

Did you ever go to a meeting where they asked you to put on a name tag? You write your name on the tag and apply it to your shirt.

I'm not a fan of name tags. Name tags are like labels that announce to the whole world who you are. And that sometimes places us in a situation where we don't live up to our label.

I've told you before that I don't have a fish emblem or a clergy sticker on my car because I don't want to send the wrong message when I pass someone on the highway. You see if people see a pastor or a Christian speeding by them and driving in ways that may not be Christ-like I think it sends the wrong message.

You see I believe that my relationship with God should impact the way I live daily- even my driving; but even though I believe that I don't always live like I believe it. I say I believe in God, (hold up box: Believe) but...I know there is a gap between what I say I believe and how I live (hold up box: Live).

How about you? Ever find a gap between what you believe and how you live? In case you are not certain if this applies to you, just ask your children. Children have a way of seeing the gap between what we say we believe and how we live. My daughter has a way of reminding me when the gap between what I say I believe and how I live is getting bigger. She calls me, *Pastor George*. I hate it when she calls me that because I realize that once again I've got a gap that needs closing.

One of the greatest challenges that we have as disciples of Jesus Christ is to live a life that is consistent with what Jesus taught; in other words to close the gap between what we believe and how we live (between hearing and doing, add labels on boxes).

As a matter of fact it is the gap that causes many to question why they would want to follow Jesus or come to church.

Well this morning our scripture lessons speak to the gap between believing in God but living as if God doesn't exist.

So let's start with the passage from Matthew. Notice that Matthew places this parable of the two builders (7:24-27) at the end of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus statement on what we believe as disciples and how we are to live daily. This parable of the two builders also is a call to close the gap between what people believe and how they live.

Notice two specific instances of the gap between believing and living. First, Jesus says: You have heard that it was said... you shall not murder. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. (5:21-22) Then in a second instance Jesus says, You've heard it was said, love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. (5:43, 44)

So the parable of the two builders summarizes all that Jesus says here into a choice. Be wise and live what you believe or be foolish and don't live what you believe.

Look at it this way; the foolish builder is the one who hears the words of Jesus but it goes in one ear and out the other. The words have no impact on their life. The wise builder on the other hand hears the words of Jesus and lives in a way that demonstrates the impact of the words of Jesus on everyday life. The key word here is "lives" because it puts into action what we say we believe.

When you read these words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount you can see how people allowed a gap to develop between what people believe and how they live. And as the gap got bigger; people lost sight of how God originally wanted his followers to relate to one another.

So what that tells me is two-fold. First, the world is watching to see if I live what I say I believe. So if I tell the world I am a Christ-follower, if the label I wear says I believe in God, I believe that God is living and active and wants to change my life and my world; then the people around me are going to be looking to see if I live my life accordingly.

Think about what people would say if Christians closed the gap between what we believe and how we live? How those Christians love one another. How they care about others around them. Etc.

And the second thing is what am I going to do about the gap? That's where our other scripture comes in.

Flash forward 20+ years from Jesus Sermon on the Mount and we come to the letter of James. James, Jesus' brother, writes about the same issue facing the disciples of Jesus. In James we hear the same warning that Jesus issued; live what you say you believe. Close the gap!

Look again at what James says: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." (James 1:22)

Why does James need to repeat his brother? Because, our natural tendency is to drift; and we drift away from the things Jesus says and the gap increases in our lives. This passage reminds that we need to know what Jesus says. That means we need to read the Bible.

But it is not just hearing, not just believing; it is living what we read.

If we believe that God exists; it will impact our decisions to offer forgiveness.  
If we believe that God exists; it will challenge us to examine how we use the resources God gives.

If we believe that God exists; it will influence what we pursue in search of happiness in our life.

If we believe that God exists; we will approach daily challenges in life without worry.

If we believe that God exists; we will not be silent when it comes to sharing our faith.

Those are the topics that we will examine as we endeavor to close the gap between what we say we believe and how we live.

So let me bring this in for a landing.

For a long time now doctors have been telling us that a low-fat diet helps to maintain a healthy heart. So you would imagine at an annual meeting of the American Heart Association that the practitioners of good heart health would avoid unhealthy food.

Well a story emerged from their 1993 annual meeting in Atlanta that speaks to us.

The doctors, nurses, and researchers met to discuss, among other things, the importance a low fat diet plays in keeping our hearts healthy. Yet during meal times, they consumed fat-filled fast food—such as bacon cheeseburgers and fries—at about the same rate as people from other conventions. When one cardiologist was asked whether or not his partaking in high fat meals set a bad example, he replied, "No, I took my name tag off." Boston Globe (11-10-93); Stephen Nordbye, Charlton, Massachusetts

See the gap? What the doctor believed didn't change the way he lived.

As disciples of Jesus we cannot take off our name tag, try as we might. We believe in God, but... But there is a gap between our believing and our living. And over the next five weeks we're going to endeavor to close the gap.

For now would you find the name tag in your worship folder? If you are willing this morning would you put on the name tag? Notice what it says: Christian and at the bottom is James 1:22.

If you are willing to put this on for the day or take it home and put it somewhere you can see throughout the week; may it serve as a daily reminder to close the gap between what you believe and how you live.

### **Family Activities for This Week**

#### Memorize:

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves.

Do what it says. James 1:22

#### Read the Sermon on the Mount

Read sections of Matthew chapters 5-7 each day this week.

Discuss the passage and how your family can close the gap between "Believe" and "Live"

Study the life of Daniel

Daniel is an excellent example of someone who didn't have a 'gap' between what he believed and how he lived.

Daniel 1 – Training

How do Daniel and his three friends demonstrate living out what you believe?

Daniel 3 – Fiery Furnace

How do Daniel's three friends provide an example of being consistent in how we live what we believe?

Daniel 6 – Lion's Den

Daniel demonstrates that being a person of integrity often means going against the crowd. How can you apply this to your life?