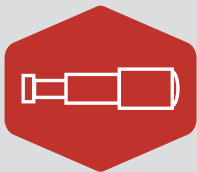




## Lesson 5: Hearing and Doing the Word

**Main Idea:** In this section, James shows a progression of practically living out Christianity. The progression is first, to be quick to listen; then slow to speak; then slow to become angry; and finally, to do what God is telling you to do. In this lesson, you will explore this progression, which is the center of James' theology and should be the center of yours. In this lesson, you will learn the difference between just hearing God's Word and doing God's Word.

**Scripture:** James 1:19-27



### The Author's Lens (Spyglass)

*What did the Scripture mean to the original author and audience? As you explore information on the author, content, culture, history, land, and language of the Bible, you will gain a better understanding of the intended message of God's Word.*

James reminds his readers of the things in life which will create a bottleneck that prevents the external Word of God from moving into our internal lives. He lists several things that cut down on our ability to receive God's Word. There can be strong interference, things in our personal lives, that keeps the Bible from becoming a living force in our life.

James provides the reader with a triple exhortation: "Be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger," which is proverbial in nature. That is, if you want to be ready to listen, you must be able to control your tongue. Throughout James, he addresses the proper use of the tongue, which is foundational to walking according to the wisdom of God.

When you allow anger to control you, then you will end up spewing out poisonous emotional words. This falls short of how God intends you to relate to others.

The kind of anger James is talking about represents deep-seated, long-lasting, long-standing resentment. When that kind of anger is inside and something triggers it, you become quick to speak and slow to listen. This pattern takes away from being able to live out the Word in your everyday life, to live out what it means to be a Spirit-filled person—full of love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23).

In James 1:21, according to one commentary the term “get rid of” was used at times in the ancient world to refer to taking off clothes, but it occurs in the New Testament in the figurative sense of “laying aside” something spiritually bad, such as lying (Ephesians 4:25), malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, slander (1 Peter 2:1), or anything that would hold us back from following Christ fully (Hebrews 12:1).<sup>1</sup> These actions and attitudes have the ability to corrupt the righteous standard God desires for you as you walk in community with others.

What James is telling the newly born young Christian is that you have been given a clean slate. God has given you a new nature. But with that new nature, you still sometimes carry baggage from the old one, the leftovers of the life before you came to Christ. It is what you are still working on. Christ has saved you. He has freed you from your sins. He has cleansed you. But you, as Paul puts it in Romans 7, are still struggling with the old, fleshly nature. At the same time, you are being asked to receive the Word of God—to be serious in your purpose to live the Christian life and lay aside things which hinder your reception of God’s Word. What James is really doing is telling you that there are no automatics to the Christian life. It is something to be worked on in partnership with the Holy Spirit. You do not go on cruise control in your spiritual development.

It is important that you become not only knowledgeable about the Word, but that you also live it out. What James is saying is that the Christian cannot settle down into passivity, to remain only in listening mode. Christianity is a life of action. The critical thing is not to merely understand Scripture from a theological, linguistic, hermeneutical, or exegetical standpoint. What is vital is that you have a working, active knowledge of the Bible. The real problems people have with Scripture are not with the hidden and difficult-to-understand theological issues. The real problems are with the plain things, the things which call you to actually obey. That is where your old, sinful nature wants to say no.

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<sup>1</sup> Guthrie, “James,” 13:225.

Notice the word “religion” is used a number of times. In the language James uses, the word in this particular context was taken to mean outward performance. But real, pure religion before God involves three basic elements, which can be practically applied.

The first is controlling the tongue. In verses 1-19, James has been addressing the person who is going through trials, someone going through stress. Of course, one thing that can happen when a person is under pressure is that they may erupt. Something may set them off, and they may spew out words they deeply regret. That is why when you are under stress, it is especially important to watch your tongue. It is a matter of putting God’s Word, and His definition of pure religion, into practice. Keeping a tight rein on the tongue requires self-control. This contradicts today’s common advice to “vent.”

The second thing that James tells you to do on a practical level is to have social concern. If we relate that back to verses 1-19, one of the things that happens when people are under stress is they tend to turn inward and become exclusively worried about their own concerns. But the Lord wants to draw you out of yourself. Through His Word, He makes us aware of the needs of others, knowing that when we reach out to bless others, we ourselves find healing.

There is a war between the Christian and the non-Christian lifestyle. Knowing this, James offers the third practical application of God’s Word: to keep yourself unpolluted from the world. This means to maintain inward purity. Again, relating this back to the first 19 verses, people going through relational stress in their families or other close relationships may seek relief from these pressures in escapism, alcohol, drugs, wrongful sex, or in letting all spiritual barriers down. However, Scripture is not calling you to a life of escapism or irresponsibility, but to a life of responsibility and personal purity.

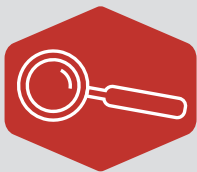


### **My Lens (Eyeglasses)**

*What does this Scripture say to you? Through completing the reading assignments below, you will better understand what God's Word is saying to you.*

One of the things James discusses in this passage is how to allow the Bible to become a living Word in you. He is talking about indispensable actions of a growing Christian, which are all related to this process of taking the external Word and internalizing it.

- A growing Christian is quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry (1:19–20).
- A growing Christian is continually working on their old nature (1:21).
- A growing Christian becomes a doer of God's word (1:22).
- A growing Christian does not settle into a passive lifestyle (1:23–25).



### **The Holy Spirit Lens (Magnifying Glass)**

*How can the Scripture apply to your life? By listening to the Holy Spirit's leading as you answer this series of questions, you can gain useful insights that will help you apply the truth of God's Word to your daily life.*

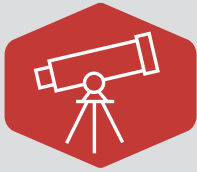
### **Application:**

- Write down your answer to the following questions here or in your journal:
  - » Who appears in this passage?
  - » Where is this passage taking place?
  - » When is this passage occurring?
  - » Why is this passage important?

3 Cedar and Ogilvie, *James / 1 & 2 Peter / Jude*, 34:40.  
 4 Cedar and Ogilvie, *James / 1 & 2 Peter / Jude*, 34:41.

- » What is happening in this passage?
  
- » How does this passage apply to my life?
  
- Circle and write down any reoccurring words in this passage.
  
- Describe a time in your life when the Lord revealed something from your old nature that you had to get rid of.
  
- Describe what your relationships would look like if you would be quick to listen, slow to speak instead of looking for your next response, and slow to get angry?
  
- On a scale of 1-4, with 1 being the greatest and 4 being the least, rate yourself on how well you listen. Write out a plan to improve.
  
- Why do you think James mentions anger as an enemy to hearing God's Word?
  
- Read James 1:19-21. When you read the word "filthiness," what comes to mind?

- Summarize James 1:20–21 in your own words.
- Read James 1:27. Why do you think practical religion pleases God?



### **Upward and Outward Focus (Telescope)**

*How does the Scripture affect your relationship with God and others? You experience God's Word in action as you use it to direct your journey with Him and those around you. Answer the following questions and record the answers in your journal.*

- Take some time to listen to the Lord about the text you just studied. How did these verses help deepen your love for God?
- As a result of your deepened love for God, how can you practically demonstrate this love to others?



## Using My *FireBible*

*Read the study notes for the following verses in the FireBible and answer the accompanying questions.*

- James 1:21. Write in your own words the three ideas related to putting away all filthiness.
  
- What happens when you allow moral filth into your life?
  
- What does the term “implanted” imply?
  
- James 1:27. Describe in your own words the two principles that define authentic religion: mercy and purity.
  
- What questions should you ask yourself in order to make sure you are living out these two principles?

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®)  
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