

“Faith That Obeys”
Week 2 - James 1:19-25
January 23, 2021

Introduction

Tim. Pastor. We're working our way through the book of James asking the question - "What does living faith look like?".

Today - **James 1:19-27**. I just feel the need to warn you before we get started that James is coming for us today, ok?
Pray.

Lecture Room. Growing up we had this room in our house, it was technically the formal living room. It was a room that looked nice but you never went into it....except when you were in trouble. In fact my family to this day still jokingly refers to it as "the lecture room". It was the place you did not want to be.

When my dad called you into the lecture room he was the king of leading questions. You know what I mean? He'd start and he'd say:

- **“What did I tell you about such and such?”** And you'd reply half heartedly "not to do it..."
- And then he'd ask **“And did you obey?”** "No..."
- **“And why did you not obey?”** "Idk...."

And what my dad was looking for in these questions was two things:

- 1) Did we hear the instructions? Did we listen to Him, receive it?
- 2) Did we obey the instructions?

One of the things my dad always made sure was clear to us when he was trying to discipline us and lead us as kids is that **there were two important steps we had to take → We had to listen to him, be willing to receive what he said...and then we had to actually obey him.**

Two crucial steps → hearing and obeying.

And James today is going to apply that principle to how we interact with God's Word.

He's going to tell us that → **Living Faith Receives and Obeys God's Word.**

That's my really simple push for us tonight - that we would be a people that would receive God's Word and then do what it says.

The Bible

But before we talk about receiving and obeying God's Word, let me make sure we're on the same page about what this book actually is.

This (hold up Bible) is the most important book in the entire world.

This is the most popular book in history - 5 billion copies of this thing have been printed and sold. There's been no book more debated, more studied, more written about, and argued over than this book.

I want you to pause and think about how incredible this is - God in all of His glory, wisdom, and love has made Himself known to humanity. This is not simply words **about** God, this is the Word **of** God. God gave this to His people - that we might know Him, walk with Him, have our hearts and our lives changed.

This Bible is, as 2 Timothy 3:16 says is - **breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.**

→ It's breathed out by God (inspired by Him). Which means there's divine authorship + human authorship.

Profitable for:

- Teaching - Correct doctrine
- Reproof - Don't go this way
- Correction - Go this way
- Training in righteousness.

James, here in this passage is going to tell us that this Word:

- Is able to save our souls (leads us down the path of salvation, pointing us in everything to Christ)
- Perfect (correct, true, without error)

This is not simply some good ideas to contemplate or a set of best practices for living your best life... **This is the perfect, without error, revelation of God to His people that is able to lead us to salvation in Christ Jesus and to a godly life.**

This is why as a church, we center everything we do around this. We preach it, teach it, counsel from it, encourage one another with it, read it, study it, memorize it, we want to be a people of the book because this book points us to God.

Living Faith Receives God's Word and Obeys God's Word.

Problem of Sin

Now, that sounds good right? Hear God's Word. Receive it. And obey it. Sounds good. Let's go home.

Here's the problem → **Sin.**

Because of our flesh, our sin nature within us, there are going to be some barriers and resistances that arise to us receiving and obeying God's Word. And that's what James is going to deal with in this passage.

Ways and reasons we reject both the receiving and obeying of God's Word.

James 1:19-21

19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;

This is one of those verses that has sort of infiltrated it's way into popular culture. Maybe you've heard this phrase before as a wisdom principle for life. Maybe you've applied it to your friendships, your career:

- If you want to get ahead at work, it is a good idea to be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry.
- If you want to have a happy spouse, it is a good idea to listen first, speak 2nd, and be patient.

Not wrong. Not bad ideas. It is a genuinely true principle for life, but given the context of what he's about to say, what James is focused on here is how we respond to God's Word.

- Quick to listen to God's instructions.
- Slow to speak and push back and justify.
- Slow to get angry and defensive against what God's Word says.

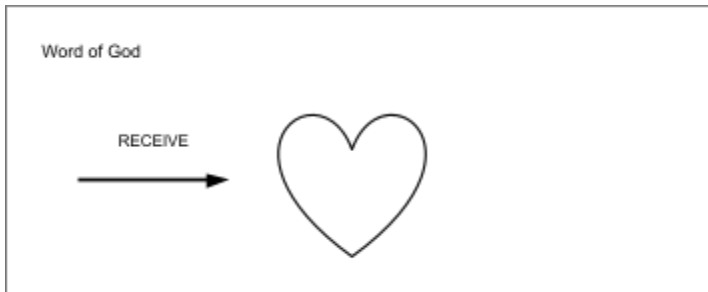
Why?

20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

21 Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

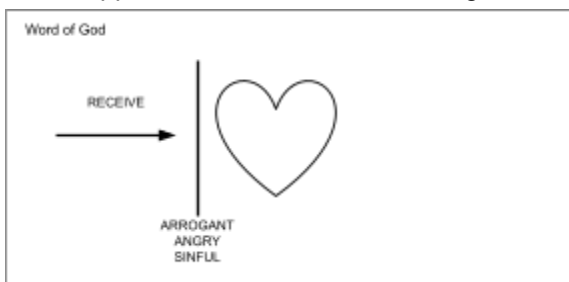
Diagram

Can I give you a diagram I think will be helpful? I want to show you what's going on in this passage.



When it comes to the Word of God, James says the goal is that we are able to receive it. That's what he just said in vs 21 - **receive with meekness the implanted Word**. That's the goal.

What happens for some of us, according to James 1:19-21, is that the Word of God stops here:



We don't receive the Word of God. We might hear it with our ears but it never makes its way into our lives. And James says the reason why this happens is because we are **arrogant, angry, sinful**, or some combination of those three.

James says it right there in the text:

- **Be slow to anger (v19)**
- **Put away all rampant wickedness (v21)**
- **Receive with meekness/humility (v21) the Word of God.**

We can't hear and receive God's Word because in our sin, we are arrogant, angry, and set on doing whatever it is we want to do.

Arguments w/ Lindsay. Think about it this way → Have you ever tried to have a conversation with someone who was arrogant, angry, and set on doing what they wanted? It's the most frustrating experience in the world. You can almost feel the wall of deflection that is up where everything you say is just going to bounce off one way or the other.

More often than I care to admit, this is me. A few weeks ago Lindsay and I were having an argument, and I realized like 5 minutes into the argument that I was completely wrong and she was completely right. You ever been there? Isn't that the worst? You start fighting with someone (friend, spouse, sibling, parent) and 5 minutes in you realize they're right and you're wrong.

But then you're stuck with that choice right → Do you own it and apologize and admit you're wrong or do you dig your heels in and hypothetically make stuff up to try to win the fight?

Throughout the course of our conversation she was making valid point after valid point. And in the back of mind it was like I knew that, but in my heart there was a wall. I couldn't actually receive any of it because I was angry and prideful - I wanted my way. And then as my heart got more entrenched into my position, I started believing the lie that I was actually right.

So first my anger pushed back - I didn't want to acknowledge I was wrong, but then my arrogance took over and I started convincing myself I was actually right.

When you're arrogant, angry, and set on doing whatever it is you want, you cannot hear what is being said.

And that is the posture that so often we take when it comes to the Bible. We create these walls of anger and arrogance.

Arrogance → In our arrogance, instead of being quick to listen, to hear from God, to receive His Word we are quick to defend, to justify, to do interpretive gymnastics so we can try to convince ourselves the Bible doesn't say what it actually says or doesn't apply to us. We become our own best defense lawyers - here's why I'm not guilty or why it's justified what I'm doing. Or you know, I read a blog that told me the Bible doesn't actually mean what it says there, so...

It's like we think the whole Bible is as confusing as the book of Revelation. Revelation can be very confusing. You know what's not confusing? **Ephesians 4:32 - Forgive one another, as God in Christ forgave you.** "Well, like I don't know if that's a good interpretation, have we considered the greek conjugation of the verb tense of the word forgive. And like Paul was writing to a different context than ours so..."

Angry → Or we just get angry and disagree. I'm my own authority. I run my life. I dictate what I do and don't do. Not God. Not His Word.

It's arrogance and it's anger and it's a life set on doing whatever it is we want to do. So we can't receive the Word.

This affects how we read God's Word, how we listen to sermons, this affects how we let ourselves come up under good Godly Biblical authority, how we receive correction and help from other believers.

If you want to know if this is you, let me give you one really easy question to ask yourself → **When's the last time the Bible disagreed with you and you changed your opinion?**

Or to put it another way —> do you have a convenient God who only ever agrees with you?

One area of particular deceptiveness here - being good in some areas, but withholding in others.

If you're here, unable to receive the Word, in one area of your life, or in many, the invitation is to repent.

21 Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

The correct posture is to “put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness” - in other words - we **repent**. We turn from our sin and turn towards God. And we receive with **meekness**, humility, a humble heart - the Word of God.

That's the whole Christian life. We repent - we acknowledge - I'm a sinner. Which means I'm not going to view things correctly. Myself, God's Word, my life. Repentance means embracing God is God, and I am not, and in my sin I'm going to want to be god, but I turn away from that and receive with humility - God give me your Word. Give me your truth. Give me your direction for life.

And change my heart so I can receive your word in humility. Which is what James says God promises He will do. Notice what he says we receive → the **implanted Word**.

This is a direct call back to Jeremiah 31, a promise God makes that His Word will not simply sit as an outside law on our lives we try our best to live up to, but that he would put His Word on our hearts. Do a new work in His people from the inside out. He wants to put His Word within us so that we can have ears to hear and receive His Word and obey Him.

God puts His Word on our hearts, we respond by putting away our arrogance, anger, and sin and receiving His Word as true and authoritative in our lives.

Now, that's a good step. A necessary step. But it is only the first step....

Foolish and Forgetful

James says - receive the word. Hear the Word. But, don't stop there:

22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

Here's what happens: We receive the Word. We hear it. Acknowledge it. Say it's good. We even may want to obey it...but we don't actually then do what it says. James says we're deceiving ourselves. And that we're foolish. Look at this picture:

23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. 24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.

I love this illustration from James. If you read God's Word but walk away and don't do anything, it's like looking at a mirror, walking away and forgetting what you just saw,

It'd be like if I took 20 minutes staring at the mirror, I walked away, and I walked up to you and said - “Hey, I forget, am I bald?” You would look at me like I'm delusional! That's the picture James paints for us.

God's Word is like a mirror. It illuminates our hearts and our souls. It shows us how we're doing spiritually. It shows us our sin, our need for repentance. It shows us how we are to live, and believe, and where we're off in regards to those things. It shows us what we truly believe about God and how we should think differently than we do about Him and ourselves.

You've experienced this if you've sat down with God's Word before - that it has this illuminating and convicting affect.

Hebrews 4 says it this way - **12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.**

God's Word lays us open before ourselves and God. But it's one thing to see it. It's a whole different thing to be changed by it and obey it.

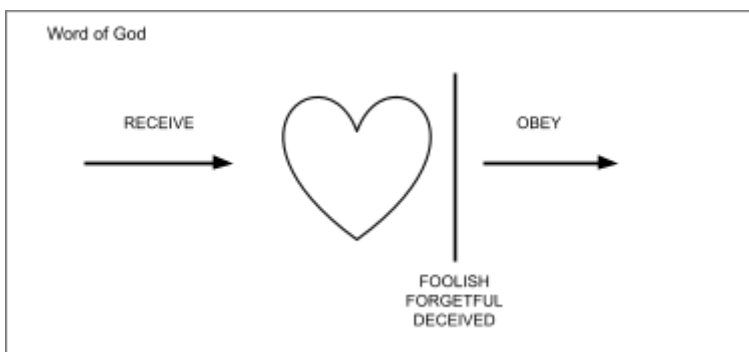
SLIDES:

Receive God's Word.

Then obey God's Word.

But some of us, that's where the sin barrier comes in.

We don't obey. Why? **We're foolish, forgetful, and deceived.**



We look at God's Word, it exposes us, we say ooph ok, and then move on with our lives.

Hearing and obeying must go hand in hand. Let me be really clear on this → **this is a warning to those of us (like me) who do a lot of studying of God's Word, and it doesn't affect their lives.**

Studying God's Word, even being excited about the Bible when you hear it or read it...and actually obeying it are two different things.

Trash can. Let me give you an analogy. Imagine a dad who gets up early in the morning before the rest of the family to get ready for work. And he goes downstairs, goes to throw something away and realizes - the kitchen trash can is full. Searches around the house, other trash cans are full too! Then he checks the wall calendar - oh yeah, it's trash day.

So he sits down before work and writes a long letter to his children - "Dear children. I love you so much. Remember how I much love you. Remember how much I've done for you. That pizza I bought for us to eat last night. The mortgage I pay for on this house. I can't wait to see you when I get home tonight and we can play together."

"It is trash pick-up day. The house stinks. It's a total wreck. I need you kids to take all the trash out of the bins in the house, take them out to the big garbage can, drag it out to the curb because the trash truck is coming. It's garbage pick-up day. I really need you to do this before you go to school. Don't obey for my acceptance but from my acceptance. Love, Dad."

Kids get up. Read the letter. Go to school. Come home. Dad comes home from work. Drives up. Garbage can is still in the garage. Bins are still full in the house. Family meeting time. Head to the lecture room.

"Alright kids. Did you not get my letter this morning?"

First kid - "No dad, we got your letter. It was awesome! It really made me excited. I got goosebumps at parts, shed some tears at parts. It really moved me. I even took the time to study it in depth. I checked out all your verb tenses, made sure I understood the appropriate context in which you were writing. I even made some notes in my journal about it."

The other kid chimes in - "I did more than that dad! I took your letter to a coffee shop and read it in public! And while I was there, I made sure to get a great photo of it next to my coffee and journal and post about it all over instagram so people knew how great of a letter it was! I even quoted my favorite part on my instagram story!"

Not to be out done, the first kid chimes in again - "Well, I didn't do that because I'm not prideful. But I did start researching about how to learn more about this letter and the practice of taking out trash. And I started thinking about how we could start a small group study on taking out trash in a "gospel-centered way". I also thought about how this person in my community group really needs to hear this letter too.

Probably a 3rd kid in there too, the youngest, who's just like "I'm gonna be honest, I read it and then set it down and immediately forgot what I read."

Dad's question would be - "But did you take out the trash?"

Isn't this so often what we do when we hear God's Word??

- When we sit in a **sermon** and hear God's Word proclaimed and go - that was a good, inspiring message. I loved the way he worked through the text. I love when he gets all nerdy about the Greek words. That quote was fire. That illustration. Awesome...and then change nothing about our lives in response.
- When we read our **Bibles** in the morning and God's Word convicts us of sin, and we go - man that's convicting, let me write that in my journal (convicted by James 1 today. You go Lord.), and then change nothing and do nothing.
- When we sit in a **Community Group** and someone shares insight from God's Word and we go "ooph that's good" and then we immediately forget it and move on with our lives.
- Or we think - I need to invest in my **marriage**. So we read some Bible passages, and 2 books on how to better love our wives through sacrifice and service. And then she asks us to help out around the house and we say "no" cause we want to watch tv.

We're foolish. We're letting the truest, realest mirror there ever was shine the will of God into our lives and we say "yep, I look like that. I have that gunk stuck in my teeth." And then walk away and do nothing.

Side note → Be wary of the deceptiveness of "being willing" or having "good intentions" to obey. You know what I mean? Where you read something in God's Word and you think to yourself "I would love to do that." And maybe you really mean it. You genuinely are willing.

But there's a difference between being willing to obey, and obeying. God doesn't want our willingness, He wants our obedience.

- Don't be willing to help the poor, help the poor.

- Don't be willing to be generous towards your church family in need, be generous.
- Don't be willing to share the gospel, share the gospel.
- Don't be willing to forgive, actually forgive.

Church, do not be deceived - If we only hear God's Word and don't actually step into doing it in obedience, we're fooling ourselves to think our faith is alive.

And in case you think this is too harsh, James isn't making this up on his own.

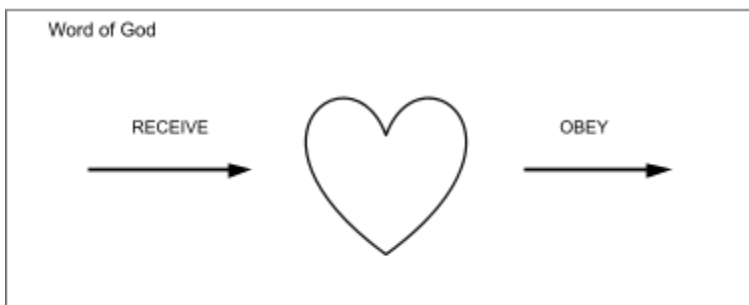
In fact, he would've heard the exact same thing from his half-brother, Savior of the World, Jesus:

- **John 14:23 - 23 Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.**
- **John 15:14 - 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you.**

Jesus was after our obedience!

What is the goal? James summarizes it so helpfully in verse 25:

25 But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.



We receive and we obey. Incredibly simple and incredibly difficult.

James says you have to stare into it. "Looks into" can be translated - **Look intently**. This means:

- Studying the Bible.
- Memorizing Scripture.
- Meditating on Scripture.
- Listening to sermons well.

But then you become, as James says, **not a hearer who forgets, but a doer who acts.**

We act on what the Bible says.

- If the text says repent, we repent.
- If it says believe this, we believe it.
- If it says do this, we seek to do it.
- If it says don't do this, we try not to do it.

This is part of why we emphasize equally both Community Groups and Sunday Gatherings. Both/And. This time together is mostly "know the Word" time. We sing good theology. We preach from God's Word. We learn more about

Jesus together here. It's important to show up ready to receive God's Word. To look intently at it together. Take good notes. Listen intently.

But then groups are primarily "do the Word" time. Alright, in light of God's Word, how do we live differently? That's where we take what's taught on Sundays and not just talk about how to apply it into our lives *in the context of community*, but then actually seek to apply it together. We hold each other accountable that we actually stepped into and did that application.

A Barometer for How You're Doing

Then to wrap up the passage, verses 26-27, James is going to end with a barometer of three things. Three really easy tests to know how you're doing in hearing and obeying God's Word. All topics we will hit on in the weeks to come, won't go in depth here but he says:

26 If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. 27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

Want to know if you're doing a good job receiving and doing God's Word?

- **How's your speech?**
- **Do you serve the poor and needy?**
- **Do you consistently say no to sin?**

Easy three tests. Like I said we'll address this in detail in the weeks to come. Let me close.

GOSPEL RESET

The challenge for us today out of James 1:19-27: **Living Faith Receives God's Word and Obeys God's Word.**

This is a lot. I have to repent, receive the Word, do the Word. That is a call that is weighty. But the beauty of this call to living faith that hears God's Word, receives it, and obeys it comes in the 4th word of verse 19. We skipped over it, I wonder if you caught it.

19 Know this, my *beloved* brothers...

Before James starts pushing them towards obedience to God and His Word, he throws in this little word that has immense meaning - he says "**beloved brothers.**" That's the Christians - men and women, positionally, are brothers of Christ. Sons and Daughters of God - His beloved.

Before James pushes them - repent, hear the Word, receive the Word, do the Word. You foolish, look in the mirror and deceive yourself people.

Don't forget this → ***In Christ, you are the beloved of God.***

God delights in you. Loves you like a father loves His children, like a mother loves her nursing infant, like a husband loves his new bride. He declares over you welcome, invitation, forgiveness. He calls you His own.

And you have to understand this first. Because when you start viewing God rightly in the gospel, you'll start viewing His Word rightly.

If you can receive and live into this identity - as beloved children of God, then you can believe what James says in verse 25 - **That God's Word is the law of liberty.**

This is a perfect law of freedom. This is not a law of restriction for restriction's sake. The Bible is not just around to suck all of the joy out of your life. Bunch of rules that just make me sad and my life boring. That's not the point.

God, creator and author and designer of the universe - of all created things - has set before us a way to live. A way that is right, yes, but also a way that is good. A way that the author of life intended for life to go.

And He loves His children. He delights in His people. He gives good gifts.

And so the one true God, who is good beyond comprehension, knows the way life is designed to work, wrote it down for us, saved us, delights to give us good things, and calls us to obey it.

So as we learn to trust His love for us, and His goodness, we can trust the goodness of His Word such that we receive it and obey it.

And that was the key in the Olson family lecture room. Because the questions were not simply - did we listen to our dad and do what he said? The question was - **Did we know our dad loved us and wanted our good?**

Legalism says - "I receive and obey God's Word so He will love me."

The Gospel says - I am the beloved of God in Christ Jesus. I have infinite welcome by God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. I have a good Father who is after my good. His law is a law of liberty. So I can trust Him. I can trust His commands. I can trust His ways, therefore I'll hear and receive what He says, and obey Him.

Pray.

Communion.