

Abbey International Baptist Church, Reading

Worship Service 10:30AM 31 August 2025

Selina Chan leading & Jill Bird preaching

www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk

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Over the last few weeks, we've learnt from the book of James and we will have an overview today. James challenges us to live out our faith with humility, love, and with a heart that is fully given to God.

We are called to be more like Jesus. We are invited to walk in humility, not in pride. We are reminded to hold fast to the royal law: *to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and to love our neighbour as ourselves.*

We are encouraged to commit our whole lifetime to walking with God, asking Him to soften our hearts. Let us begin our service with worship, opening ourselves to God's presence.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Come, let us draw near to God with open hearts.

We come to seek His wisdom and grace.

God lifts up the humble and resists the proud.

We choose to walk in humility before Him.

God calls us to love Him and to love our neighbours.

We commit ourselves to live by the royal law of love.

God promises to take away our stony hearts and give us hearts of flesh.

O Lord, soften our hearts and make us more like Jesus.

Come, let us worship the Lord together!

We lift up our voices and our lives to the glory of God!

HYMN MP 269

I do not know what lies ahead, the way I cannot see;
yet one stands near to be my guide; He'll show the way to me.

I know who holds the future, and He'll guide me with His hand.

With God things don't just happen;

Everything by Him is planned.

So as I face tomorrow With its problems large and small,

I'll trust the God of miracles, give to Him my all.

I do not know how many days of life are mine to spend;
but one who knows and cares for me will keep me to the end.

I do not know the course ahead, What joys and griefs are there;

But one is near who fully knows; I'll trust His loving care.

Alfred B. Smith and Eugene Clarke copyright of 1958 New Spring Publishing/Imagem Music/Small Stone Media BV/Song Solutions Daybreak

FAMILY TIME: Becoming more like Jesus

*(*An offering will be taken during the following song, after which young people will leave for their groups)*

A new commandment I give unto you
That you love one another, as I have loved you,
That you love one another, as I have loved you.
By this shall all men know you are My disciples
If you have love one to another
By this shall all men know you are My disciples
If you have love one to another

Words and music@Roy Crabtree

BIBLE READING 1: Mark 12. 28 - 31 John 13. 12-17 John 34 - 35

BIBLE READING 2: James 1. 22-27 James 3. 13 - 18 James 4. 7-10

HYMN MP 760

When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word
What a glory He sheds on our way!
While we do His good will, He abides with us still
And with all who will trust and obey

*Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey*

Not a shadow can rise, not a cloud in the skies
But His smile quickly drives it away
Not a doubt or a fear, not a sigh or a tear
Can abide while we trust and obey

Then in fellowship sweet we will sit at His feet
Or we'll walk by His side on the way
What He says we will do, where He sends we will go
Never fear, only trust and obey

J H SAMMIS 1846 - 1919

SERMON Becoming more like Jesus

So here we are at the end of our 12 week series on the very challenging letter of James, the brother of Jesus, written to the early churches in the first century AD.

We called our series '**Becoming more like Jesus**'. So the question today is 'Have we succeeded'? – are we more like Jesus? Can we answer that question?

BUT Let's ask a more fundamental question

Do we believe that becoming like Jesus is God's will for us? Do we accept it is a life long process we have to work at? Is it a bit like a carving? We start as any old block of wood and we are gradually being carved into the beautiful image of Jesus. The bible says when we see him we will be like him and that as we gaze on the beauty of Jesus we are being transformed from one degree of glory to another

But a deeper question still – **Do we with our whole heart want to be like Jesus?** Maybe that is the particular challenge this morning. Or are we content with sitting in our armchair!!

But does it all depend on us , trying so hard to change?? How does James speak in his letter?

Thirteen times he calls the church my brothers and sisters and another 3 my dear ones. This means they are part of God's family – loved and secure as God's children. The Greek word here is Agapetos. You can see it has the word agape in it the special love word from God. Do you know this starting point? – a time when you gave your hard heart to God and allowed him to give you his loving heart and adopt you as his child. God's love poured out into our hearts will heal us emotionally, physically and spiritually. Then we can become wonderful channels of God's love. We love because he first loved us
Let's stop a minute and enjoy God's love – reach out your hands to receive his wonderful love flowing over you and into you. Let's say together 'I am loved by God Agapetos!'

Then right at the centre of James is what is known as the ROYAL LAW OF LOVE – Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and your neighbour as yourself – and Jesus even added to it that we should love one another as I have loved you. Really the book of James is all about this love – how can we love each other as Jesus loves us. – no favouritism, no quarrelling, loving the poor, supporting and praying for each other being some examples

So today with your help we are going to remind ourselves of some key lessons

What can you remember ? What has God been speaking to you about in James? First two quickies
James talks about reading the bible is like **looking in a mirror** – seeing how far short you fall in being like Jesus and going away and doing nothing about it!

Then about being **double minded** – this word comes three times in James – are you like Jesus one day and do your own thing the next

Then let's hear from Mohammad, how he was challenged about putting his faith into action

A few weeks ago, Simon talked about the "armchair Christian." Often, we just sit back as if in an armchair, giving advice from a distance: "You should do this," or "You should do that." But James, in his letter tells us: "Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" Faith isn't just words—it's what we do. Being a Christian means stepping out. It means rolling up our sleeves, helping others, and truly being present in their lives. We cannot walk past each other indifferently. Let's be real brothers and sisters—there is no difference in colour, race, or background. We are all children of God.

When you leave today, reach out to someone. Invite them for a walk. Spend time together. Get to know each other. I promise, when we truly know one another, judgments fade away.

A few days ago, I went out with church members to share God's message. At first, I only handed out flyers. Jill encouraged me: "Talk to them." It was hard, but after speaking to the first person, the next felt easier. I realized the challenge wasn't the people—it was my own fear.

James teaches us that faith is shown through works. Let us step out, choose love over convenience, compassion over comfort, and courage over fear. Faith becomes alive when we help the hurting, listen to the lonely, and serve those in need. So let us not just speak about faith. Let us live it. Step into the field with Christ, shoulder to shoulder with those who need us most. This is true faith. This is living Christianity. This is being the light in the world.

Then the beginning of James has a more personal note – how to cope with testing and difficult times in our lives. The encouragement to even count it all joy because we know that the testing times grow our faith, endurance and patience. This is so central to our dear brothers and sisters at Abbey – so many of us are going through testing times and need to find God's unfailing love and presence in the midst of it.

Let's hear from Senait how this scripture is precious to her

And then we have been so challenged about how we speak. We heard how hard it is to tame the tongue and to learn to be much quicker to listen and slower to speak.

Let's listen to Angel and how she has been challenged

James 3 says, "The tongue is small but has great power, like a spark that can set a forest on fire. It can be a world of evil that corrupts the whole body."

This really speaks to me, because I know I haven't always been careful with my words. In the past, I didn't fully notice how what I said could affect other people's feelings. Now, I'm learning to be more mindful and to choose words that build others up instead of blaming or discouraging them.

I've also seen a change in my connect group. We are becoming more focused on encouraging one another, not just giving out tasks or requests. It feels more loving and supportive.

I pray that the Holy Spirit will keep guiding us, helping us to watch both our words and our intentions. In Jesus' name, may He close every gap and strengthen us in our weaknesses. Amen.

So how shall we conclude – Could we say to our neighbour 'I want to be more like Jesus'? I want to be filled with his love and to let that love pour out into the world around me?

The promises are all there for this to be possible – Jesus wants it so much more than we ever do!

In July, I talked about the small words of encouragement in James 4. **Come near to God and he will come near to you. Submit to God** – yes surrender all your old self to God for him to be at work and let's see the beauty of Jesus shining through all of us here at Abbey. Amen

HYMN MP 302

I want to walk with Jesus Christ, All the days I live of this life on earth;
To give to Him complete control Of body and of soul.

*Follow Him, follow Him, yield your life to Him,
He has conquered death, He is King of kings;
Accept the joy which He gives to those Who yield their lives to Him.*

I want to learn to speak to Him, To pray to Him, confess my sin;
To open my life and let Him in, For joy will then be mine:

I want to learn to speak of Him, My life must show that He lives in me;
My deeds, my thoughts, my words must speak All of His love for me:

I want to learn to read His word, For this is how I know the way
To live my life as pleases Him, In holiness and joy:

O Holy Spirit of the Lord, Enter now into this heart of mine;
Take full control of my selfish will, And make me wholly Thine:

© 1964 C. SIMMONDS JOHN H. SAMMIS & DANEIL BANK TOWNER 1887

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION: Nigel and Anne

"Heal us Lord and we shall be healed" Jeremiah 17:14

Lord we pray for your healing around the world

Bring healing for the hatred that brings war and destruction in Gaza, in the Ukraine, in Sudan,
Bring healing for the divisions that allow conflicts to start,

Bring healing for the bereaved to those who have lost loved ones.
Lord where there is division and hurt bring you peace and comfort.

Heal us Lord **And we shall be healed**

Lord we pray for your healing in cities and towns in the UK

Healing for those who are fearful of people who are different, fearful of change, fearful of those who come here seeking safety and a better life,
Healing to a society riven by division and unable to respect people with whom they disagree,
Healing to refugees who have lost everything, who have fled persecution to seek safety, only to be treated with suspicion.
Lord where there is fear and mistrust, bring you compassion and hope.

Heal us Lord **And we shall be healed**

Lord we pray for your healing in your church at Abbey

Healing for the sick and unwell and strength and calm for those who care about them and look after them,
Healing for the lonely and the isolated who long for human connection,
Healing for people on the fringes of church who are looking for a place to feel at home.
Lord where there is sickness and loneliness, bring your healing and build in us a community of love and care.

Heal us Lord **And we shall be healed**

Lord accept these prayers for the sake of your son our saviour, Jesus Christ.

Amen

Hymn

Lord, the light of Your love is shining
In the midst of the darkness, shining
Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us
Set us free by the truth You now bring us Shine on me, shine on me

Chorus

Shine, Jesus, shine, fill this land with the Father's glory
Blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire
Flow, river, flow, flood the nations with grace and mercy
Send forth Your word, Lord, and let there be light

Lord, I come to Your awesome presence
From the shadows into Your radiance
By the blood, I may enter Your brightness
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness Shine on me, shine on me

As we gaze on Your kingly brightness
So our faces display Your likeness
Ever-changing from glory to glory
Mirrored here, may our lives tell Your story Shine on me, shine on me

Graham Kendrick. 1987@Make way music

BENEDICTION

Lord, we thank You for Your Word and Your presence with us today.
Send us out now to live what we have learnt: To walk humbly with You,
To love You with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength,
And to love our neighbours as ourselves.
Soften our hearts, Lord, and shape us more and more into the likeness of Jesus.
Amen.

THE GRACE

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore, Amen.



Events to highlight next week:

Friday Sept 5th Prayer meeting 10.30 – 11.30 at Abbey

Saturday Sept 6th 2.30 Induction service for our new Pastor Rev Dr Zoltan Biro – all welcome

Sunday Sept 7th 10.30 Worship service at which Zoltan will take our service
Followed by Connect group coffee times

QR Code for Financial Offering:

