**Just Obey**

James 1:19-27

Here is our theme verse for this whole Just Do It series:

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” James 1:22

Nike introduced the ***Just Do It slogan in 1988*** and over the next ten years used professional athletes like Michael Jordan to turn Nike footwear into a worldwide fashion statement so that through the early ‘90s as I went through high school I envied the guys with the Air Jordans while I myself settled for knock-offs. In most rankings of marketing campaigns this one from Nike is considered one of the most effective if not the best of all time. Why do you think that is?

I think the genius of the phrase is the ***simplicity of it and the universal applicability***. Don’t just TALK ABOUT IT. Do it. Don’t claim you can do it. Do it. Don’t brag about how well you could do it. Just do it.

**And it doesn’t matter what IT is.** That depends on YOU and what you are going after. But whatever you want in life, whatever goal you have, whatever purpose you want to accomplish - just do it! Here I am preaching Nike!

Actually, Nike was just preaching JESUS. Jesus is the one who said don’t be like the foolish man who builds his house on sand. That’s the person who hears what I teach but doesn’t put them into practice. Be like the wise man who hears my words and DOES THEM. You could paraphrase Jesus there in Matthew 7 with the Nike slogan. **You’ve heard my teaching. Just do it.**

Here in James 1, the half-brother of Jesus is quoting his brother and appealing to the believers in the early church to take this practical approach to following Jesus. ***Don’t just talk about Jesus - follow Him.*** Don’t claim you will obey Jesus - do it. Don’t boast about how well you COULD follow Jesus - actually do the things Jesus told us to do. Just do it.

“Be DOERS of the word, not just HEARERS, deceiving yourselves.” ***There is a very real danger of self-deception*** and hypocrisy where what we SAY does not match what we DO. And the trouble with self-deception is that YOU ARE NOT AWARE OF IT - you are deceived in your own heart. So those of us who need to hear this message right now don’t realize how much we need to hear this message.

***Lord Jesus, please help us see what is in our hearts. Holy Spirit, search me and know me - test me and know my inmost spirit. See if there is some stubborn, unbelieving part of me and lead me to repentance.***

Ok. What we will see as we finish James 1 are three signs of genuine faith in Jesus. First:

**Three Signs of Genuine Faith in Jesus:**

1. You manage your emotions and **Words**

“Know this, my beloved brothers, let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.” James 1:19

James tells us in chapter three that the person who can control his tongue is a PERFECT man or woman. Of course, then he goes on to say ***NO ONE can tame the tongue***, it is a restless evil full of deadly poison. Our words reveal our hearts. Jesus said, “Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks.”

* When anger comes out, it’s because anger was simmering inside.
* When bitterness comes out, resentment was brewing.
* When complaining comes out of your mouth, discontentment was in there.
* When gossip and slander come out, insecurity and selfishness were stirring inside.

Our words betray us. They show what is really inside us.

So James gives us a simple three part test. Are we quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger? ***Or are we quick to speak, quick to anger and painfully slow to listen?*** That is the test of how well we manage our emotions and words. Look at the motivation in verse 20.

**Three Signs of Genuine Faith in Jesus:**

1. You manage your emotions and **Words**

“For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” James 1:20

When you speak up quickly, in anger, ***what is YOUR motivation?*** I bet we all FEEL like we are speaking with the righteous anger of God in the moment. But looking back it’s like - no, that was my own selfishness, that was my own impatience, that was my agenda being frustrated and I was “lashing out irrationally” to quote Neal from Santa Clause 1.

Remember ***how easy it is to deceive ourselves*** when we merely hear the word but don’t actually put it into practice. Here we have a direct command of Scripture to be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger. Just do it. It’s not about talking it over and deciding if we should apply this or not. It’s about being DOERS of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving ourselves.

Because **what we WANT is the righteousness of God** - first in ourselves and also in the people around us. We think that in speaking quickly and expressing our frustrations we are pursuing justice but that quick emotional reaction is almost never from God or for God, but is almost certainly from our own flesh and for our own benefit.

* Your young **son or daughter or grandchild** comes to you for attention. You’re busy with work or something else so your first inclination is to say, “Not right now.” You might even get irritated if the child has come to you a couple of times in the last hour. And in the moment you would probably feel justified; you would feel righteous like you are training that child to respect adults and recognize that work is important and they just have to wait. But is that response quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger? Is it really about the righteousness of God or the preferences of you?
* **That annoying neighbor** is doing it again - that irritating habit that wakes you up on Saturday morning, that loud dog, that noisy project. Your first reaction is to send a frustrated text or walk over and ask them, again, to keep it down. Maybe it’s another party, three Fridays in a row - and you can’t get to sleep. Are you being quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger? Are you actively thinking about the righteousness of God and His agenda in this situation - or just about your comfort and preferences? Is it possible the Lord wants you to walk over there and just see what all the fun is about?
* **Your boss is calling you in again** - you can tell he is upset about something. You immediately want to defend yourself and justify what you’ve been doing and shift the blame to someone else. But are you being quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger? Are you focused on the righteousness of God and quietly waiting to discern what He is up to in this situation? Or are you just being governed by your own emotions and your own desires?
* **Your husband or wife** brings up that familiar issue again and you feel your blood start to boil. Will you speak up right away to defend yourself and potentially counter-attack, or will you be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger? Will you focus on the righteousness of God or on the anger and desires of your own heart?

Trust me, I’m not saying I have mastered this. ***I am a verbal processor***, which many of you know because you’ve sat in meetings with me. I will sometimes say, “Let me say this and then decide if I agree with it.” Half the time I don’t. “I don’t know whose idea that was, but it was a bad one.” Yeah, D, that was your idea. Ah. This is definitely an area in which I need to grow.

**Three Signs of Genuine Faith in Jesus:**

1. You manage your emotions and **Words**

“If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless.” James 1:26

This is the picture for James of the tongue - **a wild horse that cannot be tamed**. It refuses to calm down but just bucks and kicks however it wants. Can you bridle your tongue? Do you have control over your emotions and words? Do you bring them under submission to the Lord and His righteousness? Or do you deceive your heart and reveal your religion to be worthless? The first sign of genuine religion or true saving faith in Jesus is that you are able to manage your emotions and your words.

***It’s not that you can do this on your own***, it’s that the Holy Spirit helps you with His supernatural power. On your own, it’s impossible to restrain the tongue, you cannot manage your volatile emotions. “The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, who can understand it?” No one! But the Holy Spirit can and will help you manage your own heart and your words - because SELF-CONTROL is one of His fruits.

So it’s not a question of whether you are PERFECT in this area, but **whether you are GROWING**. Is the Holy Spirit developing this fruit in you of increasing self-control, increasing submission to the righteousness of God? That’s the first sign of genuine faith. Second:

**Three Signs of Genuine Faith in Jesus:**

1. You actually **Love** people
	* Start with orphans and widows

“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction.” James 1:27

True religion means you manage your emotions and words and also your ACTIONS. You actually love people, especially the most vulnerable. I just heard this insightful line: ***“God gives people power to help the powerless.”***

Think of the influence and resources you have. God has given you POWER. For what purpose? To help those without power. Throughout the Bible there are three categories of vulnerable people: **orphans, widows and foreigners**. All over the Mosaic Law and in the prophets the people of God are commanded to take care of these vulnerable people and also the poor. “God gives people power to help the powerless.”

* Why has God given you ***money and material things***? To help those less fortunate than you.
* Why has God given you ***influence and status*** in your field and in your circles? To help those coming up behind you, those who need a little boost.
* Why has God placed you ***here in Tampa Bay*** at this time? To help the weak and hurting and vulnerable around us!
* Why has God placed Oakwood right here in ***Carrollwood***? To serve and love our community in Jesus’ name.

Orphans and widows. Here James just says **“to visit” them**. So even if you don’t have money and you don’t have the ability to take someone into your home, you can visit! You have TIME you can share. Recognize the affliction of children without parents and widows who have lost their husbands. There are always around 800 children needing placement in foster homes in our region. 800. About 20 get placed every day and another 20 get removed from their homes and need to be placed. So it’s a revolving door of pain and distress and affliction. Who knows how many widows there are in Tampa Bay. ***Do you know how many there are on your street?***

Turn back to verse 22.

**Three Signs of Genuine Faith in Jesus:**

1. You actually **Love** people

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” James 1:22

We come back to our “Just do it” verse. What is the WORD? The teachings of Jesus. What did Jesus teach? **LOVE ONE ANOTHER**. Love your neighbor as yourself. The law of Jesus is the law of LOVE. ***Are we just hearers of this word or are we DOERS of it?*** Are we like the foolish man who hears Jesus’ teaching but does not put it into practice? Or are we like the wise builder who hears and does it?

There is very real danger that ***we can deceive ourselves*** because we KNOW so much of the Bible. But knowing and doing are sometimes very separate realities because we are so capable of self-deception. We read the Bible and then immediately forget what we just read. We are like dirty children who glance in the mirror but then don’t actually wash our grimy faces and just race back to our mud pies in the driveway.

**Three Signs of Genuine Faith in Jesus:**

1. You actually **Love** people

“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.” James 1:25

There are three steps here. ***First you LOOK*** into the law of God - the perfect law - the law of LIBERTY. This is not the law of obligation, of requirement, of slavery. It is the law of freedom because it is the law of LOVE. You look at God’s law and ***secondly you PERSEVERE*** in it. We need to not just read the law and listen to it, we need to meditate on it and study it and memorize it and discuss it, persevering in these disciplines. But all of that is worthless if it doesn’t produce step three: ***actually DOING it***.

That’s the person who will be blessed in his doing - the one who is not a hearer of the law who walks away and forgets but a doer of the word who ACTS.

***Who can you love TODAY?*** Is there an orphan or at risk child in your life? Is there a widow or single mom you can love? Is there a refugee or new immigrant you can befriend? Is there someone who is poor and struggling? Is there an addict or someone with mental health challenges?

If you ask the Holy Spirit to show you someone you can love He will ALWAYS answer that prayer. Really everyone we see needs some encouragement. But the Lord places us intentionally by people in special need of love.

* Students, maybe there’s ***someone in your class*** who is hard to love. Truthfully, they are kind of annoying and everyone knows it. But the Holy Spirit keeps prompting you, nudging you to sit with them, to listen to this person, to be a friend.
* Grown-ups, I bet there is ***a neighbor on your street*** you know by sight but the Holy Spirit has been leading you to walk over and see how they are actually doing. My across the street neighbor always waves and says hello. A couple of weeks ago he waved me over and said his wife is in the hospital and would we go visit her to pray for her. Sometimes the leading of the Holy Spirit is WILDLY OBVIOUS. Sometimes the person literally pleads with you to pray for them and to love them. Other times people are proud and keep their problems more hidden.
* Maybe there is someone in your ***Community Group or in the church family*** who has been on your heart. If you would like to visit someone this week just contact me and I’ll share our list of shut-ins who would be delighted to have someone swing by.

Pray about it. And make a point this week of DOING something. Look into the perfect law of God and persevere in it - taking steps to DO what the Lord leads you to do. One more sign of genuine faith in Jesus.

**Three Signs of Genuine Faith in Jesus:**

1. You **Win** the battle with temptation and sin

“Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness.” James 1:21

We know that the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. We know that we need to manage our emotions, our words and our actions. So part of Christian growth is ***identifying those selfish, sinful, filthy expressions*** of our old pre-Christian life and throwing them away. Put off the old you and dress up in the new you, in Christ. Put to death the misdeeds of the body. Know your sin so you can fight your sin. As John Owen said, “Be killing sin, or it will be killing you.”

Genuine faith in Jesus engages in the battle with sin. The Holy Spirit convicts you if you don’t. ***One of the best signs that you really belong to Jesus is GUILT.*** When you do something wrong or fail to do something right, you quickly feel convicted about it. That’s the Holy Spirit you just grieved. That’s the Spirit of God in you leading you into all righteousness, reminding you of the teachings of Jesus and training you in the way you should go.

* If you can ***blow up at someone*** with toxic words and you feel no guilt or remorse about it, you should wonder if you are really a believer.
* If you can ***look at porn*** all the time, objectifying and dishonoring humans made in the image of God and you feel no guilt or shame, you should rightly question whether you have ever made a real commitment to Jesus as Lord.
* If you can ***lie and cheat*** and deceive and take advantage of people through questionable business practices and you feel no guilt about it - your heart is so hard that it could mean you were never changed by the grace of God.
* If you can think about ***orphans and widows*** and just shrug your shoulders and go back to your selfish, comfortable life without a second thought, without a twinge of conviction, you should take a serious pause to search your own heart and ask whether the love of God is in there.

Again, none of us are perfect, this side of heaven. But the Holy Spirit makes sure ***we keep making PROGRESS***. How? James shows us three steps here.

1. You **Win** the battle with temptation and sin
	* By daily **Receiving** God’s Word

“Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save you.” James 1:21

We cannot win the battle with sin on our own, apart from God’s Word and God’s Spirit. We must learn to receive with MEEKNESS, ***with humility, with teachability***, the Word God delights to IMPLANT in our hearts. Meekness is not weakness, it is submission to the authority of God, His leadership and guidance. The picture is of a wild horse being broken, submitting to its master.

So every day we need to humbly take in the Word of God, allowing Him to implant it deeply in our hearts and minds. This is what genuine faith does - it remains open to God and His Word, receptive and responsive to Him. ***That is the kind of faith that saves.***

Faith that ignores God’s Word, faith that does not receive instructions from God with humility and responsiveness is not genuine faith - it is false, hypocritical faith - so it cannot save. It may look like religion, but it is worthless if it does not lead to obedience.

1. You **Win** the battle with temptation and sin
	* By actively **Obeying** God’s Word

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” James 1:22

We deceive ourselves if we claim to be taking God’s Word into our hearts and minds but we don’t actually obey it; we don’t actually let it change us. Jeremiah says ***the Word of God is like a hammer***, breaking up the hard ground. He said the Word of God is like a fire, purifying God’s people and purging away the dross from our hearts. God’s Word is a sharp, two-edged sword that divides thoughts and intentions, the motives of our hearts.

Do we invite God to use His Word in this way? Do we welcome this purifying, soul-shaping labor from the Holy Spirit?

***The Bible will change you if you let it.*** But that’s the key - you have to let the Lord change you through His Word. It is very possible to just approach the Bible as an interesting book to learn from, amassing more and more knowledge. But remember, “knowledge puffs up.” It is LOVE that builds up.

Daily receive God’s Word. Actively obey God’s Word. One more key to winning the battle against temptation and sin.

1. You **Win** the battle with temptation and sin
	* By deliberately **Resisting** your sinful desires

“Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness.” James 1:21

I often say that in the battle against sin **we need both offense and defense**. It’s true in sports, and it’s even more true in warfare. If we don’t protect ourselves from the attacks that are coming we will quickly become disabled and destroyed. But if we only protect ourselves with massive defenses but don’t move forward on the offensive, we will not accomplish our mission on which the Lord has sent us. We need both offense and defense to be effective.

The point is to **be deliberate; intentional**. Sitting back and hoping things get better is just making yourself an easy target for the enemy. You need to know the common ways your sinful flesh is inclined to sin and the usual strategies the devil uses to trip you up.

“***PUT AWAY all filthiness*** and rampant wickedness.” Yes, sin is prevailing and rampant all around us. But we are the holy people of God and we should not be, indeed we must not be like the world. Cast off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. AND RUN with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Defense that casts off every temptation and sin. Offense that moves forward at a RUN.

Defense that doesn’t even go near the place of temptation. Offense that moves forward in love and service and ministry.

Defense that shares openly with one or two trusted Christian friends, asking them for prayer and encouragement. Offense that challenges those same friends to move forward as servant leaders and disciple-makers together.

Here is our summary:

**Three Signs of Genuine Faith in Jesus:**

1. You manage your emotions and **Words**
2. You actually **Love** people
	* Start with orphans and widows
3. You **Win** the battle with temptation and sin
	* By daily **Receiving** God’s Word
	* By actively **Obeying** God’s Word
	* By deliberately **Resisting** your sinful desires

James is a very practical letter. Just Do It could have been his motto. You say you follow Jesus - prove it. ***Does your life look like Jesus’ life?*** Do you love like he loved? Do you sacrifice as he sacrificed?

***True saving faith in Jesus MUST change you.*** Don’t kid yourself. Look for this kind of fruit in your life for evidence that you really belong to Jesus. First, you see your emotions and words more and more devoted to building people up. Second, you frequently, tangibly and sacrificially love people - especially the most vulnerable people. Third, you fight sin and are learning how to win.

Let’s close today with a simple exercise many of us use frequently called an SOS.



***Let’s take the next three minutes, while some music plays***, to pray over this passage of Scripture. Have your Bible open in front of you to this part of James 1 and ask the Lord these three questions. SOS. Lord, what do you want to say to me right now? How would you have me obey this passage? Who can I share this with?

This is a helpful practice for C groups and D groups and also for our personal daily Bible reading. We want to develop the habit of **reading the Bible like wise people** instead of fools - wise people who hear and do, not fools who hear and walk away, forgetting what we just read. So take a few minutes for an SOS, then I’ll close our time in prayer.