



YOU: Connect. Grow. Serve. Go!
Winter 2017-2018 Midweek/ Sermon Starter

Unit 2: Spiritual Check Up

Sermon Series Title: Grow Up: A Look At Spiritual Maturity

Sermon 4: Practice What You Preach

Bible Passage: James 1:22-25

Introduction

Not many people forget the smooth soul singing from Mr. Barry White. The bass-baritone vibrations still reverberate in the corridors of many hearts around the world. Many people remember Barry White for his hit single entitled, “Practice What You Preach.” This hit single, released in 1994, transported many on an enchanted voyage while soaring the charts—selling over 500,000 units and eventually achieving RIAA gold status.

In this single, White exposed a major issue that is prevalent in countless relationships: ‘lip service.’ Lip service is shown when someone expresses something verbally but fails to deliver in action. White’s response: Practice what you preach. Unfortunately, this epidemic is prevailing in ecclesiastical communities as well. Every week churches swell with people who fail to practice what is preached. Many people know Scripture, songs, and sermons but very few people truly practice what they preach.

Background/Context

James understood that believers are required to offer more than lip service. He wrote, “be doers of the word and not hearers only” (Jas. 1:22). In James 1, he beckoned believers to move past lip service; He encouraged believers in the words of Barry White, to practice what they preach.

A. Personal Reception
(Jas. 1:22)

The book of James is widely known as the “how to” for Christians—a manual for Christian discipleship and maturity. In our context, it can be viewed and used as the modern “Christianity for Dummies Book.” James began his manual with a comprehensive look at the necessity of the Word of God. For James, the Word of God is necessary for Christian maturity. Indeed, “man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). Yes, mature disciples recognize the necessity of God’s Word. Undeniably, all believers must value the Word of God.

Why is the word of God necessary? Paul wrote, “faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message about Christ” (Rom. 10:17). Our faith is fortified through the Word of God. For James, receiving the Word of God is essential for Christian development.

James’ audience understood this mandate. Hearing scripture—mainly the Torah and Pentateuch, read formerly aloud, was a fundamental component of their religious foundation. However, James seems to elevate this level of expectation with these words, “be doers of the word and not hearers only” (Jas. 1:22). In a very clear way, James commands us to put the Word of God into action. Our attentiveness to God’s Word should always influence action. Moreover, when we receive God’s Word, we should put it into practice. James invites all of us to practice what has been preached.

Application Point: How much do you value the Bible? What can you do to ensure that you spend more time in God’s Word? Remember, His Word should guide us everyday. We develop more maturity and stability when we receive and apply it to our everyday lives.

B. Personal Reflection (Jas. 1:23-24)

James continued arguing his case with the use of a mirror metaphor. James wrote, “if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man looking at his own face in a mirror” (Jas. 1:23). This metaphor stressed the point that the Word of God—just like mirrors—should force us to look at our reflections to assess our spiritual status.

Craig Bloomberg puts forward as a basis of argument, “mirrors in the ancient world were very different from our modern crystalline inventions. Generally made of polished bronze or copper, mirrors produced dim and warped reflections.” Consequently, one had to look at his own face in a mirror. The word *look* indicated much more than a glance, it implied an intense and concentrated focus. James used this metaphor to teach us that believers should intensely examine their lives after receiving the Word of God.

Unfortunately, we live in a society that is filled with too many ‘selfies’ and not enough self-reflection. According to James, there are people who look at themselves from the mirror of Scripture, go away, and immediately forget what kind of person they saw. This seemingly ‘forgetfulness’ is not ignorance; it is insubordination. In a real sense, there are people who blatantly refuse to change after hearing God’s Word. However, Jesus reminds us that everyone who hears his words and acts on them builds their houses on the rock, and everyone who does not, builds their houses on sand (see Matt. 7:24,26).

Application Point: How has the Bible shaped you and provoked change in your life? What necessary changes have you failed to make in your life? Remember, God’s Word exposes the areas of your life that need improvement. Study the Bible and discover the areas of your life that demand improvement.

C. Personal Response (Jas. 1:25)

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James concluded by reminding believers of their personal responsibility to respond to the Word of God with good works. He wrote, “the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer who works—this person will be blessed in what he does” (Jas. 1:25).

Good works should always follow those who look intently into the perfect law of freedom. The Word of God not only exposes our errors, but it also empowers us to put its principles into practice. This is why James commands us to be “doers of the Word.” Note that James’ charge is given in the present imperative tense which denotes a continuous, habitual command. This was a call for a life-long commitment. James was not soliciting a single or occasional action; He was instructing the believers to make “doing the Word” a permanent lifestyle.

Practicing what the Word preaches requires both discipline and devotion. All believers must be devoted and disciplined enough to make “doing the Word” a daily decision. This is what Jesus meant when he said, “if anyone wants to follow after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). When we devote ourselves daily to good works, then we will be blessed in all that we do.

Application Point: In what ways could your life improve if you decided to respond to God’s word? Remember, God’s word is designed to develop us. However, we must be willing to be obedient to God’s Word for that change to manifest. Allow the Bible to change you.