

James 1:19-27

Week 2 - Turning Listening Into Action

Learning Objectives

- This study isn't meant to sort out all the difficulties of being saved by faith alone and the commandments given about our actions and how those work together. This study is to get people to consider their current way of viewing their life and matching it up with God's commands/desire for our lives, with the end hope being that people will be spurred on to dive into the word and live out life with God.

? What are some verbal and nonverbal responses someone shows and does that make you feel heard? What are some that make you feel unheard?

Optional Transition: As we move forward in chapter one of James, we'll find the author emphasizing the importance of listening and acting when it comes to being a Christ-follower.

Leader's note: The passage is presented up front so that the group can read it together in context. As you move into the second and third sections of the handout, you may want to give everyone a moment to go back and read those sections of the passage again as a refresher.

James 1:19-27 (NIV)

¹⁹ My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. ²¹ Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

²⁶ Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Listen (v. 19-21)

? How would you describe your listening skills? What's your typical reaction when someone tells you something you disagree with?

? What does it mean to produce the righteousness God desires (verse 20)?

Possible answers: Conducting one's life by the will of God, or according to his standards. To do something that is right, consistent, without prejudice or partiality. To act so the Lord may be glorified.

? What does it mean for the word to be planted in us? What does that say about the relationship that God has started with us?

Possible answers: For the word to hold truth in our hearts, for the word to grow in us and allow us to expand our knowledge of God to lead us to do His will. For it to change our hearts. God has again made the first step in reaching out to us individually (and corporately) and planted His word in our hearts, read through the parable of the sower for further insight, Matthew 13:1-9.

Optional question: Read Genesis 4:6, Proverbs 25:23, and Matthew 5:33. What do these passages and this passage say about anger? How does that fit together with other examples we find in Scripture?

Possible answers: That the anger of man even when directed at wrongdoing is not able to change another person's heart. That a quick-tempered, selfish anger shows lack of trust in God and a lack of love for others.

Consider/Meditate (v. 22-25)

? Are you listening to the word? What are some obstacles or excuses that you have?

Possible answers: Ways to mix up time in devotion (connecting with God): journal, listen to music, meditate on Him, scripture memorization

? How does a person deceive themselves if they only listen to the word? Hint: the Greek for this use of "deceive" means "falsely reason" or "delude".

Possible answers: They have not humbly or meekly received the word (v 21). They convince themselves that only having knowledge of the truth is enough for salvation.

? How is someone who merely listens to the word like a person who looks into a mirror and later forgets what they saw?

Possible answers: People look into mirrors to spot and remove blemishes from their face. If they see sin in their life but don't get rid of it (v 21), they are like someone who looks at a mirror, sees the blemishes, but does nothing about them and later forgets they are even there.

Optional question: In what way(s) is the Law like a mirror? James is talking about the Old Testament law (Ten Commandments law, specifically) here. What freedom comes from obedience to God's word?

Possible answers: Mirrors reveal to us what our blemishes are; "our sins are the spots which the law discovers." (per Matthew Henry, in his commentary on James). Christ has set us free from this law (Romans 6:14). We are no longer slaves to sin and are free to follow Christ's directives.

? What's at stake when we fail/neglect to live out God's Word?

Possible answers: Per verse 26, what's at stake is the value of our faith. The Word should not only touch us intellectually, it should transform us, and we should live out that transformation in our daily lives.

Apply (v. 26-27)

? What is James saying in verse 26 that adds to his exhortations in verses 19-25?

Possible answers: Having a loose tongue can allude to all sorts of things we say: slander, malicious speech, etc. Not having grace or love for others is an indicator that our own hearts have not been changed.

? James takes note of widows and orphans because they were often the most in need. But this can be extended to all who are in affliction in our lives. Do you have any widows and orphans in your life?

Possible answers will vary. This question is meant to help people turn their thoughts and hearts outward.

? There's a difficult tension between remembering that we are saved by faith alone, yet recognizing that our faith should lead us to action--should bear fruit. What does it look like to live with balance between these two? What does it look like to slip too far in the "license" side? The "legalism" side/defining our faith by our works?

Possible answers: Too far into license, and we begin to believe that killing sin does not matter, or that God does not care about what we do. Too far into legalism and we begin to try to earn grace through our actions rather than through God's unmerited favor, or we view God as constantly disappointed in us. Staying between the two extremes is a constant tension.

For Discussion and Accountability

? Are there sins you've committed in the past - or feel stuck in currently -that you believe are unforgivable? Have you talked to someone about them? Have you confessed them to God?

? What are the things that are keeping you from feeling 100% confident in your salvation?

? Are there areas of your life that you feel you are still working to somehow achieve or maintain your salvation/righteousness in God's eyes?