



Living in the good of what we believe: practical pointers from James

Follow up on Session 1: New Life is for New Living

In the first session we spent some time looking at God's glorious plans for the world and for our recruitment to help in their execution. In particular we focused on the passages below.

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10)

"For Christ's love compels us... he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again." (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

"... for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose." (Philippians 2:13)

"... so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God," (Colossians 1:10)

"His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life ... (and) given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:3-4)

To notice...

1. God has glorious plans and purposes (Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 2:13).
2. As his children, he has recruited us into his church to help execute his plans (Ephesians 2:10; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15) and this involves living for him rather than ourselves (2 Corinthians 5:14-15; Philippians 2:13; Colossians 1:10).
3. Christ's love compels us (2 Corinthians 5:14-15) and our aim is to please him in how we live (Colossians 1:10).
4. He has given us everything we need to complete our assignment (2 Peter 1:3-4), works in us to will and to act to fulfil his purposes (Philippians 2:13), and even forms his character in us (2 Peter 1:3-4).

To consider...

Rather than tackling all the suggestions below, I suggest that you choose one or two and set aside some time to consider it / them unhurriedly, prayerfully, expectantly. You might like to tackle them alone or online with others. Either way, God bless you richly as you wait on him!

1. Looking at the 5 passages above, what excites you most? What challenges you most? What do you find most encouraging? You might find it helpful to read the passages in more than one Bible translation. You can find many at <https://www.biblegateway.com>. I often find it helpful to compare the *New Light Translation*, *The Message* and the *NIV*.
2. Remind yourself of the opening promise in 2 Peter 1:3-4. Do you believe that God has given you all you need for a godly life, right now? Or, in reality, do you believe in the promise in a general sort of way (or possibly just for others) but not really for you here and now? If so, what do you suppose God would ask you to do about it? What difference do you think it might make in your life if you did believe (more strongly) that the promise held for you, here and now?
3. If, on the other hand, you already strongly believe this promise holds for you here and now, what impact do you think it is having on your life? Take time to thank God and ask him if he has more to show you on the matter.
4. Consider tackling #2 or #3 above from the perspective of you and your marriage partner together, or your family, your household or your home group, instead of as an individual.
5. The 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 passage encourages us to no longer live for ourselves but “for him who died for us”. What does / might it look like for you to (increasingly) “live for him who died for us” in your home / family, your work, how you handle your finances, during the Covid-19 restrictions, or some other facet of your life? Ask God if he has anything to say to you on the matter and give him space to speak. He might want to affirm or encourage you, to show you something new or to challenge you.
6. The Colossians 1:10 passage talks about pleasing God in what we do and how we do it. Are you sometimes aware of God’s pleasure in what you are doing or how you are doing it? If so, take time to thank him. If not, consider taking a lesson from the Puritans who used to refer to “Doing everything for an audience of one”; that is, mindful that pleasing God is our highest priority. Choose a particular aspect of your life: what might it look like for you to tackle it “for an audience of one”?
7. In his letter, James was concerned for any of his readers who – though believing the right things – were paying too little attention to putting them into practice (James 1:22-25; James 2:14-17). Conversely, in writing to the church in Ephesus, Paul expressed concern that the Ephesian Christians were in danger of thinking they had to earn God’s favour through their works (Ephesians 2:8-10). One theologian has summarised the twin dangers in the neat phrase, “We are saved for works not by works”. Do you stand in need of James’ or Paul’s correction(s) just now? Take some time to prayerfully consider.

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