

HIGHLANDS CHURCH

Study Guide

Highlands Sunday Service (9:00am)

Thomas Slager
March 1, 2026

Major Points

- 1 Pure speech reflects a transformed heart—the tongue reveals what is truly inside us, whether good or evil, because out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.**

Luke 6:45

- 2 Practical compassion for the vulnerable (orphans and widows) is a defining mark of true religion—biblical compassion is active, not merely emotional.**

Matthew 9:35-38

- 3 Personal purity in a polluted world is expected of believers, even though perfection is impossible—Jesus prays not to remove us from the world but to keep us from the evil one.**

John 17:15-18

- 4 When we fail at all three marks, grace and forgiveness are found in Christ—communion reminds us that salvation is by grace through faith, not by our own works.**

Ephesians 2:8-9

Key Quotes

“Now, the tongue may not always say truthful things, but the tongue always reveals truthful things.

at 60:17

“Biblical compassion, the compassion of Christ is active compassion. It does something. Our heart goes out to people, but then our feet quickly follow.

at 70:38

“Friendship with the Lord looks like obedience to the Lord.

at 53:01

“The goal is for us to look in the mirror, to do some introspection, to check our own heart, to see the way we are, but also see the way that we're meant to be.

at 54:27

Discussion Questions

1. Pastor Slager talked about the tongue being a truth-teller about what's going on inside our hearts. When you think about what 'spills out' of you when you're stressed or caught off guard, what does that reveal about where your heart is right now?

2. The sermon described three marks of true religion: pure speech, practical compassion, and personal purity. Which of these three do you find most challenging to live out consistently, and why do you think that is?

3. Pastor Slager made the point that biblical compassion isn't just feeling bad for someone — it's active, it moves your feet. Can you think of a time when you felt compassion but didn't act on it? What held you back, and what would it look like to respond differently next time?

4. The sermon mentioned how Jesus prayed in John 17 that the Father would NOT take us out of the world but would keep us from the evil one. Why do you think God wants us to remain in a 'polluted world' rather than just beam us up to heaven? What purpose does that serve?

5. Pastor Slager emphasized that looking in the mirror of God's Word isn't meant for us to hold up to other people — it's for self-examination. How can we cultivate a habit of honest self-reflection without falling into either self-condemnation or self-righteousness?

Word Studies

χαλιναγωγέω

chalinagōgeō

Greek

To lead with a bridle, meaning to hold in check or restrain, conveying the image of controlling a powerful animal with reins.

θρησκεία

thrēskeia

Greek

External religious worship or practice, referring to the outward expression and ritual of one's faith rather than internal belief alone.

ἄσπιλος aspilos

Greek

Without spot or stain, denoting moral purity and freedom from the contaminating influence of sin.

Cross References

Psalm 141:3

David's prayer, 'Set a watch, Yahweh, before my mouth. Keep the door of my lips,' echoes the Old Testament longing for God's help in bridling the tongue — the same heart-level struggle James identifies as a mark of true religion.

Proverbs 4:23

'Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it is the wellspring of life' provides the Old Testament foundation for Jesus's teaching in Luke 6:45 that out of the heart's abundance the mouth speaks, undergirding James's connection between tongue and heart.

Isaiah 1:16-17

God commands Israel to 'cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow,' demonstrating that caring for orphans and widows has always been God's standard for authentic worship — not a new idea from James.

Micah 6:8

'What does Yahweh require of you, but to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God' summarizes the Old Testament call to combine practical compassion with personal holiness — the same two marks James gives for pure religion.

Titus 2:11-12

Paul teaches that God's grace 'instructs us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age,' showing how grace empowers the personal purity James describes rather than excusing moral compromise.

Further Reading

- **The Letter of James (The Pillar New Testament Commentary)**
by Douglas J. Moo
- **Taming the Tongue: The Power of Spoken Words**
by Jerry Bridges
- **Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just**
by Timothy Keller

Scripture References

REFERENCE	TYPE	TIME	CONTEXT
James 1:26-27	Read Aloud	49:54	<i>If anyone thinks he is religious and does not brid...</i>
James 3:7-8	Read Aloud	56:33	<i>For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and s...</i>
Luke 6:43-45	Read Aloud	58:53	<i>For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a...</i>
Matthew 28:19-20	Referenced	52:39	
John 14:15	Referenced	53:01	
John 15:14	Referenced	53:01	
Matthew 6:5-8	Read Aloud	62:38	<i>And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocr...</i>
Matthew 9:35-38	Read Aloud	69:52	<i>And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villa...</i>
John 17:15-21	Referenced	75:54	<i>Father, I do not pray for them that you take them ...</i>
Romans 7:15-25	Referenced	76:34	
John 13:6-10	Referenced	78:03	
James 1:16	Referenced	65:56	
James 1:22	Referenced	66:22	
Colossians 2:23	Referenced	55:20	
1 Peter 1:15-16	Referenced	88:23	
Acts 1:8	Referenced	12:32	
Ephesians 2:8-9	Referenced	80:05	
Romans 2:4	Referenced	67:51	
Lamentations 3:22-23	Referenced	68:03	