

Week 2

8 weeks
TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE >>

*'Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves.
Do what it says.'*

James 1:19-26
&
Luke 11:37-54



Is change needed? And how does it happen? **JAMES 1:19-26**

James is so clear that growing as a follower of Jesus is not simply about increasing our understanding of spiritual truth but about life change. The key question is how does life change take place?

Change happens through...

> Careful listening to God's word (v19-20)

> Humbly accepting God's word (v21-25)

> Acting on God's word (v26-27)

>> A CLOSER LOOK

(James 1:19-26)



NOTE: Throughout the rest of the study, there are several questions for discussion. One or two of the questions allow a more creative approach. Feel free to adapt them as you see fit, but they are some ideas to prompt some more creative thinking! **These are marked by an asterisk*.**

>>Recap from last week

If you haven't yet done so, you may like to recap on last week and consider whether you have managed to make any changes in your life as a result? How did the study affect your life throughout the week?

> Careful listening to God's word (v19-20)

- It is said that God has given us one mouth and two ears for a good reason. Why is it that we are often quicker to talk and speak our mind than we are to listen and hear what other people think?

- James is not simply suggesting that we need to listen to other people. Looking at the context (v18-27) what would suggest to you that James is eager that followers of Jesus listen carefully to God?

(Note: When James speaks of 'the word of truth' he is referring to the collection of traditions about Jesus life and teaching later to be written down in the Gospels.)

- Explore together ways that you can listen carefully to God's word. (**It may be helpful to get a large sheet of paper in the middle of the room and write down all your different ideas.*) Which of these would you find helpful to take up this week? Choose one that will be a challenge for you.

> Humbly accepting God's word (v21-25)

- James warns us that it is possible to listen to God and forget fairly quickly what we have heard. Just as we can listen to other people and ignore what they say so too we can listen to God and ignore what He is saying to us.
 - What attitude do we need to have if God's word is going to sink in (v21)?
 - Why do you think we sometimes find this difficult?
 - What might need to change in our hearts for us to have a greater sense of humility?
- Some people look down on the Bible, thinking that it is 'out of date' and that following its teaching will deny us pleasure in life. How does James describe it (v25)? How will remembering this help you to listen humbly?

> Acting on God's word (v26-27)

- If we listen carefully and humbly accept God's word our lives will be changed. What will be the practical signs in our lives that God's word is making a difference?
 - In our speech?
 - In our practical care for the vulnerable?
 - In living distinctive lives?

*(*It may be that you are able to share stories of the differences you are already seeing. Or it may be that these will be things you long to see happening in our congregation. Talk about them together and pray through them. Please feel free to share any stories and ideas with your group leader or with the church leadership.)*

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ALTERNATIVE PASSAGE



The Need for Change - LUKE 11:37-54

The Pharisees and the religious leaders of their day assumed they were godly and righteous, but Jesus confronts them head-on. He challenges their inconsistent lives, and prompts them to look deep inside their own hearts.

> *The problem of hypocrisy...*

> *What hypocrisy looks like:*

1. It emphasises appearances...

2. It misses the point...

>> A CLOSER LOOK pt 2. (Luke 11:37-54)



>>Recap from last week

- If you haven't yet done so, you may like to recap on last week and consider whether you have managed to make any changes in your life as a result? How did the study affect your life throughout the week?

It seems likely that the Pharisees and the religious leaders of their day were highly regarded and respected people. Their devotion to scripture and their strict practices were to be a model to everyone else. In short, to look at them, you would think that they were model God-followers.

However, in this passage, Jesus confronts them with some pretty challenging words. He challenges the things they do and the things they say. Essentially, Jesus insists that their lives are inconsistent, and that they are actually leading other people away from seeing the wonderful truth of the gospel of grace.

In other words, Jesus tackles head-on the important issue of hypocrisy in the lives of people who claim to follow God.

> Questions

- How would you describe hypocrisy? Why? (You may like to think of one or two current examples in the news, on TV programmes or in your own experience.)
- Do you tend to think of hypocrites as being happy or sad people? (**If you're feeling brave and creative, you might like to play a quick game of charades, by trying to act out what you think a typical hypocrite looks like: what expression would you give them on their face? How would they stand? What would they wear?**)
- Do you ever tend to think of yourself as a hypocrite? Why/ why not?

>>Read Luke 11:37-54

(Note: although there was a lot of similarity and overlap between the 'Pharisees' and the 'experts of the law', it might be helpful to know the subtle difference between them. Basically, the Pharisees were the group of people in Jesus' day who tried to live out their devotion to God by obeying the laws very closely. The teachers of the law were the experts on the scriptures and advised the Pharisees on how the law should be obeyed.)

>>Questions

- Why do you think the Pharisee is surprised at Jesus' actions in v38? In response, what is Jesus' main criticism of the Pharisees? (v39-41)

- Jesus, then describes six main concerns. He mentions three concerns about the Pharisees (v42-44), and three about the experts of the law (v46-51). What are they? Can you think of contemporary examples that might be similar?

- Do you recognise any of the same issues in your own life? How might you combat them?

- James 1:22-25 gives some pretty clear principles about how to change our lives, which involves both hearing and doing. How should listening to God's word change us?

- James describes God's word as the 'perfect law that gives freedom' (James 1:25). What is it in the gospel which frees us from the need to try and pretend to be something we aren't? How does this naturally make us love God more?

>> MAKING A CHANGE *(James 1:19-26)*



WHAT CHANGES CAN YOU MAKE THIS WEEK?

It's important to act on what you have studied. Can you think of some specific changes that you can make during this week, as a response to what you have been looking at?

Here are a couple of suggestions, but there may be others that you would like to define yourself:

- Reading & Listening to God's word. When you read the bible this week, rather than just reading it, why not write some things down as you read. Ask: "What is God saying to me through this? How can I be different as a result?"
- From the list that you made earlier (about how you can listen carefully to God's word), choose one of those ways and make a decision to do it this week. Tell your group which one you have chosen, so that they can ask you next week how it has gone!
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>> MAKING A CHANGE *(Luke 11:37-54)*



It's important to act on what you have studied. Can you think of some specific changes that you can make during this week, as a response to what you have been looking at?

Psalm 51:6 says: "Surely you desire truth in the inner parts". Take time to ask God to show you ways in which you have pretended to be more devoted on the outside than you are in your heart. Ask for his forgiveness.

During this week, ask a close friend (who you really trust) to tell you if there is any way in your life that hypocrisy might be creeping in. Ask them to pray with you about this.

Finally, looking back over the things you wrote on your card last week, why not pray this prayer again, asking that God would change you.