



# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

## Real Faith. Real Life.

Part 3: K.I.S.S. Christianity –  
Keep It Spiritually Simple  
James 1:19-25 | Tim Badal | February 5, 2017

In our series, “Real Faith. Real Life,” we’ve been learning from the five-chapter New Testament letter that was written by James, the younger half-brother of Jesus. James has a lot to say about his Brother’s teaching and ministry. He especially is describing the life change that takes place when we give ourselves over to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.



In our first week we learned that although James was an intimate part of Jesus’ earthly family, he did not realize that his brother was also his Lord and Savior until after Jesus was resurrected from the grave. But once he saw Jesus prove His power over sin and death, his eyes were opened and he then bowed the knee to the same Man he may have wrestled with and played childhood games with years earlier. But now he saw Him as someone completely different.

James then became a leader in the early church, and his letter is one of the most practical writings in the entire New Testament. He describes—sometimes almost to the point of plagiarism—much of what his older Brother taught. Often piggy-backing on Jesus’ words, James would expound them for the benefit of the early Christians, providing them with wisdom on how they should live.

For the last two weeks we’ve talked about what real faith looks like. We saw that real faith looks the same in times of triumph and in times of trials, temptations or tragedy. We now are asking the question: what is the antidote when bad things happen? What is the antidote when I’m tempted to do things that go against the will and plans of God?

Today we will find the answer to these questions in James 1:19–25, showing us how to be victorious in times of trial or temptation. At the end of this passage, James promises us that if we will persevere in doing the things he has instructed us to do, we will be blessed in all we do.

Do you want to be blessed in all you do? If not, you need help. Of course we want to be blessed. We want the God of the universe to bless our decisions and all our ways. God is willing to do that if we live our lives the way He has called us to live them.

With that in mind, let’s listen to what James has to tell us in James 1:19–25:

<sup>19</sup> Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; <sup>20</sup> for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. <sup>21</sup> Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

<sup>22</sup> But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. <sup>25</sup> 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.

When I was a kid growing up, I heard my dad use a phrase over and over again. I know he didn’t invent it, but it became his catch phrase to the extent that he should have gotten a royalty for using it. Having three sons, it seemed to roll off his tongue over and

over again. But even though I heard it often as a kid, I never really thought about what it meant until I became an adult. And now as an adult I too have used this phrase in my business life, in my ministry, and in my leadership roles in my family, community and church. It might cause some of you to cringe, but I think it's a good proverb or parable. When we were boys, my dad would remind us all the time, "Keep It Simple, Stupid."

I realize that last word might be a little rough, so you could change it to "Keep It Simple, Silly," or find your own word to use. But the point is we as humans have a way of making things complicated. We add extra steps or superfluous information or structure to something that actually is quite simple. Dad knew if we couldn't see the simplicity of something, it would bring all sorts of havoc and struggles to our lives. Not everything is brain surgery. Not everything is that hard to accomplish. If we get down to the basic facts of whatever we're facing, we can more easily be productive. So Dad would say, "Keep It Simple."

Christianity is no different. As Christians we can create all sorts of complications in what it means to follow Christ. We add man-made rules and regulations by which we then judge the Christian standing of one another. But James suggests the practical course of simplifying what is required. Seeking to remove that which is superfluous, he reduces the Christian walk to a two-step process.

Using the same K.I.S.S. model as my dad, James tells us, "Keep It Spiritually Simple." It doesn't have to be hard. It doesn't have to include lots of rules and regulations. If we can remember two simple truths, we'll be able to accomplish what God has called us to accomplish, and in so doing we will be blessed in all we do. What are these two steps? It's easy.

- We need to know the Word
- We need to do what the Word says

Knowing and doing. When James says he wants us to be doers of the Word in verse 22, he's saying we should be in the ongoing process of gaining information and then applying what we've learned.

By way of illustration, let's think back to the days when we rode our bicycles. I know some of you still ride today, but it's been a long time since I've been on a bike. But I remember that the first step to riding was to propel the bike using motion with both legs. As you put pressure on the pedals, you began to move.

In similar fashion, James is telling us to propel our Christian lives through using two motions: knowing and doing. Knowing and doing. Knowing and doing. If we stop putting pressure on our bike pedals, what happens? We fall off. We can't keep the bike upright. But as long as we continue "pedaling" our Christian lives, we'll be able to stand and advance. But one effort cannot happen without the other.

Sadly there are some of us in our world, and even in our church, who are trying to do "one pedal" Christianity. Have you ever tried to ride a bike with only one foot? You can do it, but it's really cumbersome. Besides being difficult, you're going to look pretty dumb in the process. The bike is designed to work best if you have two feet pushing the pedals in alternating fashion.

James agrees. It takes knowing and doing. Knowing God's Word and doing what it says. It's that simple, yet we make it so complicated because of our sin or our excuses. You might say, "Tim, I get it. But I don't know enough." I can't tell you how many times I've heard that excuse: "I'd be glad to help, but I don't know enough."

For example, I'll tell people they need to evangelize, to share their faith. Their inevitable response is: "I don't know what I would say. Give us a class. Give us information. If we know more, then we'll be able to do that." But James makes it clear that knowing and doing are on each other's heels. You don't just know, know, know, know, know—and then at some point, after you've graduated from seminary, you then begin to do, do, do, do, do. It's know and do—know and do. We don't need more information.

I'm going to give you guys an honorary degree. You are seminary graduates now...compared to James' audience. You have the Word of God in your hands and at your disposal. Most of what they had in that day, especially the New Testament, was simply oral teachings. You have way more going for you than the people in James' day, so you have no basis to say you don't have enough information. You have more than enough—so your excuses will fall on deaf ears.

James' first words in our passage today are: "Know this." In the Greek language, this phrase should stop us in our tracks. James has already gotten our attention through his discussion of trials and temptations. So now we're waiting for his solution, and he's very clear: in order to get through the hard things, there's something we must know. It's almost like he's saying, "Grab your parchment and pen. This is important. This is going to set the trajectory for all I'm going to say: know this."

The only way we're going to get through trials and temptations is first knowing the Word, and secondly doing what it says. So let's look at that first step.

# 1. A spiritually simple lifestyle involves knowing the Word.

The first thing we need to understand is that knowing the Word involves real faith—knowledgeable faith. As Christians we do not believe in an amalgam of nothingness. “What do you believe?” “Oh, I don’t know. I just believe.” We don’t tell people that. “Who do you believe in?” “Nobody. We just believe.” No, our faith is based on something substantive—the Person of God, the Triune God of Father, Son and Spirit—the God Who has revealed Himself through creation and then through His Word, and most expressively through the Person of Jesus Christ, Who became flesh and made His dwelling among us.

We believe in God. Our faith is in God. There’s a substance, a knowledge. When we talk about faith, our faith must be knowledgeable. Those who decide they don’t want to study the Scriptures may say, “I just have a simple faith, what the Bible calls a child-like faith. I have a kindergarten-level understanding.” But that’s a lame excuse. That’s like saying after a first date, “I don’t need to know anything else about her. I’ve got all I need to know now.”

That example pales in comparison to what we have to learn about unfathomable God Who resides in glory. James is saying, “You need to know what you believe. You need a body of information. You have to become students of the Word. Know this. You need to be ready to receive God’s given revelation.”

So what does James tell us we need to know?

## **We are loved by God.**

James begins, “*Know this, my beloved brothers...*” This is the second time he’s used the expression “beloved.” This word comes from the root word *agape*. It is the supernatural love only God can give to His people. James is telling the church that they are loved by God, and because they are loved with that special love, Christians can then return love to God and love other people with supernatural grace.

Now, before James hands out a list of do’s and don’ts, it is imperative that we accept the truth that God’s commands are not being issued by some sort of domineering bully or boss. James probably understood this in a personal way.

I am a middle child, and I remember how my older brother used to boss me around. I would tell him, “You’re not the boss of me. Who gave you the credentials to tell me what I can and can’t do?” We went from being a wonderful monarchy with a king and queen—my dad and my mom—to unilateral dictatorship when they went out on a date. I always wondered, “When did the coup take place? I don’t like this!” I would remind my brother, “You may be dictator for the next two hours, but the king’s coming home. You’re not the boss of me. This is a democracy, and I vote you out.”

But God doesn’t do that with us. He doesn’t just give us a list of things, saying, “I’m the boss. You’re the subject. Do what I say whether you like it or not.” Rather, James reminds us of God’s love, so we know that the commands he’s about to list—even though they will challenge who we are and cause us to rethink our schedules and priorities and preferences—they are based in His love. He’s not a cold boss, but rather Someone Who has proven over and over again His love for His children.

Earlier in this chapter James reminds us that we know we are loved because God gives us good and perfect gifts. Verse 17: “*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*” Listen, every day for Christians is Christmas morning. Every day we wake up to find that God has given us every good and every perfect gift. His repeat of the word “every” implies that the number of gifts we receive is beyond counting. Every morning we should be walking down our stairs wondering what gifts God has left under the tree of our lives. No matter what trials or tribulations we are going through, we can never say God is not being kind and good and merciful and loving to us. In those times of trials or temptations, we know the one thing that is constantly true: God is so good to us. He gives us everything we need—more gifts than we know or even realize.

We also know we’re loved by God because He has given us new birth in Jesus Christ. Verse 18: “*Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*” What James is saying here is that we have salvation. God not only has given us everything we need for physical life, He has also given us everything we need for our spiritual lives. We were lost sinners, filled with all kinds of filthiness and worldliness. Yet God sent His Son, giving Him up so that we could be saved through Jesus’ death on the cross. The Father poured His wrath and judgment on His Son in order that He could pour out His love and mercy on us. We know we are loved because God was willing to forsake His Son so you and I might be adopted as His children.

So God gives us gifts, He gives us salvation, and third, He gives His Word. We're told in verse 21 that we are to *"receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save [our] souls."* The word "save" is important. In our evangelical world we think about "getting saved" as being a one-moment-in-time experience. We might have come forward in a church meeting or raised our hand or prayed a prayer with a teacher or parent. And then we would say we were saved.

But that's not how James—or in fact the New Testament—looks at salvation. Salvation isn't a momentary event, but a long, drawn-out process. We're told that we are chosen and predestined even before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:3–10). So before you and I were ever born, before we could do anything good or bad, God saved us.

Then He brought us to a place called conversion, where the gospel was preached and we bowed the knee to Jesus Christ. That's the point that we think we were saved. But that process of salvation doesn't end at our conversion, because conversion—that is, justification—changes our standing and then leads us forward to the next step of salvation, which is sanctification. So for the rest of our earthly lives we're in that long process of seeing the salvation that was begun before the foundation of the earth brought to fruition in our lives.

Our sanctification process becomes more evident as we go through times of trial and temptation. As we say no to sin and yes to Jesus and His Word, we become more and more like Him. Then there's the moment when we see Him face to face, when our bodies will be resurrected and made to be like His. That's called glorification, and that will happen on the great Day of the Lord, when we will be ushered into eternity.

Salvation is a long process, but that doesn't mean you can go in and out of salvation. We believe and the Scripture clearly teaches that once you are saved, you're always saved. Once you've given your life to Jesus Christ, nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:31–39).

What James actually says is that the Word—which he wants us to know and to do—it's actually the Word that saves us. It's not that the Bible saves us from our sins—only Jesus can do that. But the Word does the ongoing sanctifying work in our lives. What we learn through the Word is that in every new day, every new encounter, every new trial and every new temptation that comes our way—whether we find victory in it or find ourselves lost in it—God is in the process of saving us. In a sense He saves us over and over and over again. He's making us clean by the washing of His Word (Ephesians 5:26). Said another way, the Bible is guaranteeing for us, over and over again, that we're children of the King, that we're loved by God.

The local Aldi grocery store offers a guarantee. It's not that if you're unhappy with their product they'll just give you a new product. Rather, they offer what they call a "double guarantee." They'll not only give you a new product, they'll give you your money back. You don't ever have to be afraid to try their products.

In essence that's what James is saying about our salvation. It's guaranteed. And not only does God guarantee it, He guarantees it over and over and over again. So if you have bowed the knee to Jesus Christ, you should never wonder if you are loved by God. He loves you and guarantees that in the good, the bad and the ugly of life. He wants you to know that truth in the Word, and then He wants you to live it out by doing what it says.

### **We must listen and remain level-headed.**

James also tells us if we want to know the Word, it is important to listen and remain level-headed. Verse 19: *"Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person..."* That means each one of us. This isn't a word to teenagers or a word to the men or a word to the women. This is a word for all of us. *"Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God."*

James emphasizes that we are to be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to become angry. Hearing the Word is predicated on these three virtues. If you're not listening, if you're always talking and you're always angry, you will never hear the Word. You'll never hear what God has to say. In times of trials and temptations, we need to go to God and give Him priority. We need to seek Him and His wisdom first.

Far too many of us as Christians go to Scripture as a last option instead of our first response. We go to our wallets. We go to our friends and family. We go to the local banker or psychologist or doctor. All of these have their place, but they are secondary to the Word of God. We need to shut our mouths, quiet our hearts, and listen to what the Word says, in order that we may discover God's truths, His paths that we need to follow. That's our first step, not something farther down on our list.

We need to be careful to think through the context here. A lot of preachers choose to focus on these activities as a matter of relationships between people. For example, a sermon might go like this: "We need to be quick to listen and slow to speak. Parents, listen to your teenagers. They've got a lot to say. Listen to them, because some day you're going to want them to listen to you."

That's all fine and good. Relationally, it is helpful if you don't do all the talking in your marriage, but you do some listening as well. But that's not what James is talking about here. By limiting what he's saying to the context of human interpersonal relationships is to take the force out of what he's really teaching. He's also talking about listening, being slow to speak and being slow to anger in our relationship with God. So if we truly want to hear from God, we must shut our mouths and with humility be quick to hear what God has to say.

This draws in the question: is it bad to talk too much, even when we're talking to God? No. I make a living talking. I talk a lot. But one of the things that was going on in James' day was that because the Scriptures had not yet been completed, local church assemblies were characterized by a lot of sharing between the people. Someone would stand and say, "This is what God is telling me." There would also be prophesying, where someone would say, "This passage meant something to me and I think it may be addressed to all of us." People were talking freely in the public assembly, and may even have been saying things they shouldn't have. It wasn't sinful or out of bounds *per se*, but it might not have been what God was actually saying.

We need to be careful when we say to others, "God shared this with me," or "God told me to do this." If it's not in Scripture, we are outside of knowing whether or not something is true. In James' time, people articulated all kinds of things about God. Later in his letter, he actually says, "*Not many of you should become teachers*" (3:1). In other words, "You shouldn't be talking about God in an authoritative way. When you take on that role, you put yourself under a stricter judgment. So you need to listen, and you need to stop talking so much."

This practice applies most importantly to the public teaching of God's Word. This is hard for me, because as the teacher, of course it would do me well to tell you to listen better. Let me encourage you with something. I think you as a congregation are very good listeners. When we bring other pastors to this pulpit, I have been told over and over again how easy it is to preach to Village Bible Church, because you are ready and willing to hear from the Word of God. That's very encouraging. But still, we can always do better.

Let me say another thing: you should always be challenging what I say. Paul told the Bereans to do that, they did it, and they were blessed as a result (Acts 17:10–11). But be careful that you don't get into arguments with me. Rather, as you examine the Scriptures yourself, you should work out what is true between you and God. But so often we will take what we hear from God's Word, and we'll decide that the preacher just doesn't know what he's talking about. So let me offer this thought to you: I've pored over these passages, I've dedicated time to studying them, and I'm going to do my best to explain what I believe to be the consensus of Biblical scholars throughout history regarding what a given text means. I fully desire also to be led by the Holy Spirit.

So ask yourself this. "Am I deflecting my anger or criticism that comes out of my own relationship with God and putting it on Tim or whoever is leading my small group? Or am I willing to listen and have my heart changed? Instead of wanting to shoot the messenger, maybe he's not the problem. Maybe I am."

Here's what I need to remember. When we go through the TSA line in heaven, you guys will go through the easy line, while your elders will be pulled out for a more thorough examination. I realize that I am going to be accountable for my words. What I say will be challenged and critiqued by God. So let God work on me. Let the elders challenge me. And what I would challenge you with is this: first say, "Lord, I've heard what You've said. What do I need to fix?"

Now, if there's something glaring or something that's obnoxiously wrong, then speak up. Speak up. But I too often hear from people who are arguing with God, then they bring me into the middle of it. So "*be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.*" Anger keeps us from thinking clearly. In that moment, all we care about is the thing we're angry about and how to let the world know we're angry. We're not thinking through what the Word is teaching or what God is directing us to do. What we need to realize is that we're not listening. Instead, we only want to express in word or in deed how angry we are.

Because we don't fully grasp our faulty listening, James is reminding us that in our natural way of living, we are quick to express our opinions and verdicts on situations and people. When we're not slow to speak and not listening—both in our private devotions and in public Scripture reading and teaching—we will not know the Word as we should.

How do we know if we're receiving the Word of God? Here are two tests. First, ask yourself—do not ask your spouse or someone next to you—ask yourself: "How much passion do I have for the Word? How fired up do I get when I study the Word or hear it

taught? Deep down inside, would I rather have stayed home today? I don't need to hear that. I've got better things to do with my life."

How many of you were hoping I wouldn't preach the whole hour? "He sounds a little sick. Maybe he'll run out of air." How many of you are thinking right now, "He's wasting time. Just get to the point. I can fill out this little sheet of paper and say I listened"? How many of you prepare yourselves to hear the Word of God? How many of you are excited to hear the Scriptures opened again? Excited to be taught and trained by God? That's the passion test. Are you passionate about the Word of God?

Next is the priority test. When the Bible tells you to do something, whose view takes precedence? When God says to do something, do you falter in your response? "Upon further review, that's too much. I'm going to do my own thing." Whose view takes priority—yours or His? Jesus says if we love Him, we'll obey His commands—and we will enjoy doing so. It will not be drudgery; it will be a joy. But for that to take place, there are some things we have to let go of first.

### **We must let go of certain things.**

James says in verse 21 that we must *"...put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness..."* The word filthiness is important. While I don't mind the translation, it does seem to go outside what we would think filthiness is—but I'll trust the translators. Still, in the original Greek, the word literally was used as a medical term and spoke of an ear condition, specifically an excessive wax build-up. Talk about gross, right? There's so much wax that it impairs your ability to hear. So what we do is take a fluffy little object called a Q-tip, and we stick it in our ear as far as we dare so as not to hit our brain. We wiggle it around, and then we pull it out. And here's the crazy thing. We look at it. And the natural response often is, "Ooooooh." Then we go back, because "If I pulled that out, I'd better see what else is in there." And what is this wax build-up? I don't even know where that stuff comes from. I'm told by doctors that it's a good thing, if there's not too much. It lubricates the ear and all that. I know far too much about ear wax.

James is saying, "If you want to know the Word, you've got to get the wax out of your ears." What a great illustration. Clean out your ears. The wax of our spiritual hearing comes from the temptations that we give in to. James has talked about the temptations, the things that come into our lives that we don't get rid of before they become sin. They start creating a "wax build-up" in our ability to hear. If you're saying yes to temptation, you cannot in the same voice say yes to God and His Word. It's an either/or proposition. You can't have your sin and have the Scriptures at the same time. Jesus tells us we're going to love one master and hate the other (Matthew 6:24). You can't serve both. So you're either serving your desires or the decrees of God.

So James is telling us to get the wax out—and he doesn't just mean a little of it. We need to get rid of it all—all the rampant filthiness and wickedness in our lives. We must put it all away and be done with it. If we don't, we will always be distracted by it.

Let me illustrate this for you. My youngest son Luke—I love him to death. He's a great kid. But he has a medical condition that when his eyes are focused on the TV, his ears stop working. I know he hears the television. But we'll call from the kitchen, "Hey, Luke, buddy. Hey, Luke! Luke! Luke, can you hear me?!" "I think Luke's gone deaf, Honey." Finally we go into the living room and jostle him. "What? What? You're bothering me. What do you want?" "Well, we've been calling you for a half hour, son."

Why? Because we're distracted by all the things our flesh cries out for and are so preoccupied with the things of this world. Like Amanda and me trying to get Luke's attention, God is yelling at the top of His lungs, "Are you going to listen?"

In order to remain level-headed, you've got to let some stuff go. Do you want to understand all the Scriptures and gain all the value that comes with that understanding? You've got to free yourself, by the power of the Holy Spirit, from the temptations and the sins that entice you.

## **2. A spiritually simple lifestyle involves doing what the Word says.**

Now that we know what the Word says, we need to do it. But here's the problem. We're a Bible church. Bible is our middle name. We do a lot of preaching and teaching here. And one of the faults we can have is that we can get into "one pedal" Christianity. We are really focused on knowing the Word. We're an Outline Point #1 kind of church. We like to hear the Word taught. We want to know all the deep meanings. We want to understand the Greek and Hebrew words and their meanings. But we might not be getting to Point #2 as quickly as we should. We see that as merely the cream on the top. Yet that's not how God presents this through the book of James.

I'm going to share an illustration I heard from another pastor that I think has some merit.

He tells the story of a father who came downstairs on trash day. He was up before any of the children, and he realized all the trash containers in the house were full. He even sensed that the house was beginning to smell from all the trash. Not wanting to wake all the kids, he wrote a note—an incredibly glowing note. “Kids, I just want you to know how much I love you. It’s been a great weekend. It was so much fun taking you guys out for ice cream. It was so much fun going to those games. I’m so proud of you. I love you. I want you to know when I’m away from you I think the world of you.”

As he was penning these words, he added, “I was noticing the trash needs to be taken out. So here’s what I need you to do. Today’s trash day. I need you to take out the trash. Love, Dad.” Love and sincerity of relationship combined with a command: take out the trash.

So then he goes to work, returning home after a long day at work. The kids have come back from school. Dad walks into the kitchen and the first thing he notices is the trash can. Do you think it’s empty or full? It’s just as full as it was before. He says, “All right, guys. It’s family meeting time.” And he brings the whole family together, saying, “Hey, guys, did you get my letter?” “Yeah, Dad, we got it.” “Well, what did you do?”

“Well, Dad, we’ve got to be honest with you. We had never read a letter that was so well-written in all our lives. I mean, the way you used imagery and the way you articulated your thoughts—it was beautiful. It sparked our attention about the whole subject of trash. So we started to investigate. Where does trash come from? What happens when we throw the trash out—where does it go? We thought about things like carbon foot-printing and all that. We learned about recycling. We got on the internet and did all kinds of research on all aspects of trash.

“We also learned the Bible talks about trash. It says that man-made religion is like garbage. We learned that in Old Testament days, garbage was taken outside of Jerusalem to a place called Gahenna, which was a pile of trash that they had set on fire and it was always burning. Dad, did you know that trash and garbage symbolize our sin before God? We had no idea. Did you know that trash is referenced more than three dozen times in the Scriptures? Can you believe it? I mean, we’ve learned so much about trash. We even invited our friends over and started a small group here this afternoon to talk about trash. Dad, this is the greatest thing in the world!”

Do you know what Dad said? “Why didn’t you take out the trash? I gave you one command and you didn’t do it.”

Listen, Village Bible Church, sometimes we’re more worried about knowing the text than actually doing it. This is a sin we can too easily allow ourselves to get into. We’ve got to have knowledge of the Scripture, but remember—we don’t just soak up more and more knowledge like a sponge.

This would be a great experiment for you to do at home. Take a slightly damp sponge, squeeze it out, put it in a container of water and let it soak up all the water. Then set that water-filled sponge on your counter and leave it for a couple days. What’s going to happen? It’s going to start to smell. It’s going to start to mold. Why? Because sponges are not built to hold water for a long period of time. Their job is to be squeezed out. So we fill it up and then we squeeze it out.

In the same way we fill ourselves up with spiritual things, and then we squeeze it. Knowing is filling—squeezing is doing. Don’t be like that family just talking about the chore but not carrying it out. Like the bicycle illustration, we need to be both knowing and doing.

James makes this clear in verse 22: *“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only...”* There’s a real temptation to only do part of this. But James says if this is our attitude, we’re deceiving ourselves. As he says in verse 26, that kind of faith is worthless. If you just hear what the Word says, you may have knowledge that puffs you up, but your faith is worthless unless you’re doing what it says.

Later on James says it another way: *“Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works”* (James 2:18). Faith apart from works is not real faith. Does that mean we’re saved by works? Absolutely not. But we’re saved to do good works. That faith will lead us to the good works God has called us to, according to Ephesians 2:10.

### **Doing what the Word says means we must let go of certain things.**

First, this doing involves resigning ourselves. Verse 21 says, *“...receive with meekness...”* The phrase “with meekness” uses a Greek word that was coined by Alexander the Great. He was known to ride powerful horses and historians say it was breathtaking to watch him on his steeds. They would say, “What a powerful horse!” Yet this powerful horse was kept under control. It submitted

itself to its rider. Its power has been harnessed and subdued. That power is not removed, but brought under the control of the one who is guiding it.

Similarly, believers must resign themselves to God and His Word. We carry great power and strength, but God wants to harness that so He's in control. So either we're going to be bucking broncos, or we will allow ourselves to be tamed by the Word of God. I don't know if you've ever watched a horse being tamed, but it's not a pretty process. There's a lot of arguing between the horse and trainer. Then eventually the horse realizes the trainer isn't going to give up, so the horse yields to him.

Some of you right now are bucking the Word of God in your life. Resign yourself to it. Submit to it.

### **Doing what the Word says means we must receive it.**

We are to *"...receive with meekness the implanted word..."* This image moves us to an agricultural picture. It speaks of properly cultivated ground that is able to receive the seed. In Matthew 13, Jesus talks about the four types of soil in His parable and says just because seed is thrown on the ground doesn't mean it's going to grow there. The farmer has to break up the ground. He must rid the ground of all weeds or anything else that would compete with or choke out the desired plant.

So the question is: how have you prepared your heart so the Word of God can be implanted in your life? A lot of us might say, "Well, we'll sing some songs and that will get my heart right." I don't think the human heart turns that quickly. Preparation needs to be ongoing. We need to constantly be cultivating our hearts and pulling the weeds from our lives. That way when the Word is proclaimed in our personal study or our small groups or in our church activities and worship services, that seed is falling into fertile ground, giving it every possible opportunity for real growth to take place.

### **Doing what the Word says means we must reflect on it.**

James uses another metaphor in verses 23–25.

<sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. <sup>25</sup> 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.

He says going into the Word is like you or me going to the mirror. How many of you did not look in the mirror this morning? I want you to be honest. None of you? You all look put together. We all looked in the mirror. Now, when James says a man looks in the mirror, he's being gender specific. It's a male looking in the mirror. Why would he talk to a male about looking in the mirror? Because he knows our tendency isn't to do what our wives do.

Amanda is up on a Sunday morning 30 to 45 minutes before I even think about getting up. I do a "drive by" of the mirror. I don't spend a lot of time looking intently in the mirror. Guys will do a drive-by past the mirror and then forget right away what they look like. They'll forget if there was an issue. For most men, all we do in the mirror is shave. How many times have we missed spots shaving because we don't spend a lot of time there? We don't look intently into the mirror to make sure our whole face is clean. James says, "Hey, guys, we're not really good at this."

Notice the next phrase James uses: *"...his natural face..."* A man looks intently at his natural face in the mirror. What is James saying? Literally the phrase means "the face of his birth." He knows what he looks like. It's the unblemished, unchanged face; the face he's always had. What I think James is getting at here is that when we look into the Word of God as our mirror—when we look intently into it—we start seeing beyond the blemishes to what God wants us to be spiritually. God doesn't just show us our sin; He also shows us what we can be and how we are doing in our standing with Christ Jesus. That's when those glaring issues start to pop out at us.

So we have to decide. Do we want to look how we used to look, or do we want to look how God sees us? If we want what He sees, then things need to change. But to do that, it takes a time of reflection. If we're okay with the sin and filth, then we will never become what Christ wants us to be.

### **Doing what the Word says means we must respond to it.**

Verse 25: *"But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres..."* We need to underline that word, "persevere." To do what the Word of God says is going to take endurance. It means we're going to have to let go of our temptations. We will have to give priority to the Word—a preference for the Word—that will change the way we live. Some of us would rather get a



different kind of mirror. There are apps you can get on your phone where you can take a picture of yourself and then change the way you look. Some of us want to do that. We want to Photoshop some things on our own. But the Word of God doesn't Photoshop. It changes us from the inside out. But to respond in that way, we must persevere. We must be students of the Word. We've got to get on that bicycle of the Christian life. We've got to know the Word and we've got to do the Word. Know the Word. Do the Word. What are you not doing today? Do you not know the Word? Then get into it. Are you not doing the Word? Then persevere and do the hard work of saying, "Lord, where You tell me to go, I will go. I will do what You say. You are the Leader. I am the follower. Not my will, God, but Your will be done."

James is simple on Christianity. Know the Word and do what it says.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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