

FAITH IN ACTION

Week 1 | James 1 - 2

Day 1 - Faith in Action = Humility

Read: James 1:19-21

If you've ever used a "walkie-talkie", then you've experienced the annoyance of a person holding the button down while you're trying to speak. Not following the basic radio etiquette of speaking and then waiting for a response, obviously results in confusion. Similarly, if you're texting and rapidly responding before reading the other person's responses, miscommunication often follows.

Before you start thinking about that person in your life who needs better communication etiquette, as with all Biblical study, it's important for us to look at ourselves first. Instead of thinking about all the people in your life that "really need to hear this", think about the way that YOU need to hear this. James is filled with simple practical instruction, however, you will 100% need God's strength to put it into practice.

James gives us 3 very practical tips in our passage today: be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. We can all think about conversations and interactions that would have gone SO much better if we had only followed these 3 simple tips. If we know this, then what keeps us from following them? Why do we so often respond without listening first? The simple answer is our pride. If we are honest with ourselves, there are times when we think we know best and we feel like our words are more important. We can easily desire to be seen, heard, or to be right, over our desire to listen and understand. Listening, hearing & understanding requires a posture of submission & humility. This is why God calls us over and over in His Word to humble ourselves. God knows that having a posture of humility is what makes us teachable to mature & grow our faith. How can we put our faith into action if we aren't willing to hear the action God is calling us to do? We have to let go, humble ourselves, and submit to Him in order to hear His voice.

- Where should you have listened more before you spoke or reacted this week? Is there someone in your life that you need to ask for forgiveness from? Ask the Spirit to reveal this to you today.
- Are you trying to act on your faith without waiting and listening for God's instructions first? Are there areas where you are resisting receiving God's Word? Why?

Deeper Dive

As we begin our series in the book of James, it's important to understand the context during this time of the New Testament. James was written by Jesus's half-brother, James. James was leading the early church in Jerusalem at the time. This was a community of messianic Jews, or those that were Jewish but had also accepted Jesus as their savior. This community was heavily persecuted by the Jewish leaders. In addition to the persecution, there was also a famine in their region so they were struggling in many ways. James was eventually killed by the Jewish leaders because of his faith in Christ and leadership of the early church.

The book of James starts like a letter, however, it's doesn't address specific "church related" concerns like Paul's letters. Instead, it's an overall practical application of Jesus' teachings largely based on the "Sermon on the Mount" (Matt 5-7). It's short, direct, and meant to challenge us all. It should serve as a reminder of how we should be living in accordance with God's Word &

Deeper Dive

Looking into the mirror of God's Word:

- **Luke 6:35** ~ do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back.
- **1 Peter 4:10** ~ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.
- **Ephesians 4:32** ~ Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.
- **Acts 2:42** ~ They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer
- **Matthew 7:1** ~ Do not judge, or you too will be judged.
- **Ephesians 4:15** ~ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.
- **Matthew 6:4** ~ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.
- **1 Corinthians 9:7** ~ Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Day 2 - Faith in Action = Obedience

Read: James 1:22-25

Imagine looking in the mirror and seeing a bug crawling across your face. Would you just walk away and do nothing? NO way! We would immediately stop (maybe scream) and get the bug off our faces, right?!

James refers to God's Word as a mirror. The more we read, learn and understand the life that God calls us to live, the more clearly we see into that mirror. As we gain more understanding, we will see the areas where we need God's help in getting the bugs off our faces. Looking into the mirror reveals a true and authentic reflection of the Spiritual condition inside our hearts. Of course, once we see clearly into the mirror, we have to choose what to DO with what we see. We can either choose to act in obedience & truth, or we can choose ignore truth and act in deception & hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is the direct consequence of looking in the mirror and ignoring what we see. This is exactly what James is talking about in our verses for today.

Let's take a look at what this looks like in our daily lives. As you read over this chart, read the corresponding verses in our deeper dive section for today. Take a long look in the mirror of God's Word today and ask the Spirit to reveal the areas where you have been tempted to ignore applying His teachings in your own daily life.

Obedience: Faith in Action	Self-lead: Hypocrisy	Mirror
Volunteering joyfully - requiring nothing in return	Volunteering - out of obligation, to be seen, requiring thanks, or criticizing those who didn't "do" as much as you	Luke 6:35 1 Peter 4:10
Forgiving immediately & repeatedly in love	Forgiving with your words, but harboring resentment in your heart & keeping a secret record of wrongs	Eph 4:32
Attending church to worship God and grow in your faith	Attending church out of obligation, habit, or as a social activity - to see others or to be seen by them	Acts 2:42
Having good boundaries and holding others accountable with love & grace	Judging or condemning others for their mistakes and shortcomings, while ignoring your own	Matthew 7:1 Eph 4:15
Sacrificially giving as a joyful act of worship to God	Giving as an obligation, to be seen by others, or to gain preferred treatment	Matthew 6:4 2 Cor 9:7

- Is there an area that the Spirit revealed to you today as you read the mirror of His Word? Is there an area that you struggle with living in hypocrisy instead of obedience to Him?
- What areas of your life is God calling you towards obedience to Him as an act of putting your faith into action? Is there a next step that you have been reluctant to move forward and take?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **James 3:5** ~ Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.
- **Galatians 5:22-23** ~ But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.
- **Luke 6:45** ~ A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.
- **Ephesians 4:29** ~ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.
- **Proverbs 15:1** ~ A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.
- **Proverbs 18:21** ~ The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.
- **Proverbs 17:27** ~ The one who has knowledge uses words with restraint, and whoever has understanding is even-tempered.

Day 3 - Faith in Action = Fruit

Read: James 1:26-27

You may have heard that it takes 5-7 compliments to balance one criticism. In neuroscience this is called “negative bias”. Physically, our brains process negative words differently than positive ones. Negative comments produce stress hormones that activate our memory systems. This is why that time you gave a presentation at work and 15 people tell you that it was great, but 1 person says it was “weak”, that’s all you could think about. It’s not a character flaw when we remember negativity more, it’s scientifically how our brains operate. This is exactly why God cautions us to be careful with our tongues (James 3:5). Our tongues can create gossip, start conflict, destroy trust, crush confidence, twist the truth or stir up division. They can also speak life, share the Good News, bring peace, share wisdom, defend the hurting, and encourage growth. Words are powerful and they make an impact on our lives.

Our words reveal what is truly inside of our hearts. We will see spiritual fruit (Gal 5:22-23) in our words & actions if we are truly following God. Just as Jesus said in Luke 6:45 “the mouth speaks what the heart is full of”. James says in verse 26 that putting our faith into action means our tongue is controlled by the Spirit. If we talk about having faith, but our words & actions don’t show fruit, then we have a hypocritical faith. Fruit of the Spirit is grown by spending time with the Spirit, it can’t be manufactured or earned.

- Examine your heart as you read over this list. Are there areas you are struggling with a self-lead hypocrisy in your life? Ask for God’s help in growing the fruits of the Spirit in your life. How can you move towards putting your faith into action in these areas?

Fruit	Spirit-lead: Faith in Action	Self-lead: Hypocrisy
Love	Truth spoken with compassion & grace	Truth spoken with contempt, ego, or pride
Joy	Focused on hope, rooted in God’s goodness	Focused on criticism, outrage, sarcasm, or bitterness
Peace	Pointing to Jesus	Pointing to fear, worry, self, or anger
Patience	Pausing and waiting for the right timing in grace	Impulsively responding without considering the consequences
Kindness & Goodness	Speaking in a way that is for the betterment of others	Speaking in a way that is for the betterment of yourself
Faithfulness	Integrity, truth, honesty, authenticity, & dependability	Deceit, half truths, lies, manipulation, omissions or exaggerations
Gentleness & Self-Control	Speaking with humility, and wisdom in tone and timing	Speaking with disregard for others, impulsively and pridefully needing to have the last word, or to be right

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Romans 2:11** ~ For God does not show favoritism.
- **Philippians 2:3** ~ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.
- **Galatians 3:28** ~ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
- **Acts 10:34** ~ I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism
- **Job 34:19** ~ Who shows no partiality to princes and does not favor the rich over the poor, for they are all the work of his hands?
- **Proverbs 22:2** ~ Rich and poor have this in common: The Lord is the Maker of them all.
- **Galatians 2:6** ~ As for those who were held in high esteem—whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism.
- **Luke 10:36-37** ~ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

Day 4 - Faith in Action = Seeing Others

Read: James 2:1-13

Whether we like it or not, we all have filters, perspectives, bias, and various lenses that we see others through. Our life experiences, values, culture, and even personality traits can affect how we see others. Scientists have studied how our brains interpret people around us, and have found that we instantaneously read facial expressions, posture, body language, tone of voice, and mood. In seconds our brains form a “perception”. Of course, this quick scan function is built for speed to predict threats, it’s not meant for judgement of character.

Throughout scripture we are warned against judging others, or treating some as “better than” or “less than”. When we claim to have an active faith in God, but we show favoritism in this way, it reveals our own inner hypocrisy. James warns us against this in our verses today. God calls us to see everyone through His eyes, as His children, made in His image, and loved by Him. Part of putting our faith into action is living free from favoritism, prejudice, selfish motivations, or social bias in our interactions with others. Of course, as with all the ways we put our faith into action, seeing others the way that God sees them is ONLY impossible with His Spirit guiding us.

- Examine your heart today as you read over this chart. Are there even very subtle ways that you might be living with a self-lead hypocrisy verses a Spirit-lead faith in action?
- Are there people you are drawn towards, and those you avoid? Who is God calling you to notice and see through His eyes in your life?

	Spirit-lead: Faith in Action	Self-lead: Hypocrisy
Empathy	Offering grace & understanding for those whose struggles we can't relate to, or those that don't appreciate or reciprocate our care	Offering more grace & understanding towards those whose struggles we can relate to or that have done the same for us
Prayer	Praying for those we dislike, we can't relate to, or that have wronged us	Spending more time praying for family, friends, or those that also pray for us
Celebration	Celebrating the success of those that we are in competition with, that we disagree with, or that their success doesn't benefit us	More enthusiastically celebrating the success of our friends, family, those that can give us influence in return, or that have celebrated us
Social Activities	Inviting and including those that are overlooked, not included, hard to be around, considered weird or annoying, with different interests or political affiliation, and/or those that don't reciprocate or appreciate you	Only inviting and including family, friends, or those that have influence or power, those that could elevate your social status, with similar interests or political beliefs, and/or those that will reciprocate & appreciate your invitation

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Matthew 5:16** ~ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.
- **1 John 3:18** ~ Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.
- **Ephesians 2:10** ~ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
- **Matthew 7:21** ~ Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.
- **Isaiah 30:21** ~ Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'
- **Proverbs 16:9** ~ In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps.
- **1 John 4:19** ~ We love because he first loved us.

Day 5 - Faith in Action vs. Faith Knowledge

Read: James 2:14-26

Each January there is a huge influx of new gym memberships and purchase of exercise gear & diet apps. While these are great first steps, it's not the membership, equipment, or the diet app that makes us stronger and healthier, right? We have to put in the work of going to the gym, exercising, and eating right to build our muscles and transform our bodies to be healthier. The same is true in our spiritual lives as well. Sure, going to church, knowing Bible verses, getting a new fancy devotional book, or aligning with Christian beliefs is a great first step. However, the knowledge and association alone won't mature, grow, or strengthen your faith. Knowledge won't produce fruit. Spiritual fruit grows when we exercise and strengthen our faith muscles by putting God's Words into action!

In our reading today, James points to Abraham and Rahab as examples of putting faith into action. While we are not saved BY our actions, our actions demonstrate the reality of our faith. Just as James mentions in verse 19, even the demons have the knowledge of the truth. This is why he says that faith without action is dead. We are not earning God's love, we are responding to it in our obedience to Him.

As we have studied this week, faith *without* action is hypocrisy in our lives. Faith *in* action is listening to God's Word, trusting in His promises, and moving forward in active obedience to Him. Let's look at a few examples of taking knowledge and turning it into action:

Knowledge	Faith Knowledge into Action
God provides	Sacrificially giving generously, choosing gratitude vs. worry
God loves people	Reaching out to someone who is struggling, resisting favoritism
God forgives	Offering forgiveness to those who have wronged me
God hears me	Praying, listening, & talking to God, bringing my concerns to Him
God calls me to serve	Volunteering, helping and serving generously, without needing thanks or recognition
God values truth & integrity	Being honest & living in truth even when it's hard, honoring God with my words and actions

- Where has your faith become comfortable, knowledge based, or inactive? How could you take your faith knowledge and turn it into courageous faith in action?
- Is there something God is asking you to do? What is keeping you from moving forward in obedience to Him?
- If someone looked at your life this week, honestly reflect on what evidence of faith would they see in your actions, deeds, and words?