

Father's Day
Easier Read Than Done

James 1:22
Dave Outcalt

Woodside Church

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It is an honor to be able to share with you a little about my faith journey. One of my favorite verses in the bible comes from James 1:22-24. 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 a man who looks at his face in the mirror and after looking at himself walks away and immediately forgets what he looks like". This verse made me realize that although I was getting better at reading the word, I would often read and forget. I wasn't applying it to my day to day life. For me, God's word was easier read than done.

I grew up in Yardley and Levittown and was the youngest of 4 children. We went to Catholic Church every Sunday and it was there that I went through my first Holy Communion and confirmation. Not everything stuck from those days but I did learn that Jesus was born on Christmas ... we got presents on that day. And, Jesus rose from the dead and we got candy on that day. Through middle school and high school I was concerned with sports, social standing, and of course...fashion. Oh I still went to church and confession. I found confession very awkward what with that door sliding open in the confessional. It always startled me; and the first thing you had to say was how long it had been since your last confession. That could be an embarrassingly long time so quite often I would simply cut that number in half figuring I was going to be confessing that I had lied in a few minutes anyway. Why not sort of just jam one more in the bag. I was going through the motions. Religion was a check mark for me. I had no idea what it was to have a personal relationship with Jesus or that it was even possible... and it only got worse in the college years.

It was in 1991 when some of that started to change. I turned in my striped pants for Air Force blue. I was at a month long course called Squadron Officer School in Montgomery, Alabama. It was there that I met a fellow student named Russ Smith. He was a fighter pilot, he had a great sense of humor, and was an all-around good guy. We became fast friends. While we were down there the Gulf War was going on and we got talking about the biblical significance of the Middle East and he was very knowledgeable. I asked him how he knew so much and he said he was a Christian. I don't know why but this took me by surprise. He went on to share his story and I listened...not because he was a Christian but because he was a good guy and he was a friend.

Well Russ got me interested so at age 30 it was off to the bookstore to buy a book I had heard about but never owned and never read. I remember feeling very proud to have my first Bible...maybe a little too proud. I remember people speeding past me on the highway and I thought...my goodness...those people clearly don't have a bible like I do. I think I climbed that mountaintop a bit too fast. I jumped in and started reading right away. I got through Genesis

just fine and Exodus had a lot of familiar stories. But then I got into Leviticus and I ran headlong into a section headed “Regulations about Mildew”... so at that point I decided to jump ahead to the New Testament. That had a treasure trove of information: be anxious for nothing, what is impossible with men is possible with God, be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger. I needed to hear all that...but then I came to that pesky passage in James that I mentioned earlier that talked about doing what the bible says. I promised myself I would get to that. Right now I am just a religion puppy...new to the faith.

Well I was living in Phoenix Arizona and figured it was time to give church another try. I found a Presbyterian church that taught me about a personal relationship with God, applied the Bible to my life, and by the way had awesome music. They had an angel tree at Christmas and I picked the angel for a 10 year old boy who wanted a remote control truck. I went to the store and made the purchase. While still standing in the toy section I pictured that boy opening his present on Christmas and I was totally overcome with emotion. When I bought that truck, it felt like God opened my eyes...and 30 years of self-centeredness began to melt away. I took my first action step and God was there to meet me.

Life moved forward and I left the Air Force and joined the airlines where I met a beautiful young lady from Kansas who thankfully said yes when I got on one knee. Darla had a strong and mature Christian faith and she taught me a great deal. We had 2 beautiful children, Jacob, and Jenna. Having these 2 little ones helped me better understand God’s unconditional love for us. We were living in Yardley and needed a church. We were warmly greeted here at Woodside, we loved Doug’s sermons, and the music was awesome. This became our church home.

One of the first things we did after joining was to take the Alpha Course. With humor and great clarity Nicky Gumbel walked us thru what some call Christianity 101. Bruce and Judy Jones opened their house each Sunday evening, people took care of the food, we had facilitators that led the small groups, and Doug led the whole program...they were all doing what the bible said. But of course they were all mature in their faith and I was just a Christianity 101 guy. They should be helping me.

But then we started the “Purpose Driven Life” and the **very first** thing Rick Warren said was “It’s not about you”! These were powerful words for me. Basically he was telling me to **grow up**... both in my day to day life and my spiritual life. 1 COR 13:11 says “When I was a child I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child, when I became a man, I put childish ways behind me”. I started to realize that I was hanging out in my comfort zone and that was one of the most boring places to be. It was time to stop waiting for a special calling or a sign from above. I could spend my whole life waiting. It was time to act.

One of the first things I did was to volunteer to change the sign in front of the church. It was a small thing but it got the ball rolling. I also got involved in a program called Adopt a Pilot working with students from Urban Promise and Afton Elementary school. These programs were giving me the opportunity to contribute to others...but there was still something missing.

During this time period Doug was strongly encouraging small group study. Darla and I have hosted some the church wide studies but I found it hard to commit to a group on a permanent basis. Then in 2013, I started attending a Friday morning group that was meeting at Einstein’s (picture). Sticking with these brothers in Christ was a **huge** step in my Christian walk. The small

group environment gave me the opportunity to share struggles in my faith and discuss areas I needed to work on. It gave me focus and accountability I simply could not achieve on my own.

One of the more memorable studies we did was on a book written by Travis Lee. Travis and Allegra are frequent visitors to our church and Travis had written a book called "Deeper". In that book Travis claimed that not only was it possible to have a sinless day but that he had had sinless days. To be clear Travis did not claim to be a sinless person...just that it's possible to have a sinless day. His reference was 1 John 2:1 which says "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But **IF** anybody does sin we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense, Jesus Christ, The Righteous One". Even after reading this verse the idea of a sinless day seemed impossible to me. But Travis went on to explain that he **CHOSE...He made a conscience decision...** not to fill his mind with the negativity found on TV or social media (he reminded us that that is a choice)...he avoided temptation by never being alone with any women other than his wife, and he simply chose not to become agitated at other drivers which...is when many of my sinless days go down the drain. And by the way he and travels around the country with his family in a 5th wheel worshipping God. **HE WAS ACTUALLY DOING WHAT THE BIBLE SAID! He didn't join our study to pat us on the head and tell us sin was OK...he came in as a warrior...to fight sin...and to encourage us to do the same!** ...Travis wasn't just reading his bible and putting it back on the nightstand...he was studying and applying it. He raised the bar in our group. It's easy in a small group to pat each other on the back and just sort of say "hey don't worry I struggle with that too". I learned through that experience that the small group should not be about accepting the status quo but to look for ways to grow in our faith and to lift each other up.

Many in our small group and in the church were doing what the bible said through leading mission trips, recovery ministry, code blue, youth groups, and the list goes on. I not only wanted to follow their example but I wanted to become a good example to those around me including my family.

I signed up to help with some of the youth programs (picture) here at the church and started tutoring at the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen. But one of the best experiences was going on the Bahamas and Haiti mission trips. There are several mission trips available here at Woodside and I know they are all great experiences. In the Bahamas we restored homes and made them better able to withstand the major storms that rock Grand Bahama while in Haiti we slung 10,000 buckets of rock and dirt to fill in a foundation that will soon become a church. We spent an afternoon doing activities with kids who were at an orphanage. And we visited with students who went to school at one of our worksites. Pastor Valentine, who is the head of Foundation for Peace in Haiti, has been here to visit our area. He told us on our last night down there how much he appreciated us giving up all our conveniences to come to Haiti. (Picture) All we could think of was how much these wonderful people gave to us by working and worshipping together. These trips create an **awesome** opportunity to do what the bible says.

Please understand that I don't share these things to pat myself on the back or act like "Now I've made it" and everything is wrapped up in a perfect little bow. That happens in books and movies but for me...Monday morning comes, life goes on, and so do the challenges. I still find it easy to get caught in the trap of anxiety, being a little too judgmental, and sometimes I feel shame that I know God's word but don't always follow it. I know in my heart I am covered by God's grace but sometimes in my mind I still dwell on poor decisions from the past. And as I

grow older I wonder if I am becoming calmer, more loving, and understanding or am I becoming more anxious, narrow minded, and impatient. There is a tug of war there.

I must admit I don't read the Bible every single day but I am doing better. One thing that has helped my Bible reading is to not pick and choose the verses I like and sail over the ones I don't. I use a highlighter and spiral notebook to focus on areas of the Bible that challenge me. Nothing complicated I just write down a few lines on why a verse makes me uncomfortable and what I think God is trying to teach me. I review these before I start my day and it gives me a reminder of how to not make the same mistakes over and over. My Bible reading is no longer a race to get through the chapters. I have slowed it down in search of those truths that challenge me and in turn help me and to grow.

I work at a job where you have to know what is in your manuals. On the good days you have to know the manual and on the bad days you better know it. We had a bad day at Southwest Airlines a couple months ago when one of our airplanes diverted into PHL. A piece of one of the engines came off and punched a hole in a passenger window. This created not one, not two, but three very serious emergencies. First of all the aircraft was down to one remaining engine...next there was a rapid depressurization due to the damaged window which requires both passengers and crew to quickly get on an oxygen mask...and of course at that moment a passenger was critically injured. From a pilot's standpoint any one of these emergencies is very serious...but to have all three at once creates a huge challenge. But the crew worked together...as a group...leaned on each other...they guided each other...they shared their knowledge...they didn't just quick grab the manual and say **hey** we better figure out what's in here...**they already knew what was in there**. And thanks to good training and repeated practice they knew how to **actually do** what was in the manual and safely land that airplane. The knowledge would have meant nothing if they couldn't apply it.

We have a manual too. I think sometimes we read this manual and wonder why it doesn't "**work**" for us. I don't think it is supposed to **work** for us...I think we are supposed to work for it...to work for God. He did His work...His full and complete work. He gave us His word... and it's our responsibility to dig in and look at how we need to apply it. I know if I don't follow this manual...if I don't get together in small groups to discuss God's word...I will not be able to be the husband... the father...the spiritual leader...nor the man that I want to be. I cannot do it on my own. I've been down that road a thousand times and it leads to nowhere. Last week Pastor Doug challenged us to read two Psalms a day this summer...starting today. This is a great opportunity to join with others here at Woodside and start (or continue) getting God's word into your life.

Many of you have seen this picture and recognize that something is missing. It is of course the doorknob on Jesus side of the door. This signifies that although Jesus knocks you must be the one to open the door and let him in. He doesn't knock because He needs us but because He knows we need Him. Sometimes I wonder why He is still there even in the face of my repeated struggles. Yet He is. I love this picture and its significance but I no longer see it as Jesus coming into the house as much as Him taking my hand and saying "Come out here with me and let's get to work".

Reading is important and necessary. But I don't want to look back on my life and wonder why I just read about things and never experienced them. I don't want to look in the mirror and

then walk away and forget...that on our good days **and our bad days** we are children of God... loved unconditionally. I don't want to read and forget...I want to read and **experience** the peace, the love, and the fulfillment that comes not only by inviting Jesus in, but by taking His hand and letting Him lead us out. Will you pray with me....

Lord we give you thanks and praise that thru all the Noise of this world...the busyness...the doubt...the worry...the stress...all the things that distract us from a relationship with you...you still stand at the door and knock...with the gift of unconditional love and grace. Please guide us Lord to slow down...to open the door...and walk with you. Guide us Lord to not just read your word but to study it...and to do what it says.

We pray this in your strong and loving name. Amen.