



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

Alan Cottenden, Christ Church Bedford, January 2021



Session 1:
New Life is for
New Living

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practical pointers from James



James' letter

- James was probably Jesus' brother.
- Initially slow to believe in Jesus (John 7:5), by his time of writing (~50s AD) it seems James was the leader of the church in Jerusalem.
- After Stephen was stoned (30s AD) the members of the Jerusalem church were scattered "throughout Judea and Samaria" (Acts 8:1).
- Subsequently, James will have picked up from travellers how these scattered (largely Jewish (James 1:1)) Christians were getting on.
- His letter is probably to them. He majors on helping them in their challenges, rather than laying out a comprehensive theology.
- The topics he addresses sound remarkably familiar to modern ears!



New life is for new living

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues in it – not forgetting what they have heard but doing it – they will be blessed in what they do." (James 1:22-25)

- "Not just cerebral or credal: (in the bible) nothing is *known* until it also reshapes us." (Alec Motyer) **AC students.**
- James then *earths* these words into his first readers' lives, and ours!



Tom Wright on practicalities

“‘Hope’ ... is not a feeling. It is a virtue. You have to practice it, like a difficult piece on the violin or a tricky shot at tennis. You practice the virtue of hope through worship and prayer, through

invoking the One God, through reading and re-imagining the scriptural story, and through consciously holding the unknown future within the unshakable divine promises.” (Tom Wright)

- Something similar could be said of **trusting God** or **knowing God’s love**, and aspects of godly living such as **living wisely**, **maturing through trouble** and **training the tongue**.
- Awkward and alien → novice → second nature.



Great Grandma Lucy’s knitting adventure

1st Row.—K1, s1, k1, pssso, knit to last 3 sts, k2 tog, k1.
2nd Row.—P1, p2 tog, purl to last 3 sts, p2 togtbl, p1.
 Now **for all sizes** work the 2 dec rows as on back until 6 sts rem. Cast off.



Aim of the series

The aim is to encourage and equip us to live more and more in the good of what we believe, nudging us towards “second nature” in the sequence below:

Awkward and alien → novice → second nature



The plan for our sessions

- Reminder of the biblical basis for being **doers of the word** and not hearers only. (10 Jan)
- Overview of practicalities. (10 Jan)
- Specific applications: **living wisely** (17 Jan); **maturing through trouble** (24 Jan); and **training the tongue** (31 Jan).
- Talks, slides and supporting material will be on the church website.
- Please use them!
- James’ message is **corporate** (we, us) as well as **individual** (I, me).
- Interaction and discussion.



Doers of the word: God's plan

- “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)
- “... 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,” (Col 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)



Growing as doers of the word

How can we grow as doers of God’s word? In this session we’ll unpack some key pointers:

- **Purpose:** Why are we doing this? Motivation, incentive.
- **Partnership:** Not all down to God, nor all down to us.
- It’s a **Process:** No quick fixes.
- **Perseverance:** It takes intention, time and effort.
- **Paeon:** (Thanksgiving for deliverance!). Grateful joy.

In sessions 2-4, we’ll apply them to 3 specific challenges from James’ letter: living wisely, maturing through trouble and training the tongue.



Purpose (motivation; incentive)

- Not to win God's approval: "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. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus **to do good works**, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:8-10)
- "For Christ's love compels us..." (2 Corinthians 5:14a). Salvation is grace (unmerited favour of God); ethics is gratitude.
- "Find out what pleases the Lord" (Ephesians 5:10).
- For God's reward and "well done". (Colossians 3:24; Matthew 25:21)
Lucy's knitting (again!)



Partnership 1

- Trust God and act. It's neither all down to God, nor all down to me. **AC prayer corner.**
- "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; **apart from me you can do nothing.**" (John 15:5)
- "... let us keep in step with the Spirit." (Galatians 5:25)
- "His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness." (2 Peter 1:3). **AC student.**
- "... I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me." (Colossians 1:29)



Partnership 2

- To trust God is to live and make decisions on the basis of him being trustworthy. It's not a feeling. Expecting God to deliver my preferred outcomes is not trusting God.
- We grow in trusting God like we grow in trusting a person: a little at a time. We trust him / them with increasing confidence as we increasingly find him / them to be trustworthy. **Elephant stakes.**
- Trusting God when all is not clear.
Margaret H lesson. Margaret C computer game.



Process: no quick fixes

- "...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6)
- "So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and **become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.**" (Ephesians 4:11-13) (We are works in progress!)
- "**I have learned** the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want." (Philippians 4:12).



Perseverance

- Growing / maturing / changing / breaking old habits / creating new habits is gradual: it takes intention, time and effort. **AC kitchen.**
- Practice = both what you customarily do, and learning to customarily do it. **AC GP.**
- “Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” (James 1:4)
- You don’t sow and reap on the same day. “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” (Galatians 6:9) **James’ framed bible verse.**
- Trust God for the fruit: focus on faithfulness. **Claire’s & Jane’s diets.**



Paeon

- For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, 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, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and **giving joyful thanks to the Father**, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.” (Colossians 1:9-12)