^[a]? ²¹ Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. ²³ And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,”^[b] and he was called God's friend. ²⁴ You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

²⁵ In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? ²⁶ As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. James 2:14-26

Take 1-2 minutes to select and write down below a verse or group of verses that stood out to you.

Wait – Take three minutes now to wait on the Holy Spirit. Put aside any thoughts and worries of the day. Meditate on the Scripture. Reread to yourself the verses you selected slowly, and attentively. Then pause to let the Holy Spirit speak to you.

Observe – What did you notice about the verse(s) you selected? Was there something the Holy Spirit spoke to you? Write below your observations and questions.

ME: So, I selected the following two verses:

“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?” James 2:14 and,

“But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” - James 2:18a.

For me, in this Observe section, I had a couple of observations, as well as questions.

- James is confusing me here
- Isn't our salvation assured by our faith?
- I didn't think we could earn our way to salvation in heaven.
- Is what James is saying contradicting other writings in the New Testament?

This is where the short time period that we are using here makes it a little more difficult to move ahead. And that is what is beneficial about using this method during your study/devotion time. You can extend your study time if you need to resolve issues – or you can finish and pick up where you left off. Or, if you are in a growth group, you can get feedback from others. I did some research and came up with passages that spoke about salvation by faith. Paul says:

- This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, Romans 3:22
- And, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.” Ephesians 2:8-9

So why does James seem to focus on deeds in this chapter? Is this a contradiction of other writings in the bible? It isn't. What James is speaking about here is a problem he recognizes among these new believers, with extremes on both ends.

In verse 14 he is speaking about those that are taking Paul's teachings about faith and salvation to the extremes. He must be speaking about people that believe that since Jesus died for their sins, they are assured of salvation. But – do they really have the faith they say they have. Notice how he says, “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds?” – James 2:14. Did you notice that he uses the word “claims”? He isn't denying here that we have been saved through faith. He is questioning whether such faith is real.

The second group is a group that points to their Christian deeds as their path to salvation. “You have faith; I have deeds.”

He never says that we can receive salvation based upon our deeds. He is saying that our deeds and our faith are equal. The first deed we show as a sign of our faith is when we give our lives to Jesus and place our trust in Him.

In verses 21 and 22 he writes, “Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.” – James 2:21-22

We don't perform our deeds to get to heaven. Our deeds are the way we share our faith with others: local ministries, mission trips, growth groups, music, evangelism. All to share the love of Jesus Christ.

Request – Ask God to show you where and how the Scripture and observations apply to your life. Write the application below.

ME: Please continue to guide me in where you want me to serve. Let me learn to accept that it doesn't matter if I feel good because of what I'm doing, or if I am doing what I do because it makes me feel good.

Dedicate Yourself – Looking at how the Scripture applies to you, what is one thing that needs to change? Perhaps the change is in the way you think or feel, the way you see yourself or others, something you need to do or stop doing.

ME: Always keep in mind that my actions go hand in hand with my faith. Do as I say AND as I do. Jesus may have ever said those words, but he set that example. He instructed us in obedience:

Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." John 14:23

And then, at the Garden of Gethsemane, knowing the fate that was in store for Him, He showed His obedience:

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." Matthew 26:39

We are all very busy, and we make excuses for why we don't make the necessary time available to strengthen our relationship with God.

Work is so busy. I just don't even have time right now to study a chapter

Maybe I'll join a growth group after the kids get out of grade school.

That guy looks like he needs some help, but I'm already late. I'm sure someone else will help him.

We have a couple of weeks before the Ephesians study begins March 1st. Let's try to take some steps and get ready for that.

- Give something up for Lent. But don't just give up coffee, or chocolate. I think that the reason to give something up for Lent should be focused on giving something up that is interfering with your time with God – that relationship. Last year I decided that I needed to make more time to spend on my devotion time, my bible study time, my God time. I decided to give up stupid TV. Not all TV. Just stupid TV. And what I mean by that is Friends, Seinfeld & Big Bang Theory. Not that they are bad shows – I like them. But I've also seen every one of them I don't know how many times! I plop in the chair at night after a long day of work, click on the TV, and vegetate in front of a show that I can read the lines along with the characters. But I didn't just switch it out and watch the MLB

channel (as much as I might want to prepare for the upcoming baseball season). No. I left the TV as it was when I got home – blank. And then I used that time for study.

- Study with others
 - You could join a growth group, or even better – start a new micro-group. Ask one or two other friends or family members to get together once a week, just for an hour, and study together. Go see Meg Smith in the lobby after service. She'll help you get started.
- Live your faith
 - It doesn't have to be ministry related or signing up for a mission trip – not that there's anything wrong with that – but just share your faith with others through your daily living.
 - Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. - James 1:22
 - A couple weeks ago I was shopping at BJ's and after I loaded my car and was taking the cart back, I noticed a woman finishing emptying her cart. So I asked if I could take hers as well – no big deal. She said, "Thank you. You just made my day." We exchanged "God Blesses" and went on our way. For whatever reason, it was a big deal to her.

Last month, on January 14th, the Tuesday morning men's group led by Dave Wollman began their study time at Einstein's bagel shop by praying the Lord's prayer. A young man at a table next to them walked over and said that he recognized the Lord's prayer and asked if they would pray for him. They invited him to sit down and join them. He told them that his name was Johnathan and he was an active, struggling alcoholic. He was currently homeless and had just spent a cold night in the woods behind Kohls. They prayed for him but didn't stop there.

They went over to the ShopRite and picked up some hygiene items for him. Knowing my involvement with Recovery, Dave contacted me and asked if I would be able to come over, talk to Johnathan and see if there was any way I could get him any help. I drove over to Einstein's, found Johnathan, and introduced myself to him. A couple of the guys from the bible study had also come back to give him a blanket, a winter coat and a duffel bag to carry his stuff in.

Now I have to point out that this isn't actually a comfort zone area for me. My services in the prison and recovery ministry is more administrative. I help run a coffeehouse with Michelle and co-lead the quarterly recovery service – happening today. I also lead worship services at one of the Philadelphia prisons. However, when somebody contacts me to ask how to get help for a friend or a family member in a crisis situation, I usually reach out to other ministry members that are much more qualified than I am. But on this day, those other people were only available by phone. So I worked with Johnathan for several hours until finally convincing him that he needed to stop setting conditions and just accept the help that he needed. It is important in these situations that the individual takes responsibility for his recovery.

He checked himself into a hospital for detox and then agreed to go to a facility in the Poconos where we had found a bed for him.

Johnathan had come before the group at Einstein's asking for prayer and they accommodated him. Prayer works and is important in times of need. But they also recognized that there was more that this young man needed, and they acted on it and blessed Johnathan and made him feel welcomed, worthwhile and loved.