

DG Guide: James 1:13-18

Opening Prayer

Father, we gather around your Word again, and we're aware that we've heard a lot of it. You've been patient with us. Help us tonight to come with open hands rather than closed fists: quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to argue with what we need. Show us the gap between what we've heard and what we've actually done, and give us the grace to receive the implanted word with meekness rather than resist it with pride. Amen.

Starter Question

Think back to a time you gave someone really good advice - and then watched them do nothing with it. How did that feel? Now flip it: when has someone given you genuinely good advice that you sat on for way too long?

Key Takeaways from the Sermon

1. The person in the mirror isn't hostile or hard-hearted. They look intently, they understand what they see, and then they walk away and forget. James's word for this ordinary, undramatic non-response is self-deception.
2. The three postures are about how you receive the word. Quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger: these are the conditions James requires before someone can genuinely receive what God is saying. Anger in particular closes the door because it makes you the judge of what you're hearing rather than the one being judged.
3. The implanted word is already in you. James doesn't tell believers to go and get the word - he tells them to receive and walk in light of what's already there. For the Christian, the word of God has been planted in you by the Spirit. The question is whether you receive it or resist it when it comes to you by His Spirit, through His scriptures, in preaching, in community, & in conviction.
4. The law of liberty holds grace and obedience together. James is a herald of grace who insists that grace produces a shaped life.. Like Spurgeon said "the grace that doesn't change you doesn't save you". The "law of liberty" is the kind of living that flows from being already freed in Christ. You obey because you've been liberated, not in order to be set free.
5. Pure religion has two faces and they belong together. Visiting orphans and widows means costly engagement with the vulnerable. Keeping yourself unstained from the world means costly separation from what would corrupt you. James holds both. Either one alone is a half-religion (and false religion).

Scripture Reading

Read together: James 1:19-27

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Mirror

1. Don described the person in the mirror as someone who looks intently, not carelessly. They really look. Then they walk away and forget. What makes this kind of forgetting so easy and so natural? Have you experienced it?
2. James uses the word *paranomizantes* for "deceiving yourselves"; it literally means using false logic to reach a wrong conclusion. The person has convinced themselves that hearing counts as doing. Where do you see that logic operating in Christian culture, or in yourself?
3. Read Ezekiel 33:31-32. God says through the prophet that the people come, sit, listen, and don't do. He describes a preacher as being "like one who sings lustful songs with a beautiful voice." That's 600 years before James. What does it tell you that this is such an old and persistent problem?
4. James says what the hearer forgets is not information, it's "what he was like," his own face. If consistently hearing without doing corrupts self-knowledge, what kind of person does it eventually produce?

Positioning Yourself to Receive

5. James gives three postures: quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. Which of the three is your weakest? The person who always has a response before the word ends. The person who talks about it at lunch but doesn't act on it. The person who resists the uncomfortable parts.
6. Discussing a word, from a friend, from the scriptures, from a sermon, etc, can become a substitute for actually putting it into practice. You leave feeling like you've engaged, but you haven't. How do we guard against this? What's the difference between good debrief and avoidance dressed up as reflection?
7. "Receive with meekness the implanted word" (v.21). Meekness in the NT doesn't mean weakness - it describes someone who has power but chooses to come under authority. What does it look like, practically, to receive a sermon or a Scripture passage with meekness rather than resistance?

Pure Religion in Practice

8. James pairs two things as the definition of genuine religion: visiting orphans and widows, and keeping yourself unstained from the world. These pull in opposite directions - outward into mess and

vulnerability, inward toward personal purity. Why do you think he refuses to let us have one without the other?

9. "Visit orphans and widows in their affliction" - the word *episkeptesthai* means to actively seek out and attend to. It's what Luke uses for God "visiting" his people. Who in your world or your community is vulnerable right now? Who would you have to go out of your way to reach?

10. "Keep yourself unstained from the world" - where is the world's thinking most deeply affecting yours right now? In what you want, what you fear, what you think is worth pursuing? This isn't a shame question - it's a diagnostic one.

What Did You Do With It?

11. The passage's diagnostic question: What have you heard that you haven't yet done? Not "what were the themes" - what specific action, conversation, change, or commitment was implied by what you received? Take a minute to actually answer that (and tell a friend).

12. The person who looks into the "perfect law, the law of liberty" and perseveres will be blessed in their doing. What does it look like for you to stay with what you're seeing rather than walking away before anything gets done?

Personal Reflection

Take a few minutes quietly. No need to share unless you want to.

- What specific gap between hearing and doing do you need to name honestly before God right now?
- Which of your three postures - quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger - is doing the most damage to your ability to receive the word?
- What one concrete action will you take this week because of what you've heard - either from Sunday or from tonight?

Group Commitments

Choose 1-2 of these to commit to as a group this week:

1. Each person names one specific action implied by this scripture that they haven't taken yet - and reports back to the group next week.
2. Read James 1:19-27 every day this week. Not to find something new - to stay with what you found.
3. Find your "orphan and widow" - identify one person in your circle who is structurally vulnerable and make contact this week.
4. Identify one area where the world's thinking is most affecting yours, and bring it in prayer daily, asking for the "law of liberty" to reshape it.
5. Spend fifteen minutes before next Sunday's gathering re-reading this week's passage, specifically to arrive quick to hear .

Closing Exercise

One person at a time, complete this sentence:

"One thing I heard recently that I know I need to stop just hearing and actually do is..."

(Leaders: create enough groundwork for honest answers. This is not about big-ticket sin - it might be something small that keeps getting deferred or defended.)

Closing Prayer

Pray together, focusing on:

- Honesty - thanking God that he speaks the truth about us and that his diagnosis is always accompanied by grace.
- Confession - bringing the specific hearing-without-doing gaps honestly before God.
- Thanksgiving - for the implanted word already at work in us by the Spirit, even when we resist it.
- The vulnerable - praying for specific people in the group's orbit who need the love that pure religion requires.
- Commitment - to persevere in the word this week rather than walking away before it can do its work.

For Next Week

- Follow through on your group commitment - especially the action item from Sunday's sermon
- Memory verse: "But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." (James 1:22, CSB)
- Preparation: Read James 2:1-13 before your next meeting. Come ready to discuss: how does favoritism expose whether we are actually doers of the law of liberty?

Leader Notes

- The diagnostic question is the sharpest edge of this guide. "What did you hear last that you haven't yet done?" Create space for people to actually answer it, not deflect into abstract discussion. It's a confronting question and the discomfort is the point.
- Watch for two common escapes. First: turning the guide into a theology discussion about law and grace (interesting, not the point tonight). Second: turning the application section into vague commitments ("I want to be more intentional"). Push for specificity.
- This passage can land as heavy law if you're not careful. Keep coming back to the implanted word - James's framing is that the word is already in the believer by their union with Christ. This is not about straining to obey. It's about stopping the resistance.

- The "orphan and widow" question is a big one... Some people in the group may be in acute need themselves. Others may be the ones who need to go. Read the room. Don't let the question land as guilt or shame - let it land as an invitation to participate in God's work in the world.
- You don't need to cover everything. The guide has more questions than one DG needs. Use sections 1, 2 (selectively), and 4 as the backbone - move to section 3 if you have time. The personal reflection and closing exercise are worth protecting.

Or, if you just want a bunch of discussion prompts:

1. What's the difference between having heard something and having done something with it? Where's the line?
2. James says the person who hears without doing is "like a man who looks at his face in a mirror, then goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like." What's being lost when someone forgets their own face?
3. Quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger - which of these three postures is most countercultural in 2026? Why?
4. "The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (v.20). When have you seen anger close someone off to something they needed to hear - in yourself or in others?
5. The word translated "implanted" (emphyton) in verse 21 was used in classical Greek for things that are native to a person - bred in, constitutive of who they are. If the word of God is implanted in you, what does it mean to receive it versus resist it?
6. James says hearing without doing is self-deception. What lies does it let you tell yourself? What does the hearer-only think about themselves that isn't true?
7. "The law of liberty" - James puts law and freedom together. How is obedience to Christ's law an act of freedom rather than constraint?
8. "Pure and undefiled religion" requires both costly engagement with the vulnerable and personal resistance to the world's corrupting influence. Which side do you naturally lean? What would it look like to hold both?
9. The blessing James promises is "in his doing" - not in his knowing, and not just after the fact. What's a truth you know well that you've been waiting to turn into action?
10. If the Word of God demands a life and not just an audience - what would it mean for this group to stop being an audience for each other and start being a community of doers?