

# “Faithful Labor”

James 1:17-27, James 3:Select Phrases, Deuteronomy 5:6

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Rick Warren said, “You only believe the parts of the Bible that you do.” The apostle James would agree. We are saved by grace. We are forgiven of every shortcoming. And, God encourages us to live into the glory we have been created to enjoy and share. We are invited to discover the joy that permeates us when we do the will of God. The Apostle James emphasizes two aspects of God’s word that is especially important to do, listen and love.

James pushes us, challenges us, makes us think about how we live out the faith we profess. He reminds us, too, of the “implanted word” that is within us— the Word that will guide us and form us into the image of God. God hears us and knows us completely. God is peace, love, and joy. This is the basis for all behavior toward others and the cosmos. Jesus is the first fruit. We are the first fruits. Our listening and love bring heaven to earth.

**James 1:17-27 NLT “Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. God never changes or casts a shifting shadow. God chose to give birth to us by giving us God’s true word. And we, out of all creation, became God’s prized possession. Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires. So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls. But don’t just listen to God’s word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the word and don’t obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don’t forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it. If you claim to be religious but don’t control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless. Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.”**

Youtube can show one how to do almost anything. However, the instruction is only beneficial if you can put it into action. One can learn to cook gourmet meals, even homemade ice.

A year ago when we were on vacation in Ohio, Spencer locked the keys in the trunk of our car. Did you know that the worst place to lock your keys is in the trunk? Police, tow truck operators, car dealerships can all get into your car with a certain tool. However, none of them can get into the trunk. When the car door is opened, the car alarm goes off, which you cannot turn off unless you have the keys. The car disables the hood and trunk release to help deter theft. If you have the title to your car, your drivers license, and can return in person to the dealership where you purchased the car for just ten dollars they will make you another key. Unfortunately, we were 1,274 miles round trip away from that solution. Another option is to tow the car to a dealership and have them disassembly parts of the car to get into the truck which was going to be both expensive and take a lot of time. YouTube to the rescue. Spencer found a video with the solution. Pop off the cover to the child seat anchor. Locate the trunk release cable. Take a screwdriver and push the cable to the side then the trunk will open. Both the car dealership and the Triple A tow truck driver were amazed and asked Spencer to share the video, so they could save their customers hundreds of dollars and time.

We have access to an even greater instructional resource on how to best live our life. It includes guidance on every situation we find our self in, that resource is the Bible. Unfortunately, many do not read the entire manual. Even fewer strive to live God’s instructions. Some get the wrong impression that the Bible is restrictive, a list of don’ts, when in reality the Bible seeks to give us freedom to live into abundant life.

For example, the Ten commandments begin with God saying, **Deuteronomy 5:6 NLT “I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery.”** God first forgives, heals and sets us free, then God invites us to savor abundant life through love. Up until this point the Israelites were slaves, they had no freedom, their every move was controlled. Now they are free, so God is giving them 10 ways to be in loving community. The first four reveal how to love God. The last six reveal how to love one another. Living these commandments keeps us free and open to receive God’s blessing so we can bless others.

How well our life works, how well the world works, depends on our ability to put God’s love and instructions into action. Bad things will happen to us, however we are each free to choose how we respond. God in time will right even wrong and heal every brokenness. In the meantime, we are called to listen and love.

Most of our learning comes by watching someone model behavior. In the church, we call this discipleship. Jesus is our ultimate model. Each of us strives to live like Christ modeling to others how to live like Christ.

The Apostle James lived in a time of social tensions, where outbreaks of violence and insurrection were taking place. The whole Roman world was dealing with unrest, including economic problems, food shortages, and the rapid turnover of Roman emperors that led to erratic government policies.

The problem before the church in this time of uncertainty can be summed up something like this: How do we remain a faithful Christian community during this time of government upheaval and angry, hateful speech?

James wrote to encourage and give instruction on how to navigate in difficult times. Listening and love must be practiced. The letter reads like a series of random tutorial videos on the Christian life, but in this section James made clear that no amount of instruction matters unless it is put into practice. James wanted the church to become experts not only in hearing the instruction but doing the instruction as well.

James saw the current situation as an opportunity to demonstrate love, a chance to shine in the midst of a dark world as a community of the new creation that God had brought forth in the resurrection of Jesus. James writes directly to the problem at hand and lays down a quick take on how to manage oneself while the world seems to be spinning out of control. It's tempting to forgo listening and speak instead, to offer your solutions, to tell how things should be done, to post and forward on Facebook, to tweet, to give into anger, revenge and nasty words. James encourages us. **James 1:19-20 "Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness."** James instructs us to let go of reactivity and let come the image of God, the gifts of the Holy Spirit working with in us, which enables us to listen and love.

James warns of the hurt, hate, and destruction that can come from our speech, that is our tongue. **James 3: Select Verses "The tongue is a small part of the body, but it can speak big things. See how a very small fire can set many trees on fire. The tongue is a fire. It is full of wrong. It poisons the whole body. The tongue sets our whole lives on fire. The tongue is full of poison that kills. With our tongue we speak bad words against people who are made like God."**

We tame our tongue by listening first, by loving the person, then speaking. It is never appropriate to call someone a negative name. Every person is a gifted child of God. Speak the truth in love by identifying actions, policies or speech that is not loving yet always love the person. Listening enables us to understand, to deepen our compassion, to discover mutually beneficial solutions.

Listening and love grows the more we practice. The purpose of receiving instruction is to put the information into practice. If, say, I watch a YouTube video on how to fix a leaky faucet but never pull out the tools and get to work putting what I've learned to good use, then I will still be stuck with a constant drip. If we are going to tame our tongue, to learn to listen, to love then we need to be intentional and practice. When we practice listening and loving, we build a spiritual muscle memory that enables us to listen and love in difficult situations.

Mother Teresa reminds us: "Do not think that love, in order to be genuine, has to be extraordinary. What we need is to love without getting tired. How does a lamp burn? Through the continuous input of small drops of oil. ... What are these drops of oil in our lamps? They are the small things of daily life: faithfulness, small words of kindness, a thought for others, our way of being silent, of looking, of speaking, and of acting. These are the true drops of love that keep your religious life burning like a living flame."

Pauline Oliveros prays, "I pray for deep listening in this century—listening alone—listening together—listening to others—listening to oneself—listening to the earth—listening to the universe—listening to the abundance that is—awakening to and feeling sound and silence as all there is—helping to create an atmosphere of opening for all to be heard, with the understanding that listening is healing. Deep listening in all its variations is infinite. Deep listening is love. Deep listening is healing and love." Legend has it that a Christian believer who had been lost at sea washed up on the shore of a remote native village. Half-dead from starvation, exposure and sea water, he was discovered unconscious by the people of the village and was slowly nursed back to full-health. He lived thereafter among the people for some 20 years. During his time with them, he lived out his Christian faith. However, he uttered no sacred songs. He preached no sermons. He neither read nor recited Scripture in public. He made no personal faith claims whatsoever—except by his actions. When people were sick, he visited them, sitting long hours into the night. When people were hungry, he gave them of his own food. When people were lonely, he kept them company. He taught the children. He always took sides with those who had been wronged. There were few, if any, human conditions with which he didn't identify. After 20 years passed, missionaries came from the sea to the village and began talking to the people about a man called "the Christ." After hearing of this "Jesus," the natives insisted that he'd been living among them for the past 20 years. "Come," they demanded, "we'll introduce you to the man about whom you've been speaking!" Listen and love. Amen

