

## ***“Fuel—The Best Way to Live”***

Today we're stating a series of messages called "Fuel." We are a fuel hungry people. And I'm to talking about gasoline and our fuel consumption there. I'm actually talking about how we have a fairly new craving for fuel drinks, for energy drinks. How many of you have had an energy drink in the last week? Some of you are kind of proud of that you haven't. How many of you have had coffee or tea in the last week? The energy drink phenomenon is huge. In 2005 energy drinks were a \$3 billion dollar a year industry in the U.S. Goldman Sachs estimates that by the year 2010 energy drinks will be a \$10 billion a year industry.

Energy drinks have been around for a very long time and people have sought them out because we want a boost, we want some extra vitality, we want more alertness, we want to be able to do more, to do it faster, to do it better and we spend a lot of money on energy drinks to see that happen. We're looking for some fuel for life and we think we can get it through Red Bull, or Jolt, or Rock Star, Amp'd or just plain old strong coffee.

Of course energy drinks have some pretty serious side effects. The amounts of caffeine can be off the charts and cause all kinds of side effects the worst of which are tremors, seizures, and heart irregularities that can lead to death.

But lots of us are willing to take the risk, because we need some fuel for these crazy lives we lead. And we think these drinks will give us an edge. They'll give you an edge all right! A friend of mine complained for years that he never felt rested, couldn't sleep well, was always exhausted. So to combat his weariness he drank energy drinks throughout the day and he wondered why he couldn't sleep at night. It's a vicious circle. We crave fuel for our lives.

Well, over the next few weeks we're going to tap into some series fuel. Not energy drinks, not coffee, not tea, not espresso. We're going to be tapping into some real fuel for life right from God's word. We're going to be drinking in some serious stuff from a little book in the New Testament called the book of James. It's five short chapters in the Bible that offer a concentrated, power-packed, high energy, (yet caffeine and guarana free) shot of real deal fuel for life.

This is going to be awesome because we're going to sit at the feet of one of the power-houses of early Christianity. We're going to learn from James about how we can have super-fueled lives.

Since we're looking to this book of James for this fuel, this concentrated jolt, let's get a quick overview of this book in the Bible. The Bible is divided in to the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is the story of our spiritual ancestors the Jews, the family of Abraham and God preparing them and working in them to bless them to be a blessing to the world. That's the basic story of the Old Testament.

The New Testament is the story of Jesus and the early followers of Jesus. It's the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies that God would walk among us as one of us.

The books of the Bible were picked and brought together in this form over a period of time. These weren't the only things written about the history of our spiritual ancestors, and the New Testament isn't everything that was written about Jesus and the early church. But the 66 books in our Bibles today were determined to be documents that were written by verifiable people whose lives and writings withstood the test of time. They're the standard we measure everything else against.

The New Testament is made up the 4 Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and they each tell about the life of Jesus, his teachings, the events around his life, death and resurrection. And after his resurrection his disciples gave their lives teaching about him and inviting others to follow him. So the rest of the New Testament are letters that were writing to early groups of Christians and individuals to teach, to correct, to inspire them to know Jesus, follow him and stay true to him in the face of persecution, in the face of temptation.

The apostle Paul wrote most of the New Testament. We call them books of the Bible, but Paul's writings are actually letters. Saint Paul's is named after him. He started churches in cities all around the Mediterranean Sea, he trained leaders, he was persecuted for his faith and he died in Rome, probably under the persecution of the Roman Emperor Nero.

But Paul wasn't the only one whose writings are considered scripture. One of the other people who was there at the beginning of the Christian movement was James. Now, there's some debate about which James wrote this book of the Bible. Some say he's James, the brother of John, who was one of the 12 disciples. But historically this James is thought to be the brother of Jesus. And this book of the Bible is one of his sermons that someone else would have heard and written down.

I tend to agree that this was written by James, the brother of Jesus. James the brother of Jesus was the leader of the church in the city of Jerusalem. He was a key leader at the very beginning, and he helped to shape the early church. But what's really interesting about James is he was skeptical about Jesus in the beginning. He didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah. How do we know that? We've got several references in the gospels where Jesus' family, including his brothers, got to get him because crowds are following him and they think that Jesus has lost his mind (Mark 3:21). At one point the apostle John says, **"For even his own brothers did not believe in him" (John 7:5, NIV).**

Something happened in James for him to go from complete skepticism, to being the leader of one of the largest bodies of Christ-followers and eventually being killed for his faith. James encountered the living Jesus, his brother, after the resurrection, and that changed everything. He spent the rest of his life sharing the story of Jesus, leading people to a relationship with the living Lord.

So listen. If you're a skeptic about Jesus right now, you're in good company. So was Jesus' own brother, James. If you have a hard time believe Jesus to be who he said he was, so did James. But James kept himself open to the possibility that Jesus was the Messiah and at some point he realized that Jesus is the one.

We get a pretty clear picture of James' life from other books of the Bible and other writings from that time period. But we get the best glimpse, I think, in how James introduces himself in this letter. The very first verse, **"James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ..." (James 1:1, NIV).** This is how James identifies himself. The word for servant there is actually the word *doulos* in Greek, which means "slave." James is saying, "I'm the slave of Jesus." That's a pretty weighty word. He's saying, "My master's word is law, I give up my rights, I give up ownership of myself to Jesus, I give him all my obedience."

James is saying, "I'm not in this for privilege, or rights, I'm in this to serve because I want to give my life to something bigger than me." When James calls himself a slave of Jesus Christ, he's saying, "My loyalty is to you, Jesus,"

When I read that I have to ask myself, "Aaron, do you consider yourself a slave to God?" I don't really like that label. In our culture today we have a hard enough time just submitting to authority in simple ways. Thinking of ourselves as slaves goes against the rugged individualist themes we're brought up with. Thinking of ourselves as slaves goes against the independence we all strive for. I may call myself a follower of Jesus, but I'm no slave. But this is important. James saw a big picture. He was saying with a certain pride that he was a slave of Jesus Christ. Because there were a few others in scripture who gave themselves the same title. A few others who were spiritual giants called themselves slaves of God: Moses, Joshua, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Isaiah and most of the prophets.

So James is saying, "I'm following in the footsteps of some of the most powerful, purposeful, spiritually connected people ever." You see, being a slave to Jesus Christ, according to James, isn't about becoming powerless, weak, cowering. It's just the opposite. He knows from history, that those people who called themselves slaves of God, made the greatest impact in the lives of others. And that's what James wants to do in the time he had left.

No. I don't like the word slave. But when I really think about and realize that being a slave to Christ, means that I'll be a slave to nothing else. That's awesome! I want to be that slave. When I realize that being a slave to Jesus means not weakness, but strength, not fear, but freedom. I want to be that kind of slave.

So many times in life we're driven down, beaten down, crushed because we allow ourselves to become slaves to some pleasure, or addiction, or way of thinking, or way of doing. When all the while Jesus calls and says, "Come follow me, I'll make you great." I want to be that slave.

That was James. Once a skeptic about Jesus, then a voluntary slave. He spent his life leading the church Jerusalem, leading a church that was persecuted from every angle. And when the High Priest at the time had the chance, he had James and other leaders of the church killed for their beliefs in Jesus.

James' life offers some serious weight to what it means to be a follower of Christ. James wants us to acknowledge that God's way, the way of Jesus Christ, is the best way to live. That the best way is the way of surrender. The way of real power, is the way of surrender. The way of authenticity and humility is the way of surrender. That God's plan for life is the best plan.

So over the next few weeks, let's look at James' life, and his high-octane teachings that can really be fuel for this best life, the best way to live. I want to challenge you personally, individually and in your small groups, to dig deep, to drink this in, to make this study of James real and relevant. He's giving us real fuel for the best way to live. Let's not walk away from it.

Now we get to our key verse, James 1:22. This is the memory verse. I touched on this last week. It's simple. It's powerful. Let's read it together. **"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (James 1:22, NIV).** Kind of a Nike "Just Do It" type thing, isn't it?

*Do not merely listen to the word.* Let's take a closer look at that word 'listen.' It's the word we get our English word 'audit' from. Have you ever audited a college class or audited a high school class or maybe a master's program? That's where you can go to the class and you can listen to what the professor says, but you don't have to take the test, you don't have to do any of the work? You just audit the class. And James is saying here: Do not merely audit the Word. Do what it says. Do the work. Do the assignments. Apply it to your life. Don't just audit God's Word.

If you start soaking in God's Word, but you don't do any of the work, you don't start to apply it to your life, you're just deceiving yourself. People say, "Okay, I'm going to start going to church. I'm going to get me a Bible, and I'm going to start reading the Bible a little at a time. Man, I'm getting so much better. I'm growing so much." Not really. If you're just merely auditing the class and you're not applying it to your life, James says you're just kidding yourself. You're really deceiving yourself.

There are some Christians who go to church all the time. Some of them even read their Bibles regularly but they're perpetually unchanged. They could kill you in a game of Bible Jeopardy, but they are the meanest, most critical, judgmental, cold people, because all they've done for all their life is just audit the class. Religious activity is masking the truth about them on the inside. They think they're growing, but they're not.

Scan down to James 1:26-27. **"Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:26-27, TNIV).**

What he's saying there is: Be careful. If you think you're growing, if you think you're getting close to God by auditing the class, but you can't control your tongue or if you don't apply God's Word to your life and you're still divisive and you're abusive verbally and you're prone to gossip, you're just kidding yourself. And if your heart is not growing toward the kind of people that Jesus loved and embraced—the poor, the widows, the orphans, the marginalized of this world—you're not growing. Your religion, in fact, is worthless, and you're falling into deeper deception. *Do not merely listen to the Word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.* It's the best way to live. It's the most joyful way to live. It's the most purposeful way to live. It's the most authentic way to live. It's the most balanced way to live. The gospel is the gracious invitation of God, followed by the grateful response of men and women.

Let's memorize this verse of Scripture together. I'll say a piece. You say it back.

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

Let's take it in little bigger chunks. *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. (Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves.) Do what it says. (Do what it says.)*

How about the whole thing? *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*

Verses 23 and 24 talk about mirrors. There are all kinds of different mirrors. My shaving mirror fell last week and now it distorts my face. I look in it now and I kind of look like Quasimodo. There are slimming mirrors. Don't you like those? There are distorted mirrors, like when you go to a carnival or amusement park. Then there are mirrors that just give you a perfect reflection.

Look what it says in James 1:23-24. **“Those who listen to the word but do not do what it says are like people who look at their faces in a mirror and, after looking at themselves, go away and immediately forget what they look like” (James 1:23-24, TNIV).**

Now that takes A-D-D to a whole new level right there, doesn't it? I've got a mirror with me here. I really don't like looking in this thing. But when I look in it, I can see myself for who I really am. This is not one of those slimming mirrors. This is not one of those distorted mirrors. I get a pretty accurate reflection of who I am.

I've got a zit right there. Got a little grey creeping in. Got something in my teeth. You guys ever get one of those out-of-control eyebrows? I got one of those that's going ... Have you heard this theory? That your hair doesn't fall out; it grows in and comes out other places. It comes out your ears; it comes out your back; it comes out your nose; out your eyebrows.

Wouldn't it be something for me to look in this mirror and see all that going on and immediately walk away and go, “Man, I look like George Clooney.” That would just be ridiculous, right?

James is saying those people that open the Word, look at it for a glance, and just kind of audit the class, they're like people who look in the mirror and see themselves for who they really are but when they walk away, they forget who they really are. The whole last series of messages was about your true identity. A loved child of God, that you! We gave out I.D. cards so you wouldn't forget. But it's easy to forget how loved you are. And it's easy to forget what it means to be a child of God. It's easy to forget the call of obedience. It's easy to take the path of least resistance when it comes to the choices we make everyday about how we spend our time, our money, our abilities.

The Word becomes a mirror. And I want to tell you: The Word of God, the truth of God, gives a really accurate reflection. There's no distortion about who we are when we look in the truth of God. So to walk away after we hear the truth of God, forgetting what we heard, is kind of crazy.

*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.* That's one of the reasons I'm so pumped up about this “Fuel” experience that we're launching into. And we all get to do it together. Because as you dig in here, and think about it, and talk about it in your small group. As you memorize small chunks it will change the way you do life. You will discover that God's Word really is the best way to live. We have a loving Father who is full of life and full of truth. He is consistent. He is not changing like shifting shadows. He gives us perfect guidance.

Look what it says in Colossians 3:16. **Let the words of Christ, in all their richness, live in your hearts and make you wise (Colossians 3:16, NLT).** It's the best way to live.

I want to end with this. I love symbols--simple visual reminders of something deeper. You may have noticed a symbol, a reminder just inside the doors of this room. It's a coat hook with a wire cage over it. Have you ever noticed it? It's been there for years. It's a symbol.

A friend made that one day when I was expressing some thoughts about what happens in this room every week. I was talking about how it's too, too easy to come to worship, to learn, to take in some stuff about the faith and then to hang our faith on an invisible hook just inside the door. We can hang it there and pick up next time we're here. I was telling this man about this and how I wish I had a hook with a cage over it to remind us as we leave that there are no hooks here. There's no place to hang your faith here. We're called to take our faith out into the world; to take our love, to take what we learn and go out into the world with it. To live it out out there.

Look what it says in James 1:25. **“But those who look intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continue in it--not forgetting what they have heard but doing it--they will be blessed in**

**what they do” (James 1:25, TNIV).** So let’s get some real fuel in the weeks ahead. Let’s look intently at what James had to say, let’s take it out into the world with us. Let’s be ready for those blessing that James mentions. This is going to be awesome. Because it’s the best way to live.

Say that verse with me one last time. **“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (James 1:22, NIV).** And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

God, I just want to thank you so much for your wisdom. God, I thank you for giving us a book that’s not just a book, but it’s living and active. It’s useful and practical. It’s got answers for all kinds of things in our lives. It’s a lamp to our path. It’s a light for our way. It shines a light to the dark corners of our heart and exposes us for who we really are, not so that we’d be heaped with guilt and shame, but so that we can walk free and honest.

God, I thank you for what your Word does. I pray that every one of us in this room right now will resolve in our hearts to never just merely audit the class, but that we would do the work and we’d apply the principles that we learn so that we can become better men and women, we can become better parents, we can become better kids, we can become better boyfriends and girlfriends and friends and neighbors, and so we can become more like Jesus. I thank you, God, for revealing that to us, and I pray you’d do some really cool things in us in the study of your Word.

In the name of Jesus I pray. Amen.

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