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Title: A Faith That Works: Just Do It

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Text: [James 1:17-27](#)

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We are beginning a new four-week worship series that we are calling A Faith That Works, based on the New Testament book of James. The title of the series is a bit of a play on words, pointing to the idea that we want a faith that is meaningful in our lives, helps us make sense of the world, one that helps us understand how God will

have us live. It also points to one of James' major points, that when it comes to faith, our words matter, that the things we do for others and the kingdom of God are important. There is an important correlation between what we believe and what we do.

At the beginning of this short New Testament book, we hear these words:

"You must be doers of the word and not only hearers who mislead themselves. Those who hear but don't do the word are like those who look at their faces in a mirror. They look at themselves, walk away, and immediately forget what they were like." (James 1:22-24 CEB)

These words let the original hearers know that this would be a different kind of holy writing. It is a book that is different than any other book in the New Testament. Historically, many disagree with it even being included in the canon of the Bible, and most scholars will tell you that it was only included because it is thought to be written by James, the brother of Jesus.

How it is different than many other writings is that it does theology not by talking about God, rather by talking about what does life look like that reflects the priorities of the Gospel. It is less theory and more practice. It says don't tell me what you believe but show me what you believe.

St Francis of Assisi put it like this in his well-worn quote: *"Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words."*

As the famous Nike slogan reminds us, "Just Do It!" James is the Just Do It book of the Bible.

Why do we come to church, to worship? Yes, we come to worship, but I suspect we also come to be encouraged and to be instructed in what it means to live as a Christian.

What is essential for what the Gospel looks like in the world?

James begins to answer this question in the first chapter; *“Every good gift, every perfect gift, comes from above. These gifts come down from the Father, the creator of the heavenly lights, in whose character there is no change at all. He chose to give us birth by his true word, and here is the result: we are like the first crop from the harvest of everything he created.”* (James 1:17-18 CEB)

As Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase says: *“He brought us to life using the true Word, showing us off as the crown of all his creatures.”*

We are the reality of what God is up to in the world. People should be able to see God in us. We are the best testimony to what God is doing, we are the best testimony to what the church is up to. The truth is we are all counting on a faith that works.

Grapevine, Texas is one of Money Magazine’s 100 best places to live. It has many awarding winning schools, including Faith Christian school and like most Texas high schools, Faith takes its football seriously. They have eighty players on the varsity team, 13 coaches, the newest and nicest equipment, and a ton of involved family members. A couple of seasons ago, the Lions were 7-2 and preparing to play the Gainesville State Tornados. Their season had not gone so well, they were 0-8 coming into the game, having scored only two touchdowns all year. They only had fourteen players and wore seven-year-old pads and helmets. As they arrived at the field, security guards took handcuffs off each player one by one. Gainesville State is a maximum-security prison for youth north of Dallas. They get their students by court order. Many of the kids’ families have disowned them and no one comes out to cheer for them.

A couple of days before this game, the head coach of Faith, Chris Hogan had an idea...what if, for one game, for this game, half of Faith’s parents, students, and fans cheered for the other team? What if, for this game, they made a banner for the kids to run through that said Go Tornados? What if they had cheerleaders cheering for them, by name? and what if our fans cheering for these kids learned their names and cheered for them by name. And so, they did. They made the banner, they sat on the visitor's side of the

field and half of the crowd cheered for and rooted for the Gainesville State Tornados.

Gerald, a Tornados lineman said after the game, "we can tell people are a little afraid of us at games, but these folks, they were yelling for us, by our names. Isaiah, another Tornado player said, "I never thought I would hear anyone cheering for me."

At the end of the game (Faith won 33-14) the losing team practically danced off the field with their fingers pointing #1 in the air. They gave Gainesville's head coach Mark Williams what first Gatorade bath in history for a 0-coach. When the teams gathered in the middle of the field to pray, Isaiah surprised everybody by asking to lead, we had no idea what the kid was going to say, remembers Coach Hogan. This was Isaiah's prayer: "*Lord, I don't know how this happened, so I don't know how to say thank You, but I never would've known there were so many people in the world that cared about us.*"

As guards escorted the Tornados back to their bus, each player received a bag filled with burgers, fries, candy, a Bible, and an encouraging letter from a Faith player. Before he stepped onto the bus, Williams turned and grabbed Hogan hard by the shoulders: You'll never know what your people did for these kids tonight. You'll never know what your people did for these kids tonight. You'll never, ever know." The Gainesville players crowded onto one side of the bus, peering out 4 the windows at an unbelievable sight-people they had never met before smiling at them, waving goodbye, as the bus drove into the night.

Back to Eugene Peterson's Message paraphrase: *Don't fool yourself into thinking that you are a listener when you are anything but, letting the Word go in one ear and out the other. Act on what you hear! Those who hear and don't act are like those who glance in the mirror, walk away, and two minutes later have no idea who they are, what they look like.*

Don't let the Word go in one ear and out the other. It's easy to talk about what we believe but it's another thing altogether to put what we believe into action. We forget that the world is watching. The world is watching the church. Those in our community are watching the church. Maybe even those of us in the church are watching the church. Watching to see if we have the courage to not only proclaim what we believe but put it into action. To show in ways big and small what we believe as followers of Jesus.

I wonder how many have found that their faith was a disappointment, or it didn't work for them because they didn't put it into action. It was merely a theory, not a practice.

I'll never forget when I was doing youth ministry, taking a group of high school kids to a neighborhood community center to spend time with the children in that neighborhood. This was not the type of neighborhood that any of these high schoolers had been to. The experience of the people they were spending time with was a completely different life experience than they had experienced. As we were getting ready to leave, one of the guys in the group came up to me with tears in his eyes. I knew he had been struggling with faith, struggling with what faith would do for him. He was struggling with what difference it made. He said to me and another adult standing there, "until now, it's just been words on a page. But now, today, I've seen those words come to life."

Friends, how great it is to see holy words come to life in our own lives, in the lives of others.

People ask me all the time some version of, "how is your church different than all of the other churches in Fishers or "How do we stand out?" There are several answers to those questions, but I truly believe that one of the answers and one of my prayers for us as a church is that we are not merely hearers of the Word, but we are doers of the Word.

My prayer is that we don't let the Word simply go in one ear and out the other, that we aren't just dedicating the worship hour to our faith and then moving on with our lives. God needs more than that. God needs more from you and me than just this time.

After all, we are followers of Jesus, who went so far as to give his own life, so that others may live. May truly live. He became a blessing, so that you and I, by living an active and open faith, can be a blessing to others.

A Faith that truly works is one where we are not merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word.

Let Us Pray.