



AbundantLifeChurch

SIMI VALLEY

Sunday, August 2, 2026 - Swift to Hear – Pastor John Henry Raskin

Receiving God's Word with readiness to change

Key Scripture: “Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.” — James 1:19

Sermon Summary: James 1:19 is often applied to how we react to one another, but the heart of the passage points us first to how we approach the Word of God. To be “swift to hear” means we come to Scripture with attentiveness, humility, and a willingness to let God correct, shape, and change us. The issue is not merely better communication with people; it is a deeper submission to God's voice.

Main Truth: The faithful hearer does not merely listen to God's Word; the faithful hearer receives it with a heart ready to be changed.

- Be swift to hear God's Word. Approach Scripture eager to listen, not assuming you already know what God will say.
- Be slow to speak over the Word. Resist explaining away, arguing with, or quickly moving past what Scripture exposes.
- Be slow to anger at conviction. God's Word may confront sin, pride, habits, and assumptions we would rather protect.
- Receive the Word with meekness. Humility allows the implanted Word to take root and produce real transformation.
- Let hearing become obedience. The goal is not information alone, but a life reshaped by what God has spoken.

Reflection Questions:

1. Do I come to Scripture ready to hear, or ready to defend myself?
2. What truth from God's Word have I been slow to receive or obey?
3. Where is God calling me to change, repent, or grow?

This Week's Challenge: Re-read Chapter 1 of James in the light of today's message.

Before reading Scripture, pause and pray: “Lord, make me swift to hear Your Word, slow to excuse myself, and be willing to be changed by what You say.

Receive the Word humbly. Let it take root. Be changed.

SWIFT TO HEAR

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Last week we studied the first Psalm and how it was intended to open our eyes to the entirety of the scriptures.

This very first Psalm showed us that there are two paths that a person can travel in life.

We learned that one path leads to fruitfulness and blessing leading us surely to the abundant and eternal life.

And the other path leads to rootlessness, fruitlessness and although turning around is always possible, that road leads to eternal separation from our beloved God and Father.

As we looked at that Psalm through the lens of our relationship with God in Christ, we saw that He is the one that plants us, He is the one that waters us and we only need supply the desire to bear fruit for His glory and He will see it done.

Today we are going to explore a very familiar scripture in the 1st chapter of the book of James the brother of Jesus.

James 1:19

19 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;

Bear with me because I would like to read the entire chapter before we explore it in a way that I think will change the way you think about this scripture.

James 1

**1 James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad:
Greetings.**

2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

9 Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, 10 but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. 11 For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.

12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. 13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. 15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the Word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

19 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; 20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

21 Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted Word, which is able to save your souls.

22 But be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

26 If anyone among you thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. 27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

I realize that that was a lot to drop on you in one morning in one sermon, but I will unpack this chapter, as quickly as possible, in a way that may open your eyes to something that you have taken for granted.

The first thing we need to know is that James is not writing to comfortable people.

He is addressing “the twelve tribes who are scattered abroad” —

These are Jewish believers who had been pushed out of their homes, who had lost land and property, lost standing in their communities, sometimes even family, because they trusted in Jesus as Messiah.

This is a letter to believers under great pressure, written by a man who knew pressure.

More than almost any other letter in the New Testament, the epistle of James is obsessed with a single question: what does real faith look like when it meets real world resistance?

Not the faith we talk about. Not the faith we inherited from our parents or picked up at church. The faith that survives contact with real trouble.

Right in the middle of this chapter, in verse 19, James drops a single sentence that works like a hinge for the whole chapter:

JAMES 1:19

“So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.”

You've probably heard that verse before — quoted at marriage retreats, printed on a mug, offered as good advice for holding your tongue at the dinner table.

And it is good advice for that.

But that is not the primary intention of what James is talking about. Look at what stands on either side of it.

James is not primarily coaching us on how to communicate better with our spouse or our coworker. He is coaching us on how to stand before the Word of God.

The hearing he has in mind is hearing the Word of God.

The speaking he has in mind is our human reflex to talk back and explain ourselves when that Word gets close to something we'd rather protect.

And the wrath he has in mind is what rises up in the human heart when the Spirit of God presses on us, and we do not want to move in obedience.

We just read the whole chapter and we are going to walk through the whole chapter, because verse 19 is not a stand-alone proverb.

It is a hinge — swinging between two halves of James 1 — and you cannot understand the hinge without seeing both doors that it connects.

James opens his letter with the subject of trials and he says not “if you suffer” but “when.”

He treats hardship as the normal climate of the Christian life.

And he says something that is not intuitive: that hardship, rightly received, is productive.

He says the testing of your faith produces patience — endurance, the capacity to stand firm under pressure without collapsing or breaking.

Let that endurance finish its work, James says, and you will come out the other side complete, lacking nothing.

Then he moves on to wisdom. If you do not know how to process what is happening to you — and who does, in the middle of real suffering — ask God.

He gives wisdom generously, without scolding you for having to ask twice.

But ask in faith, without the mental back-and-forth of the “double-minded man,” as James calls him — literally, in the Greek, the “two-souled” man, trying to live out of two competing centers of trust at once, unstable in everything he does.

Then comes the great reversal of verses 9 through 11 — the poor brother lifted up, the rich brought low, riches described like a wildflower that looks glorious in the morning and is scorched and gone by afternoon.

Social status, James is telling us, is not what it looks like from the outside nor is it necessarily beneficial from a Kingdom perspective.

Then he addresses temptation in verses 12 through 15.

Blessed is the one who endures it, because on the other side is the crown of life.

But — and James is emphatic here — do not dare say God tempted you.

God is not the source of your temptation.

Your own desire is; it conceives, and gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death.

That is the anatomy of temptation, and none of it starts with God, whose desire it is that none should perish.

Because — verses 16 through 18 assures us — every good gift, every perfect gift, comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

He does not flicker. He does not send you both blessing and cursing out of the same hand.

And then James lands on the sentence that everything in our key verse 19 hangs on:

JAMES 1:18

Of His own will He brought us forth by the Word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

That is the doctrine of the new birth.

It was the Word — the gospel Word, planted in you — that gave you the abundant life in the first place.

Before you loved the Word, the Word loved you into existence as a believer.

That is the last thing James says before he says “so then” in our key verse 1:19.

James is about to tell you how to live in light of the fact that the very Word that birthed you is still speaking to you. And “so then” — given that — here is your posture.

JAMES 1:19–20

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

First let's look at the first part of this scripture “be swift to hear”.

The Greek Word that James uses for the Word “swift” is “tachys”.

It is the same word used in the Gospel of Matthew to mean urgent movement with excitement — the women running from the empty tomb ran “quickly,” “tachys” to tell the good news, with fear and great joy.

And the Greek that James uses for the Word “hear” is “akousa” which means to listen attentively, to pay attention with the INTention to understand and obey.

This is not passive hearing. It is not the hearing of someone half-listening with the noise of the day still running in the background.

It is the alert, forward-leaning readiness of a servant standing near the door, listening for the master's voice, prepared to move before His sentence is even finished.

And here is where we have to be honest with ourselves.

That is not usually our first instinct with the Word of God.

Our first instinct, when Scripture is read, when the Spirit presses something on us in prayer, when a hard truth surfaces in a sermon — our first instinct is delay.

“I'll think about that.” We might say, “That's a hard teaching.” “Let me sit with that for a while.”

Sometimes that language is legitimate — there is a place for reflection. But too often “I need to think about it” is simply a polite phrase for “I am stalling so I do not have to obey.”

James says: be swift to hear meaning be attentive with the desire to obey the Master.

Then James says, “Be slow to speak”.

Now, this has real application to how we talk to one another — James will get there explicitly in chapter 3.

But notice the grammar. “So then” ties this straight back to verse 18 — the Word of truth that birthed you.

The speaking James has in mind first is the speech we direct back at God when His Word says something we do not want to hear.

It is the reflex we all know: “Well, but You don't really understand my situation.”

“That verse doesn't really mean what it sounds like it means.”

“That was a different culture; it doesn't apply to me the same way.”

“That's not fair.”

James says: be slow to mount your defense. Let the Word finish its work in you before you start drafting your rebuttal to God.

Then James tells us to be “slow to wrath”.

The Word James uses for wrath here is “orge” it does not mean explosive anger. There is another Word in Greek for that...

“orge” means a deep-seated resentment that takes up residence in a person's heart and lingers.

This is the theological center of the whole passage.

Our anger — our resistance, our defensiveness, the low simmer of irritation we feel when we are confronted — does not accomplish anything righteous in us.

It feels justified in the moment. It feels like we are standing up for ourselves, protecting something important.

But James says plainly in verse 20: it produces nothing.

It does not move you one inch closer to the righteousness God is desiring to form in you. It simply blocks the very work the Word came to do.

Think about what this means for how the Holy Spirit deals with us.

Jesus said the Spirit, when He comes, “will convict the world of sin” (John 16:8) — and He does the same convicting work in believers, gently and persistently pressing on the places where our lives do not line up with the Word that saved us.

And our worldly flesh's default answer to that conviction is resistance — sometimes quiet, sometimes not so quiet...

irritation at the preacher, resentment at the circumstance God has allowed, sometimes real anger at God Himself for asking something of us we did not want to give.

James is naming that pattern by its right name, and he is telling us plainly: it has no seat at this table.

Picture a field.

Ground that has been plowed, turned over, softened, ready to receive seed — Jesus tells us that ground produces a harvest.

Ground that has been baked hard under a defensive, self-justifying heat — nothing takes root there, no matter how good the seed is.

Swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: this is James describing the difference between plowed receptive ground and hard baked rebellious ground.

Then James says this...

JAMES 1:21

Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted Word, which is able to save your souls.

“Therefore” — James keeps building.

“Lay aside” is the language of taking off a filthy garment; you will find the same word used elsewhere of removing dirty clothes.

Before the Word can do its work, some things have to come off — not by trying to earn your way clean first but by being honest with yourself and with God.

Simply stop clutching the grime while you are claiming to want to be washed clean.

Then James tells us to receive “with meekness” the implanted Word which is able to save our souls.

This is strong stuff!

The Greek Word here is “prautes” for meekness, gentleness It means strength brought under control.

“Prautes” is the same Word Jesus uses of Himself when He says, “I am gentle and lowly in heart” in the Gospel of Matthew (Matt. 11:29), And it is also the word used of Moses, whom God recognizes as the meekest man on the face of the earth in the Book of Numbers (Num. 12:3) —

Moses was a man with real authority who had stopped fighting God about how it would be used.

Meekness is what strength looks like once it has surrendered.

Then James uses the Greek “emphytos logos” — the implanted / engrafted Word

Not foreign material forced into hostile soil, but something meant to take root — to become as native to the regenerated heart as a graft that has bonded to the tree it was placed in.

This is James circling back to verse 18.

The same Word that gave you birth is the Word now meant to live in you, take root in you, and go on saving you — not saving you again, but carrying forward the same saving work, sanctifying what it once regenerated.

JAMES 1:22

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

Here James uses the Word “akroates” for hearer, describing someone in an audience.

But he uses the Word “poietes” for doer, using the same root as the English Word poet, one who creates something that was not there before.

James is not contrasting a good response to the Word with a bad one; he is contrasting a real response with no response at all, dressed up to look like one.

Then he gives us a picture. A man looks in a mirror, sees his own face, walks away, and immediately forgets what he looks like (vv. 23–24).

That is what it is to hear the Word and do nothing with it — you had a true reflection in front of you, and it changed nothing, because you walked away before it could.

JAMES 1:25

But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

Notice the phrase: “the law of liberty.” Not the law of bondage. James is contradicting, in advance, everything in us that hears “obey” and thinks “cage.”

He says the opposite is true — this is the law that sets you free, and the doing of it, not merely the hearing it, is where the blessing actually becomes yours.

And here is the connection back to verse 19.

Swift hearing that never produces doing was never actually swift hearing.

It was just quick absorption with no response at all — and James has a name for that. He calls it self-deception.

JAMES 1:26–27

If anyone among you thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

James brings the tongue into view here but notice where it falls in the argument.

It comes after the primary work has already been described: our posture toward the Word and the Spirit's promptings, in verse 19.

A heart that has genuinely stopped arguing with God has far less left in it to argue with people.

And then the two marks of pure religion: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

Not private religious feeling.

Not a well-managed inner life kept carefully to yourself.

Tangible compassion toward the most vulnerable people in the community, and a life that has not been stained by the values of the world around it.

Swift-to-hear, when it runs its full course, does not stop at private devotion.

It walks out the door and shows up at the bedside of the widow, in the life of the fatherless child, in a holiness that can be seen, not just felt.

Now let's step back and look at the whole chapter as one movement.

Trials come (vv. 2–4). We need wisdom to process them, and we are told to ask without the double-minded back-and-forth (vv. 5–8).

Status — rich or poor — is not what determines your worth in the kingdom (vv. 9–11).

Temptation must never be blamed on God; every good gift comes from Him and Him alone (vv. 12–18).

“So then” — verse 19 — here is how you relate to the very Word that gave you new birth: be swift to hear it, slow to argue with it, slow to grow angry when it corners you.

Lay aside what is filthy, receive it with the meekness of strength under control (v. 21).

Do it — do not just hear it and forget it (vv. 22–25).

And finally the proof will show up in a bridled tongue, tangible compassion, and an unstained life (vv. 26–27).

So what does swift-to-hear actually look like on an ordinary day?

It looks like opening your Bible asking, “What would You have me do,” instead of, “How do I feel about this.”

It looks like real silence in prayer — not just a list of requests handed to God and a hurried “amen,” but space left for Him to actually speak.

It looks like noticing, in real time, the moment conviction arises — in a sermon, in a friend's honest Word to you, in your own reading of Scripture —

and consciously setting down the rebuttal that is forming in your mind before you let it out of your mouth, or even finish forming it in your heart.

And it looks like this even in the trials James opened with.

When hardship comes, the swift-to-hear response is not to argue with God about why this is happening, or to demand He explain Himself before you will cooperate.

It is to ask, the way James told us back in verse 5, for wisdom to see what the trial is producing — and to let it finish its perfect work.

I want to leave you with one more picture — not from James, but from the prophet Isaiah, describing the Servant of the Lord, and every Christian reader for two thousand years has heard the voice of Jesus in these Words:

ISAIAH 50:4–5

“He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to hear as the learned. The Lord GOD has opened My ear; and I was not rebellious, nor did I turn away.”

That is the perfect fulfillment of James 1:19.

An opened ear. No rebellion. No turning away.

Jesus is not only our example of swift-to-hear obedience — though He is that — He is also the reason we can ever hope to become people like that ourselves.

The same Spirit who filled Jesus without measure lives in you if you belong to Him, and He is able to do in your heart what your own willpower has never once been able to do: soften ground that defensiveness has baked hard, and make you, slowly, into a swift hearer, a true follower of Jesus.

So this week, when the Word confronts you — in Scripture, in prayer, in the quiet prompting of the Spirit that you would rather explain away — I want to ask you to do one very specific thing.

Before you speak, before the defense forms, before the irritation rises: stop. Lay it down. And just for a moment, let the Word finish what it came to say.

Let's Pray