

LIVING  
IT OUT



**DAILY  
BIBLE  
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

# The Final Stretch

November 16, 2020

Over the weekend, we began a new series titled *Final Stretch*. Lead Pastor Ben Snyder talked about how we are in the final stretch of the year. I'm not usually one to enjoy a big New Year's celebration, but I think many of us will joyfully welcome 2021!

It seems like just yesterday, we were watching a clip of Barbara Walters saying, "Welcome to 2020!" None of us knew what was coming though.

In 2020, we have seen and experienced excessive change, uncertainty, chaos, and fatigue ... so much *new*. Some of the changes are good; some are not. Some will be the new normal, and some won't.

Despite what this year has been, God continues to invite us to grow. He invites us to know him more, find freedom in every area of our lives, discover our purpose, and make a difference. God has a desire to do work in us and through us. This final stretch is an opportunity to refocus and to seek God.

James chapter 1 teaches us how we can approach this final stretch.

## **James 1:21**

*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.*

As the pandemic began to take hold, we literally tried to get rid of all filth in our lives—we cleaned and washed everything to the point where Clorox wipes and paper towels became impossible to find. Our hands became, and are still, chapped from frequent washing and use of hand sanitizer.

Similar to our physical world, it is equally important to get rid of the filth in our spiritual world. It is an important step we can't ignore if we want to experience spiritual growth.

In addition to getting rid of the filth in our spiritual lives, we also need to humbly accept God's word to grow. To accept it, we need to know it. And that can only happen by going to church, reading and studying the Bible, and talking to others about what we are learning. It doesn't happen by accident; it takes effort. But as you know it and apply it, you will see the power it has to save you.

As we enter the final stretch, commit to God's word and watch him work.

**1 Timothy 4:8**

*"Physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and in the life to come."*

**Questions:**

As you look at the changes this year has brought, how have they positively changed your spiritual life? What steps will you take to train in godliness?

**NextSteps:** Read more.. Learn something new. Share it with someone. Apply it to your life.

Just do it!

**Prayer:**

*Dear heavenly Father, thank you for getting us through each day of this year. Help us to embrace the changes that bring us closer to you! Help us think of these changes positively and appreciate how they have changed our lives. Amen.*

# What's Your Story?

November 17, 2020

Seeing my words in print for the first time changed something inside my mind (although seeing them now makes me cringe). What I had once only imagined became reality, and I felt driven to further develop my skills. Before that moment, my writing had only served me. My ideas and words filled pages that no one was allowed to see.

For years, I wanted to be a writer, but my actions told a different story. Wanting without *doing* something to purposely obtain what I desired only continued the cycle of merely wanting.

The same goes for growing my faith. For years, my spirit was as strong as possible from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Sundays, with the occasional Bible study during the week. But my love for God fell on deaf ears. How could I share my faith if I only listened to the word when it served my purpose? Such selfishness couldn't reach others.

## **James 1:22-24**

*<sup>22</sup> But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. <sup>23</sup> For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. <sup>24</sup> You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like.*

Once I stopped fooling myself, the church became my family. My want for religion turned into a faith walk to grow my spirituality. My struggles are less because my focus is more. I look forward to the day when all of my brothers and sisters can stop fooling themselves and say, "[I'm done pretending. I want the real thing](#)" (lyrics from "Real Thing" by Dante Bowe).

## **Questions:**

Are you actively pursuing God throughout the week? Do your actions reflect the story you're trying to tell?

## **Next Steps:**

Make a daily plan to grow your faith and understanding. Start your morning with

prayer. Read the LivingItOut. Live life with others and learn from their differences. Join a small group.

**Prayer:**

*Lord, thank you for giving me life and opening up my heart. Help me to find new ways to reach those who want to know your love. Thank you for blessing me with people in my life who were patient enough to share their faith with me. May I never lose sight of your purpose for my life. Amen.*

*This post was written by Jaron Camp, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut.*

# Step into a Healed Heart

November 18, 2020

My 4-year-old sister, Mary, loves to pray. She prays for her paper cuts to get better, for Christmas to get here sooner, and for play dates with her friends. But it is my favorite when she prays for other people. Often, Mary will pray for God to “heal their hearts.” She not only wants God to help them become healthy or happy but also wants their hearts to be healed.

Last weekend, Lead Pastor Ben Snyder said that spiritual depth is a faith-filled step away. If you want to have a closer relationship with God, you need to trust what he says. He shared an important verse in James.

## **James 1:25**

*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've heard, then God will bless you for doing it.*

Mary, at only 4 years old and without truly understanding the meaning of what she was praying, asked for something very profound. A “healed heart” is a heart that has been set free and blessed—just like the verse says. In addition to praying for others' hearts, we should also take a step of faith in healing our own!

A great step toward a fully healed heart is reading the Bible regularly. When I take a little time to read, I am trusting that God will reveal to me the message he wants me to hear. God's Word is full of wisdom and truth for a heart that wants to be healed.

## **John 8:33**

*Now you know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*

Not only am I set free, but when I obey what the Bible says, I am also blessed. For the past few weeks, my family and I have been meeting with volunteers from The Tabernacle and passing out groceries to people in the surrounding neighborhood. The Bible talks about how important it is to serve others, and now I understand—serving feels good! As I share God's love with others, I receive a blessing in return. Serving to others heals my heart.

## **Luke 11:28**

*Blessed are those who hear God's word and obey it.*

Our hearts won't be fully healed until Jesus comes back. But taking steps of faith will grow our relationship with God, and that is the best way to heal our hearts

until that time comes. Take a faith-filled step today toward freedom and blessing.

**Questions:**

How can you take a faith-filled step right now? What areas in your life can you grow to have a deeper relationship with God?

**Next Steps:**

If you haven't done so already, take a step toward God by reading Scripture every day for the next week. Try to set a goal for the week—maybe 15 minutes a day or seven chapters a week. Find other ways to take faith-filled steps, like joining a group or attending GrowthTrack.

**Prayer:**

*Father God, I know that my heart is broken because of the sin of this world. Please heal my heart and give me the courage to take a step of faith. Help me grow in you, becoming closer to you every day. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to get to know you better. In Jesus' name, amen.*

# Living it Out by Leaving it Out

November 19, 2020

The first week of the *Final Stretch* series focused on the scripture of James 1, which speaks very directly to the hypocrisy that arises when we fail to put our faith into action. The necessity of living our faith is an underlying theme in the book of James. Even if we identify as followers of God, attend church, and read our Bibles regularly, James warns that our religion is rendered worthless when we fail to live it out in our actions.

We've all heard the adage "actions speak louder than words." While this may be true, it should not suggest that the words we speak are without consequence.

## **James 1:26**

*If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless.*

This election season has presented a sobering reminder of the damage our words can inflict. People professing to be "of faith" reside on all sides of the political spectrum. But so many of the words they utter—whether audibly or via social media—are in opposition to God's teachings. We've all seen and heard the judging, blaming, and name calling; the unhealthy arguments, false accusations, and threats. This ceaseless tongue wagging has weighed heavily on many of us.

James actually had quite a bit to say on the topic of tongues. In James 1:19, the author famously instructs us to "be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry." In James 3:5-6, he speaks to the power—for good or bad—of the tongue. "The tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches," he writes. Or, if used with wicked intent, "it can set your whole life on fire."

In setting up the *Final Stretch* series, Lead Pastor Ben Snyder spoke of our opportunity to gain spiritual vision for the rest of 2020 and beyond. Living out of our faith—following the spirit into action—is certainly at the heart of that vision. The lesson from James 1:26 is that *living it out* often requires that we *leave it out* by controlling our tongue.

## **Questions:**

Do you catch yourself speaking (or writing) words that betray the principles of God's word? If so, what can you do to be more mindful of the power—and gravity—of your words?

In James 3:8, we are told “no human being can tame the tongue.” Do you find this comforting or confounding? What can we do, as humans, to move closer to fulfilling the message of James 1:26 while also understanding that we are imperfect beings?

**Next Steps:**

This week, dedicate some quiet time to considering how you can leverage the challenges this year has presented to fortify your spiritual vision moving forward. Think about what you’ve experienced, what you’ve overcome, and where you’ve fallen short. Use what you’ve learned to strengthen your vision and faith during this final stretch of 2020 and beyond.

**Prayer:**

*Heavenly Father, I am so grateful for your love and your word. Help me to always be mindful of the importance of living my faith and the value of harnessing my tongue. Grant me the wisdom to live—and speak—in concert with your desires. Amen.*

*This post was written by Todd Romain, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut.*

# You Want Me to Do What...?

November 20, 2020

## **James 1:27 (AMP)**

*Pure and unblemished religion [as it is expressed in outward acts] in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit and look after the fatherless and the widows in their distress, to keep oneself uncontaminated by the [secular] world.*

Huh? What does this verse from Jesus' brother James mean for us? Well, in Jesus' day, wives and children had only their husbands and male relatives to keep them safe, fed, and out of terrible poverty. If their husbands died, they were completely helpless. James adds that we are to stay uncontaminated by the outside world that doesn't recognize God as Lord.

The following verses in Deuteronomy tell what God commanded his people to do for those who could not care for themselves.

## **Deuteronomy 14:28-29**

*<sup>28</sup> "At the end of every third year, bring the entire tithe of that year's harvest and store it in the nearest town. <sup>29</sup> Give it to the Levites, who will receive no allotment of land among you, as well as to the foreigners living among you, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, so they can eat and be satisfied. Then the Lord your God will bless you in all your work."*

James explains the concept of religion and faith as two sides of the same coin. Faith is our deepest core belief that God's love now lives in us because we have accepted his gift of forgiveness for our sins and eternity with him. This gift was only made possible because of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son. In other words, Jesus took the punishment we deserved for our sins, in our place. Accepting that gift saved us from an eternity in hell. On the reverse side of that coin, God calls us—*his children*—to show others his love by serving our fellow man, selflessly, and in his name.

Thankfully, as we grow in our faith, God grows our desire and ability to help others in both small and large ways. For example, on a nasty winter day walking home from school, the sidewalk was icy and treacherous. I noticed three adults standing around looking down at an elderly man lying on the sidewalk pleading with them to help him up. They stood there debating whether or not they

should! I bent down and helped him up. As I walked him back home, he told me he left unescorted and had fallen only a block away. I rang the bell, explained our adventure, and said farewell. During that 10-minute encounter, God taught me to always be prepared for opportunities to show Christ's love through my actions and words.

There are so many opportunities here at CedarCreek to grow your serving muscles. You can become a world-class example of Christ's love any day of the week. We have a bed-making and delivery ministry for children without beds and a car care ministry. We join with other churches to feed folks who don't have enough. At the South Toledo Campus, we host a medical team from UTMC every week to attend to the medical needs of the neighborhood. So many more ways to help are available! Check out our website at [CedarCreek.tv/serve](http://CedarCreek.tv/serve) or ask your campus pastor for more opportunities to live out your God-ordained mission with us.

Why? Because by sharing our faith with and caring, serving, and providing for people in need, we emulate Christ's great and perfect love for us all. Grow your faith—start right now by becoming the hands and feet of Christ every day. You will never be bored, you will grow in love and relationship with God, and your life will definitely be a blessing to others.

### **Questions:**

What excuses do you make for not leaving your comfort zone to show and share with others the amazing love God has shown you?

Why do you think you succumb to fear or indifference when it comes to serving?

### **Next Steps:**

Want to dig deeper? For more on James 1:26-27 watch <https://www.crossridgechurch.ca/podcasts/media/2016-11-20-james-1-26-27>. It's a sermon on this very topic recorded on Nov. 20, 2016, by Church Planting Apprentice Matt Glezos from Crossridge Church in Vancouver, B.C., Canada.

Take a tiny step out of your comfort zone—even if you have to “do it afraid,” do it for Christ. Serve someone, anyone, with your only motivation being to bless that person and show them God's love in action. Then thank the Lord for allowing you to be in the right place at the right time.

**Prayer:**

*Lord, I am so sorry it has taken me so long to become a consistent blessing to others. You are such a kind and patient father. Thank you for all the lessons you put in my path in order to show me this is your gift to me as your child—to help, lead, and bless others in your name. I thank you in Jesus' name, amen.*