

James – Life after Faith  
James 1:22-25  
“Connecting Listening and Living”

1. THE FOOLISHNESS THAT ONLY HEARS THE WORD
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1. In a 2005 issue of *Our Daily Bread*, Richard Dehaan tells the story of a man in New York City who died at the age of 63, without ever working a single job.
2. The man spent the entirety of his adult life in college. He acquired multiple degrees, but never put any of them into practice.
3. Rather than a thirst for knowledge, it turns out that the man’s lifetime in the classroom was the result of a trust fund that had been left to him by a wealthy relative who passed away when the man was just a child.
4. The trust fund stipulated that the man was to be given enough money to support him, so long as he was in school. The man turned that fund into a lifetime of income by simply staying in school.<sup>i</sup>
5. Unfortunately, there are far too many people who spend their whole lives listening to the teaching of the Word of God, but spend very little time living it out.
6. They *hear* all the “thou shalt,” they just don’t *heed* them. They can recite the fruit of the Spirit; they just don’t reproduce them in their lives.
7. Brother James speaks out against this disconnect between listening and living. He says in James 1:22, “*But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only...*”
8. James reminds us in this text of what someone once observed. “Christ’s sheep are marked in the ear and foot. They hear His voice and they follow Him.”<sup>ii</sup>
9. In Luke 6:46, Jesus asked, “*And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*” At the heart of being a follower of Christ is not just hearing, but doing what His Word commands.
10. Look with me at this passage from James 1, and consider some things it teaches us about the necessary connection between listening and living. First of all, notice that James points us to:

## I. THE FOOLISHNESS THAT ONLY HEARS THE WORD

1. Look at verse 22. James says, “*But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.*” Notice the phrase, “deceiving your own selves.”
2. The word translated “deceiving” literally means “beside reason”. It describes that which is counter to reason.
3. In other words, James says that it is irrational to only hear the Word, but not do what it commands. You might say that it is senseless and foolish to only hear the Word, but not heed it.
4. Look at verse 22 with me, and notice what James says about *only* hearing the Word. First of all, notice:

### A. The application of the Word James commands

1. James says, “*But be ye doers of the word...*” James opens this section with a command about how we are to apply the Word of God to our lives.
2. He says that we are to be “doers”. James chose an interesting word for “doer” when he originally wrote this verse.
3. The word the Spirit inspired James to use describes more than just following a prescribed course, or adhering to a set of instructions.
4. The word James used for “doer” describes someone who takes something they are given, and then creatively does something with it.
5. The Greek word translated “doer” in verse 22 is the word that gives us our English word “poet”. A poet puts words together to create something artistic and beautiful.
6. Think about that. Like a poet, we are to take the words of God and put them together in our life so as to create something beautiful that will glorify Christ Jesus.
7. Whenever you hear the Word of God, it is not just information for your head; it is inspiration for your life! You are to take the Word and apply it creatively to your life.
8. While this is the application of the Word that James commands, he follows the positive command of “*Be ye doers of the word...*,” with a negative one.
9. Notice not only the application of the Word that James commands, but notice also:

## B. The approach to the Word James condemns

1. Again, at the close of verse 22, James indicates that it is possible to hear the Word and “deceive your own self”, and be foolish.
2. This foolish self-deception comes from being a “hearer only”. James says, *“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only...”*
3. Again, James chooses a unique word in this text. Notice that word “hearer”. The word translated “hearer” is the word that is now used to describe those who audit a class in a university.
4. Those who audit a class will attend all the lectures, and listen to all the material given, but they do not take any of the exams or tests.
5. Likewise, when the class is over, they get no credit for taking the class. They simply listened, but they did not actually “take” the class.
6. Unfortunately, this is exactly how many people approach the Word of God. They listen to sermon after sermon, and hear instruction after instruction, but they never put it into practice.
7. The foolishness of this approach is that you cannot graduate the course of the Christian life by only auditing the teachings of Christ.
8. Jesus said in John 13:17, *“If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye **do** them.”* The blessing of the Christian life is not found in simply knowing what you are to do, but in doing what you know.
9. In verse 22, James literally says that you are not in your right mind if you only hear the word, and do not do it. There is a foolishness that only hears the Word, but does not obey it.
10. Notice a second truth James gives us about the connection between listening and living. Notice not only *the foolishness that only hears the Word*, but notice also further, James points us to:

## II. THE FORGETFULNESS THAT OFTEN HINDERS THE WORD

1. Having encouraged us not to be “hearers only”, in verses 23 and 24, James illustrates what it looks like for a person to listen but not live out what they hear from the Word.
2. James says in verse 23, *“For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:”*

3. He goes on in verse 24 and says, *“For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.”*
4. Notice that the man is said to have forgotten what he saw in the glass. In verse 25, James says that the man who *does* what the Word says is *“not a forgetful hearer”*.
5. Obviously James connects the issue of forgetfulness with a failure to do what is commanded in the Scripture.
6. Let’s look at this illustration James gives us, and see what he teaches us about how forgetfulness will hinder us from carrying out what God has commanded. Notice first of all:

#### **A. What we find when we look in the Word**

1. In verse 23, James says, *“...if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:..”*
2. The word “glass” refers to the ancient mirrors that were used in James’ day. James says that a man looks into the mirror, and he sees his face. The mirror reveals who he really is.
3. Is that not what happens when we look into the Word of God. The Bible serves as mirror to reflect back to us the truth of who we are.
4. In Romans 7:7, Paul says, *“...I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.”*
5. When we look into the Word of God, it tells us who we really are. It tells us we are sinful. It tells us we need a Savior. It tells us that in Christ we are loved, accepted, and forgiven.
6. The story is told that, years ago, while working on one of his movies, actor Warren Beatty was spending so much time looking at himself that the film’s director had his assistants cover up every mirror on the set.
7. Someone once said that Beatty was so vain, he was the kind of man who would “end up dying in his own arms.”<sup>iii</sup>
8. Through his illustration, James reminds us that the Word of God is like a mirror, not to feed our vanity, but to build our virtue by pointing us to Jesus.

9. James not only reminds us in verse 23 of what we find when we look in the Word, but in verse 24, he reminds us of:

**B. Why we forget when we leave from the Word**

1. Look again at James' illustration. He said a man who only hears the Word, but is not a doer, is like a man who looks at himself in the mirror.

2. Then he says in verse 24, "*For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.*"

3. The mirror informs the man of who he is, but he walks away and forgets completely what he learned from the mirror.

4. I love the way one writer translates this verse, because it points out clearly why we too forget what the mirror of the Word has told us. Kenneth Wuest renders verse 24 this way: "...he took one look at himself and was off, and he immediately forgot..."<sup>iv</sup>

5. Is that not how so many of us read the Bible? We take one look at it, and then we are off, never to consider again what God had to say.

7. There are two reasons I think we forget the Word of God after we have heard it or read it. One, we don't *meditate* on it, and two, we don't *memorize* it.

8. Psalm 1 says that a blessed man meditates on the Word of God "day and night (Psalm 1:2)." David said in Psalm 119:11, that he "hid" the Word of God in his heart.

9. I recently heard a young man preach who is the pastor of one of the largest churches in Chattanooga. His name is Robby Gallaty, and he has only been saved for 7 years, and yet he is a very impressive and powerful preacher.

10. The day I heard him, I listened to him quote from memory all of the first three chapters of II Timothy. It was remarkable.

11. In a book written by this same young man, he writes an entire chapter on the importance of memorizing Scripture.<sup>v</sup>

12. James reminds us with this illustration that when we rush away from the Word, and never meditate on it, or memorize it, we are bound to become the kind of person who is only a hearer, but not a doer of the Word.

13. There is a third truth we draw from this passage that teaches us how we can make the connection between listening to living. Notice not only that James

points us to *the foolishness that only hears the Word, and the forgetfulness that often hinders the Word*, but notice also lastly that we see:

### **III. THE FAITHFULNESS THAT OBEDIENTLY HANDLES THE WORD**

1. Look at how James presents the opposite of the man who only hears the Word. He says in verse 25, *“But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”*
2. That phrase “perfect law of liberty” is another way of speaking of the teachings of Jesus. James is referring then to the Word of Christ.
3. James says that in order to connect our listening to our living, there is a way in which we must handle the Word of God.
4. Notice a couple of truths James gives us to help us practice what we are taught in the Word of God. First of all, we find here:

#### **A. How we should read through the Bible**

1. Look carefully at verse 25. James talks about a person who *“...looketh into the perfect law of liberty...”*
2. Note that phrase “looketh into”. It is translated from a word that literally means to turn your head sideways in order to look into something.
3. It is a picture of someone stooping down to look carefully at something. It is the same word that is used in John 20:5, where it describes what John did when came to the empty tomb.
4. It says, *“And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying...”* Imagine John squinting and leaning into that dark tomb, trying to make out what was inside.
5. That is the same effort and strain that James says a doer of the Word uses when they “look into” the Scriptures.
6. James is teaching us that a quick skim over a Bible chapter is not sufficient to translate listening into living.
7. If we want the Word to become a part of our actions, we must look deeply into the Scriptures, and as James says in verse 25, we must “continue therein.”

8. I read about two rival Scottish writers who met on the streets of Edinburgh one day. One of them asked the other, "Have you read my latest book?" The other answered, "I have not... You write a great deal faster than I am able to read."

9. Be sure; God is not so much worried with *quickness* of your reading, as He is with the *quality* of it. We must read the Word carefully; looking deeply into what God has to say.

10. The faithfulness that obediently handles the Word of God not only has to do with how we read through the Bible, but also further:

### **B. How we should respond to the Bible**

1. Look again at verse 25. James says, "*But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work...*"

2. Here is the original point where James began in verse 22, being not just a hearer of the Word, but a "doer of the work."

3. You may fill your head with Bible principles until you sound like a certified theologian. However, if none of those principles become practice in your life, they are useless.

4. If Biblical information never becomes personal motivation, then you have mishandled the Word of God.

5. For instance, if you read that you are to love your neighbor as yourself, but you are so busy with yourself that you never tell your neighbor about Jesus, then you have not truly responded to the Word.

6. If you read that those who have been forgiven are supposed to in turn forgive, and yet you carry around some dusty grudge against someone, then you have not faithfully and obediently responded to the Word of God!

7. One my favorite stories is about a man who once bragged to Mark Twain that he was planning on visiting the Holy Land, climbing Mount Sinai, and shouting out the Ten Commandments to the top of his voice.

8. Twain told the man that it would be better if he just stayed at home and lived them.

9. It is not enough to simply hear and know what the Bible says. James reminds us that a faithful handling of the Word of God involves hearing and obeying what God has said.

1. James concludes verse 25 with a beatitude. He says that if a man carefully studies the Word, and then puts into practice what he has learned, “...*this man shall be blessed in his deed.*”
2. There is a blessing – a happiness – in life that can only come from obeying the Word of God.
3. Hearing the Word of God is important, but hearing alone is not what God intends for us to do with His Word.
4. According to James, you are only fooling yourself if you fail to connect your listening to your living.
5. My prayer for each of you is that you will learn to obediently handle the Word of God, and live out what you learn.

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<sup>i</sup> Dehaan, Richard, Hearing and Doing, 2/18/2005, [rbc.org](http://www.rbc.org), accessed 10/22/09, <http://www.rbc.org/devotionals/our-daily-bread/2005/02/18/devotion.aspx>

<sup>ii</sup> Blanchard, John, quoted in James: Faith Works!, Gregory, Joel, (Convention Press, Nashville, 1986), p. 27

<sup>iii</sup> So Vain, [anecdorage.com](http://www.anecdorage.com), accessed 10/22/09, <http://www.anecdorage.com/index.php?aid=11244>

<sup>iv</sup> Wuest, Kenneth, The New Testament: An Expanded Translation, (William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1975), p.541

<sup>v</sup> Gallaty, Robby, Creating an Atmosphere to Hear God Speak, (Xulon Press, Chattanooga, 2009)