

How I Learned to Fly a 747
(Learning How to Live the Life of Faith)
James 1:19-27

Slide 1: Opening remarks

Slide 2: Scripture reading.

INTRODUCTION: **(Slide 3 Blank)** A few years ago my friend, Vernon, showed me a short video he had made to promote a missions trip at the church he attended. It was quite clever. The clip began with a Computer Graphic Image of a Thai International Boeing 727 taking off from LAX. A few minutes of the aircraft soaring above patches of clouds was followed by a landing at Chiang Mai International Airport. As the viewpoint panned around, it was an exact computer image of the Chiang Mai Airport. From there the video went on to show some of the missionary work being done in Northern Thailand.

I thought that was really cool, and decided to do a promotional video of my own, only better. So I asked Vernon where or how he made the Computer Graphic images of the Thai Boeing 737 and the CNX airport. He told me he used a computer game: Flight Simulator X So at the first opportunity I drove the nearest computer game shop and purchased my own copy of Flight Simulator X. Opening the box I pulled out a piece of paper that said: Welcome to FSX. Please read the user guide before installing your program. (Crumple and pitch). Next I pulled out the user guide. Come on, this is a computer game. How difficult can it be? (Toss user guide to one side). Finally, the disk. I put it in my computer and pressed install.

So the program installed and the first page came up with two icons. One icon was to enter into the tutorial program. The other icon simply said "start flying". I looked at the tutorial button and promptly pressed "start flying". And this is what came up on my screen: **Slide 4** the Aircreation 582 SL Tike Ultral Lite. Now what is that? It's a tricycle with batman wings and a box fan attached. I am not flying that. So I pressed the "choose more aircraft" button and began to scroll through the pictures of available aircraft. **Slide 5** Piper Cub, too noisy. **Slide 6** DC-3 too old, glider plane not enough power. Down through the list until there it was...**Slide 7**...The trumpet sounded, the light shown upon me...the big daddy of them all, the Boeing 747-400. Now we're coolin' with gas. That is what I'm flying. So I selected the 747-400 and got myself situated in my virtual cockpit. About 3 days later, after countless runs down a virtual runway and virtually crashing at the end of said runway, I was fit to be tied. How do you fly this thing? I looked over at the user's manual, reached over, and typed and email to my friend Vernon:

Vern: How do you fly FSX? I keep crashing.

Vern's reply: Did you read the user's manual? Did you go through the tutorial? What aircraft are you flying?

My Reply: NO, NO, 747-400

Vern's Reply: Read the manual, go through the tutorial, start with the ultra light.

Read the manual. **Slide 8** Flying a 747 ease not easy. Even the most seasoned pilot will encounter the unexpected. For this reason commercial airline pilots are required to carry with them in the flight deck copies of the aircraft

operations manual the AOM [Slide 9](#) and a quick reference handbook. The purpose of the AOM is to provide operating limitations, procedures, performance, and systems information the flight crew needs to safely and efficiently operate the airplane during all anticipated airline operations

Living the life of faith, like flying a 747, is not easy. [Slide 10](#) And like flying, if not careful, we can crash and burn. Most, if not all, of us here today have probably crashed and burned more than once. That's why it is important for us to be familiar with an operations manual on how to live the life of faith. I'll call it the Faith Operations Manual. Or we can call it James. The book of James is much like an operations manual for living the life of faith. It is sometimes un-appreciated because it seems to be in such contradiction with the Apostle Paul's teaching on justification by faith, which led Martin Luther to kind of write James off as an Epistle of Straw.

But there really is no conflict. Whereas Paul put forth the argument of a life justified by faith, James provides the operations manual on how to live the life justified by faith.

In our text this evening I propose that James puts forth 3 steps that we must follow in order to live the life of faith. [Slide 11](#)

- I. Step #1 We must **Cleanse the Ear Wax** (19-21) Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger, get rid of the moral filth and evil that is in you and humbly receive the word planted in you.
 - a. What does James mean, quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger? Often we read this verse and interpret it to mean we should guard our speech, our language. But that's not really the context of this passage. James talks about our speech later on in chapter 3. The context of these few verses is THE WORD. The word of truth (18) the word planted in you (21) hearing the word (22,23) the perfect law (word, 25) the context is receiving the word, teaching the word, and reaction to the word. When James says Be quick to listen, I think he is saying eagerly pursue, eagerly jump at every opportunity to listen/hear/study/receive the word. Listening, hearing, the word. But sometimes things get in the way of our listening. We allow attitudes and situations to accumulate to the point where we can't hear the word. Like impacted earwax. My brother, an ER doctor, leads medical missions trips. One of the stations he sets up is ear wax removal. Drops are put in ears to dissolve and wash away excessive earwax. Why is it important to remove ear wax? Because impacted earwax can lead to a number of undesired symptoms not least of which is loss of hearing. If someone has an excessive accumulation of earwax, they can not hear clearly. Now what I find interesting is the word filth comes from a root word that was used in ancient medical profession to refer to ear wax that needed to be cleansed out in order to hear better.* (*<http://laudatortemporisacti.blogspot.com/2009/02/ear-wax.html>) [Slide 11.a](#) Perhaps James is telling us we need to cleanse anything in our life that would impede our eagerness, our ability, to listen to the word. Like what? [Slide 11.B](#) I don't know, maybe the love we have for the sound of our own voice? Have you ever wanted to say to someone "Just shut up and listen?" Maybe you have, or maybe someone had to say that to you? Sometimes we get so caught up in what we want to say, or in defending ourselves, or in putting forth our own opinions, that we can't hear the still small voice of God. Maybe "anger". This word actually translates better as "indignation" or "lingering resentment". [Slide 11.C](#) Do we sometimes get so caught up in our own righteous indignation that we can not hear the word that is planted in us? Or perhaps we resent what the word is telling us? We resent the word when it convicts us of our sin. That resentment can be like earwax the impedes our ability to hear the word. Or maybe it's our own ego that gets in the way? [Slide 11.D](#) Receive the word with humility.

Have a teachable spirit. Be willing to be taught, receive instruction. Yet how many of us let our egos, our PhDs, our Doctorates of Theology, Masters of Divinity, our senior status in community, get in the way of hearing what the word has to teach us? And then of course there are the “real sins” immorality and the like. It’s all ear wax. It keeps us from hearing the Faith Operations Manual. And it needs to be removed. The first stop of Living the Life of Faith, cleaning the ear wax. Getting rid of anything that impedes our ability to listen, hear, and receive the faith operations manual.

II. **Slide 12** Cleansing the earwax we move on to Step #2 **Check the Mirror (22-25)**

We have a number of mirrors in our house, I’m sure you do to. We have one in the bathroom, we have a full length mirror in the bedroom, and we have a wall mirror hanging near the door before we leave the house. **Slide 12.A** And we use these mirrors to check ourselves before going out. In the bathroom I use the mirror to check my face, make sure I shaved properly and didn’t leave any whisker patches. In the bedroom I use the full length mirror to make sure I’m dressed properly, shirt tucked in, colors match. And then just for good measure on the way out I check one last time in the wall mirror. Hair combed? No green stuff stuck between my teeth? I think you get the picture, you probably do the same. Now, supposing, having checked my self in the mirror, and seeing something that needs to be fixed, for some reason I don’t fix the problem? Perhaps I get distracted, the phone rings, kids pounding on the bathroom door “I can’t wait” and I walk away fully intending to come back, but I forget. I forget I need to shave a bit closer. I forget I need to comb my hair. The purpose of the mirror is for us to check our reflection so we can see what we really look like, compare it to what we ought to look like, and then immediately do something about it. But if we get distracted, we forget what we really look like, we forget to make the changes, and we go out into the wide world looking like idiots. We deceive ourselves into thinking we look OK, but in fact we don’t look OK. **Slide 12.B** James tells us that when we hear the word, but don’t act on the word, we are like someone who looks in the mirror but forgets to make the desired changes. **Slide 12.C** We think that by hearing the word we are OK. When in fact we have deceived ourselves. Hearing without acting is not living the life of faith. James uses a term that in math is best understood as MIS CALCULATE. If we think that by hearing the word alone is OK, we have made a serious mis-calculation. The word hearing here means to audit. Ever audit a class at school? What do you do? You just show up and listen. You usually are not required to do any of the work, projects, take any of the tests. Living the Life of Faith is more than just auditing a class. We need to check the mirror. We need to check our reflection of who we are and compare it to what the word wants us to be, and do what it takes to change what we really are into what the word wants us to be. And do it immediately before the distraction of life cause us to forget who we are and what we need to be.

III. **Slide 13** Living the life of Faith requires us to clean the earwax, check the mirror, and the third step **Change our Religion** (26-27) If you think you are religious, but don’t control your tongue you have deceived yourself and your religion is worthless. True religion that God accepts is to look after the widows and orphans in their distress and to keep yourself unpolluted from the world.

a. There are two false religions prevalent in the church today. The first is a religion that says living the life of faith is a simple matter of hearing the word. Hearing and believing the word is enough. But we saw just now that hearing without doing is a miscalculation. The second religion James addresses in

these two verses. This religion is the polar opposite of the first. It is a religion that emphasizes the external form, the bodily activities, outward religious rites. So if somebody thinks himself to be religious because he's carrying out all these outward formalities of religion that person, too, is deceived. It's just going through the motions, and that is a serious miscalculation.

b. James calls us to change our religion. **Slide 13.A** And the change requires us to control our tongue. Why the tongue? What is this obsession James has with the tongue? I think James is making the point that the tongue, our mouth, our speech, is a manifestation of what is in our heart. **Slide 13.B** Out of the abundance of the heart so the mouth speaks. The good man brings forth good things out of the good stored up in him. The evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted and by your words you will be condemned. (Matthew 12:34-37). It's interesting that Jesus connects doing good or doing evil with our words. Why is that? Is it because our words, what we say, are a true reflection of who we are? We may religiously follow all the accepted outward norms associated with living the life of faith. Attend church, sing, pray, read the Bible. But is that an accurate measurement of successfully living the life of faith? James is talking about is the unholy heart that shows itself in the uncontrolled tongue. That's why Jesus says in Matthew 12:37 by your words you'll be justified and by your words you'll be condemned because your words reveal your heart. If the tongue is not controlled, the heart is not transformed...no matter how many prayers, how much knowledge, how many church endeavors we engage in, it doesn't matter. It's futile, useless.

c. **Slide 13.C** What is in our heart is what will eventually come out, for good or for nothing. If we have checked the mirror, seen who we really are, and what we ought to be, and if we strive to make the changes, then those changes will be evident in our living the life of faith. Not in whether we follow prescribed religious acts, but in acts of selfless service to those less fortunate than we. The orphans and the widows. The imprisoned and impoverished. Aid and comfort to those who have AIDS. Living the life of faith means we need to change our religion. Change from religion that is good for nothing to a life of faith good for something. From performance based religion to a life of obedience. From a self-indulgent religion to a life of service to others. So I can look at how I am living my life of faith. Is it a pattern of holy obedience? If so, I should be a doer of the Word. If I am not a doer of the word, maybe I need to change my religion.

Conclusion: **Slide 14** It's been two years, and I must confess I have not mastered the art of flying the 747 in FSX. I have allowed other things to distract me. I haven't thoroughly read the user's manual. I got through the third level of the tutorial and that was it. And I must confess I have not mastered living the life justified by faith. There are times when I allow my own ego, my own opinions, to get in the way of hearing the Word. Times when I check the mirror but forget to make the changes to my life that need to be made. Times when I too become satisfied in "performing" faith, going through the motions, and complacent in really living my faith. It's during those times that I need James to remind me "Hey bud, need to remove those obstacles, time to clean out the earwax. Hey, need to make some changes have you checked the mirror recently? Hey, stop going through the emotions and change your religion."