

# Hearing Difficulties? - James 1:19-27

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 06 May 2018

Preacher: Sam Ross

[ 0 : 00 ] Verse 19.

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. Because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

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. Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and after looking at himself goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

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.

[ 1 : 05 ] Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. 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.

So just as Sam comes up to hopefully open up that passage to us, let me just pray for him and pray for us as we listen, that we'd be able to concentrate and take it in.

Father God, thank you for the privilege of being able to come here, as Jonathan prayed and mentioned already, without distress, without the fear of being persecuted.

We can do it here in the open in a community center. Thank you for those wonderful blessings. We pray your Holy Spirit here among us.

We pray that he would be active, helping us to concentrate on what Sam is saying, concentrate on what you are trying to say to us this morning through Sam.

[ 2 : 14 ] And that as the passage said, we would not merely just listen to it this morning, and then go away and forget what we heard, but that throughout the week, throughout the rest of today, and throughout the rest of the week, we would be doing what we hear today.

We pray specifically for Sam. Please fill him with your Holy Spirit. Thank you for him. Thank you for the wonderful gifts that you've given him, that he can teach us, to enable us, to learn more about you, your word, and how we can please you throughout our daily lives.

In Jesus' name, amen. Thanks, Sam. Good morning, everybody. Well, I'm going to start with a story.

So one day, a man named Jer decided to go to the doctor, complaining that his wife wasn't listening to him as well recently, and that perhaps she had a hearing problem.

The doctor said, Well, Jer, I have something to diagnose this. It's very easy. All you have to do is just go home this evening, and I want you to stand 15 feet behind your wife, and she has her back turned.

[ 3 : 28 ] I just want you to ask her a question, and see if she responds. Jer said, That's grand. So he went on home, and that night he came across his wife in the kitchen making the dinner.

So he stood 15 feet behind her, and he asked, Darling, what's for dinner? She didn't reply. He was like, Well, this is interesting.

So he moved five feet closer again, and he asked, Darling, what's for dinner? Still no reply. He moved five feet closer again, asked the same question, still to no avail, until finally he was right behind her, like as close as he could possibly be behind her without touching her.

And he said, Darling, what's for dinner? To which she frantically swung around and cried, For the fourth time, Jer, it's roast chicken.

In that little story, we all know who actually had the hearing problem. He just didn't realize it, right? [ 4 : 41 ] And you know what? It's kind of similar to us. We may have a hearing problem, but most of us just don't realize it.

And it's not a physical hearing problem. No, it's our spiritual hearing that's faulty. In our passage today, James, the half-brother of Jesus, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, calls out those of us who think we listen well to God's word, but actually we aren't listening at all.

God's standard of listening, as described through the passage today, is summed up perfectly in verse 22. Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourself.

Do what it says. Listening accompanied by action is the type of listening that God requires of us. This brings me back to the days of my youth at home.

Picture a scene where my mum, running out the door to the shops, asked me to unload the dishwasher by the time she gets home. I said, yep, absolutely, grand, I'll do that. But she arrives back two hours later and I'm still in the same horizontal position on the couch and no dishwasher done.

[ 5 : 56 ] And you can hear her walk in and say, you didn't listen to me. And I was like, oh, but it was just a good match and I completely forgot about it. I'm sorry.

And then, in the way that only a mum can, she just, she brings in the sucker punch. If you were really listening to me, you would have done what I had asked.

Ouch. And you know, while we all know the importance of listening to and heeding our parents' instructions, there is an ultimately higher voice of authority in the life of a Christian, and that is God's word.

And like my mother rebuked me for a false form of listening, James, in this passage, he rebukes us for listening that lacks action. In God's eyes, being a good listener to his word means you don't just hear his word, but you do it.

You put it into practice in your life and you don't wait. And that's the main theme of today's passage, which we're going to explore first in verses 22 to 25. And then kind of before and after that section, there are three practical implications of this kind of listening for our lives.

[ 7 : 16 ] And those three implications are this. Number one, how we speak. Two, how we interact with the world. And three, how we serve those in need. So we'll look at those each in turn a little later.

But first, let's jump into the main theme of the passage of verse 22. And I've entitled this Man in the Mirror. I don't know if anyone's heard that Michael Jackson song. But yeah, it's kind of appropriate. Anyway, let's listen. Let's actually read verse 22 and 23 now. Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

In Jane's analogy, the person looking in the mirror doesn't do anything about what they see. They just forget about it. It's kind of like me the other week.

I paid money to go to a foot consultant because I needed advice on how to fix the problem I have with how I walk. Now, the fact that I went to the foot consultant made me feel like I was really doing something about a problem which I've, to be honest, I've ignored for the last five years of my life.

[ 8 : 32 ] But the reality is I'm deceiving myself if I think that just listening to that consultant is going to solve my problem. No, I have to go and I have to fork out 400 euro for those insoles he told me to buy or else I'm still going to walk a bit funny.

You see, it's like that with God's word. The very act of listening can fool us into thinking that we're doing something, if you know what I mean.

And we listen a lot here in Ireland. We think that we're being a really good Christian because we stopped to read the words today. Not that we did anything about it. Or because we went to church and we listened to a sermon.

Not that we thought about it again since. You know what James says, that is as useless as the man who looked in the mirror and immediately forgot that he really needed to shave and that his face was covered in Nutella from breakfast.

He failed to act on what he saw and so looking in the mirror was worthless to him. Likewise, when we look into the word, we need to do what it says or else it's absolutely worthless to us.

[ 9 : 52 ] And James pulls no punches here. Look in verse 22. He says, we deceive ourselves if we think that we are followers of Jesus without taking his word seriously or putting it into practice in our lives.

You know what? As Jesus very simply says in John 14, and it's on the screen here. You can see it with me. Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching.

My Father will love them and we will come to them and make our home with them. But anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. It's that simple.

Now at this point, I think we need to press pause because maybe you are beginning to question, as I did, well, does this mean I am doomed unless I live a flawless life of perfect obedience to God's word as James is saying here?

I mean, what hope is there for me, a man who feels time and time again though I want to obey?

Well, Romans chapter 3, verses 23 and 24 gives us the incredible answer to that question.

[ 11 : 05 ] For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We definitely know that much. And all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

God knew that we couldn't live a perfect life of obedience to him. And that is why he sent his son to do it in our place. And that person is Jesus and his salvation is a free gift to all who would believe.

He lived the perfect life we could never live. And on the cross, he died the death that we deserved for our rebellion. And now he frees us to live a life of obedience that glorifies the Father.

A life that strives to listen to his word and obey. Not that it's earning our salvation, but because we love him. Because we can say, as the author of Psalm 119 said, how sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth.

So, now we can rest assured that our hearing of God's word and doing what it says is not something that earns our salvation. Rather, it's the proof that we have been saved.

[ 12 : 18 ] And that we do love the Lord. So, in that light, let's return to our passage now. Where James continues in verse 25 to give us four steps for putting God's word into practice.

And in turn, being blessed in the Christian life. And like the rest of James' letter, this verse is absolutely filled with down-to-earth practical instructions for the believer.

So, let's pay attention and learn how to put God's word into practice. Read verse 25 with me. 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.

So, let's take each of these four steps in turn. And I found it kind of helpful to parallel this with Psalm 1. And it's going to come up on the screen beside each point.

So, let's start with the first one. Step 1. To put the word into practice, we need to look intently into it. Okay? Not just a fleeting glance every day for five minutes.

[ 13 : 28 ] Oh, that's that done. No, I'm going to get on with the rest of my busy life today. No. We must linger, dwell on, wrestle over God's word.

Which does take time. But as James says, it's the perfect law that gives freedom. Like, these words free us. And how do they do that?

Well, because within the pages of this book, we find a true God who frees us from all our false gods and we find a love which satisfies and surpasses all lesser loves we look to in life.

Why would we stay away from such a fountain? A river of life and truth? We need to check our attitude to God's word. Is it a chore to open it up?

Or do we recognize that these words are the words of eternal, overflowing life that all of us long for? Listen to the author of Psalm 1 who shows us how to do this one, right?

[ 14 : 32 ] It's up there on the screen as well. Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord and who meditates on his law day and night.

Is the word really our delight? Do we long for it? Do we meditate on it? Do we take time every day to still ourselves, open up the word and soak in it?

So firstly, we must look intently into the word and secondly, James says, we must continue in it. In the psalm that I just read, the author spoke of meditating day and night on the word.

Now, if we're really seeking to fill our hearts with God's word, we can't live off sporadic, irregular visits. We need to be continually looking intently into God's word.

We need to get into rhythms and habits of stilling ourselves and allowing God a chance to speak to us daily. And let's be careful not to get legalistic about this either, but thinking that those who read

God's word more often, that they somehow have more favour with God and they're earning brownie points with God and those who do it less, that they're less holy or something.

[ 15 : 55 ] No, that's not what the psalmist here is saying, or James. They're actually saying instead that it is your joy that you get to read the word.

What an incredible privilege it is to drink from this river of life and truth. And as Sam once says, such a man is like a tree planted by streams of water.

God's words are a river of life. Drink it up continually, daily, and let his word flow through every part of you and then just watch as that tree flourishes and you find yourself becoming more like Jesus.

Third step. we must not forget what we have heard, but do it. So here James is telling us, look, we need to take some practical steps to aid our memory, or else we're going to forget what we've heard.

My wife will tell you how shocking a short-term memory I have. You know, so much so that I actually have a list of alarms on my phone set to come on at different times for the simplest of everyday tasks.

[ 17 : 11 ] so let me tell you one thing that I do to counteract my own shortcomings. Firstly, I take notes on a Sunday whenever I'm listening to the sermon.

Now, if I didn't do this, I'd have forgotten most of the sermon by Sunday night, and good luck trying to get it into my life the next week. But by writing it down, I can then whip out my notes the morning after, Monday morning, when I'm having my time with God.

And at that stage, I'm praying, Father, show me how to get this word into my life. And so I read the scripture passage again, and I meditate on it.

I look at my notes, and I see, right, how am I going to get this into my life this week? And it's great then, because I can go back to my notes later in the week, Thursday or Friday, and see, right, how am I doing on this?

Have I really put the word into practice in my life or not? Some other methods, though, are to listen back to the sermon during the week, perhaps. You can do that on the church website here.

[ 18 : 21 ] Also, I know people who have a journal open as they read the word at home, and they write down their learning in a way to solidify it in their minds. Also, there's no substitute for good, old-fashioned Bible verse memorization, and we shouldn't neglect that either.

Why not set yourself a target? Maybe to memorize a passage a week or a month? There are lots of ways to do this, but listen, you and I, we just need to figure out how we're going to do it, and we need to put an action plan in place for how we're going to remember God's word and not forget it and get it into our lives.

So, James has told us to, number one, look intently into the words, two, continue in it, number three, not to forget it, but to do what it says, and his fourth point is that when we do all this, we will be blessed in what we do.

James was writing to persecuted believers who had been scattered from their homes in Jerusalem throughout the surrounding world. They were often poor, they were often mourning and persecuted. I wonder, was James thinking about what his brother Jesus said when he said in Matthew chapter five, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[ 19 : 45 ] Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Why are God's followers blessed?

Even in their grieving, even in their poverty and persecution, the reason is we are part of the kingdom of God, both now and in the future in heaven.

Ours is an incredible inheritance because we get Jesus in part now, fully in heaven. We inherit eternal life, free from pain, an eternity of perfect love in God's presence.

We are spiritual billionaires in Christ. And James says that this is why we are truly blessed. We have the joy of being in Christ's kingdom.

A blessedness that comes not by escaping the trials of this world, but by doing the word of the Lord. And look and see what the psalmist also says in this.

[ 20 : 55 ] He says that person is like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither whatever they do prospers. Plant your roots deep in the river of God's word and as the tree of your life grows, produces fruit, provides shade, not only will you be blessed but also all those around you will be blessed by the tree of your faith.

need. So we have heard James' call to be doers of the word and not just hearers and he's given us four steps for achieving that in our lives.

Now in finishing, we're going to examine the three different implications of this practice in our lives. Firstly, in how we speak, secondly, in how we interact with the world, and thirdly, in how we serve those in need.

So let's read, if you could read with me, verses 19 to 20. My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

James wants us to put God's word into practice when it comes to our responses to others and how we speak. Look down at verse 26. There he says, those who consider themselves religious, and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues, deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless.

[ 22 : 32 ] So we see James is pretty serious about this. Of all the parts of the body, James accredits the tongue with the most potential for destruction. If you can skip forward there in your Bible to James chapter 3 and verse 6 onwards.

And here we can see how James really does not mince his words when it comes to the tongue.

Chapter 3 verse 6. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body.

It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. Verse 8. So James could not be clearer about the harmful potential of our words to wreak havoc in other people's lives.

And so he gives this practical template to use when speaking to others. And this is it. Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger.

When someone says something that we disagree with, or something that is offensive to us, those times responding with grace and avoiding anger is one of the hardest things to do.

[ 24 : 06 ] But James orders us to do it. Now, the author, John Bloom, can use this verse to come up with the following process when we go to speak. And this is his process. Listen, wait, and respond.

So A, listen. We are to listen well so that we really do understand where the other person is coming from. Listening well, even when you don't agree, is a mark of humility that shows the other person that you are genuinely thinking about them.

B, we need to patiently wait. We must be slow to speak. In the moment, we all know our natural impulse to say things that we regret later on.

Have a look at Proverbs 10, verse 19 here. It's on the board. Sin is not ended by multiplying words, but the prudent hold their tongues.

So we must wait before responding. And as we wait, let's use that time to pray and ask God for wisdom and discernment and how best to speak.

[ 25 : 16 ] Lastly, see, we are to respond with grace. Ephesians 4, 29 exhorts us to speak in a way that gives grace to those who hear.

Proverbs 16, 24 says, Gracious words are like a honeycomb. Sweetness to the soul and health to the body. It may be that our gracious words are still tough to hear, and that's often necessary, as long as they are spoken in love, humility and honesty.

And the result of all this listening, waiting, and gracious responding is in the rest of verse 19. We are consequently slow to anger.

We are calmer, more measured, less impulsive. We're actively avoiding the type of anger that does not please our Father. So listen, wait, and respond.

That's a godly principle to speak by. And that's James' first implication for the life of a believer. His second is right here. It is how we interact with the world. And James is asking us here not to take on the morals and values of this world that are contrary to scripture.

[ 26 : 37 ] James continues to say in verse 21, look there with me, therefore, or in light of all these anger avoidance strategies, 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.

And he also calls us in verse 27, to keep ourselves from being polluted by the world. So James says, watch out. Watch out for the twisted morals and the widespread evil that you are seeing and hearing all around you on the radio, in the newspaper, the TV.

They don't produce the righteous life that God desires. Don't let them take root in your heart so that they become your morals. And I don't know which ones you are perceptible to, but these are the

ones that I seem to be constantly fighting against in my own mind.

The morals of pursuing wealth, striving for self-promotion, living for comfort and pleasure, tolerance of every new idea. We need to be careful about this.

How are the world's values quietly taking root in our hearts and minds? James has a solution to this. Have a look. It's in the second half of verse 21.

[ 28 : 04 ] He says, Humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. The morals and evils in the world today that are widely accepted, they cannot lead us to the truth that will save us.

That is the gospel of Jesus Christ who died for us. Now, I'm not saying that when you go home from church this afternoon you're going to rip out that skybox and throw it in the bin, and that you're not going to read the Irish Times anymore, and that you're never going to listen to RT News radio again.

No, no, I'm not saying any of that. Our aim is not to prevent ourselves from hearing the voice of the world, but instead to take all that we do here in the world, and put it through the filter of the word, because only here can we discern what is good and true.

And when we read what God says to be truth and life and his word, James says that we then have to humbly accept it. This means that we have to humbly acknowledge that the maker of life knows what is truly right and wrong, not us, even though there are many things that are hard to understand.

In a world of ever-evolving morals, one thing stands true throughout the ages, immovable, solid, and sure. It's the word of God.

[ 29 : 37 ] And let us cling to it for dear life as we navigate through this broken world. Finally, and briefly, the third implication of being a doer of God's word is in how we serve those in need.

Look at verse 27 with me. 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.

So after telling us how worthless our devotion to God is, if we fail to put God's word into practice in our lives, James now gives us an example of the opposite as such. This is the type of devotion that puts his word into practice, and is entirely pure and worthwhile.

This is the type of devotion that gives him pleasure. So let's look at his example where he studied this. He says, we must look after orphans and widows in distress. You know what James says?

If we're followers of Jesus, we must follow Jesus' footsteps to the homes of the broken, the weary, the downcast, those who in our day are left behind by society.

[ 30 : 55 ] And the question must be asked, if I am so caught up in my busy life, my family, my close circle of friends, but cannot look outside of that bubble of mine to see a broken, needy world, then how can I claim to obey Jesus when he says in Matthew 25, and it's on the board here, whatever you did for the least of these, you did for me.

For I was hungry, you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me in. I needed clothes, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you looked after me.

I was in prison, and you came to visit me. This was Jesus' approach to serving others. He says, go out, find the lowest of the low, and meet their needs in my name, for my sake.

Whatever you do for them, you're doing for me. I have to admit, this has been a huge challenge to me this week, in my own application of these words to my life.

As I think, well, do I actually have time for those who are suffering? The orphans, the widows, the sick, the elderly, the weary, the mourning.

[ 32 : 14 ] Are you and I giving freely out of the abundance that we have received from the Father? To be a doer of the word, we need to be actively seeking out opportunities to do this.

And this requires serious action. In finishing, let me just summarize what we've learned from God's word today. Let us not just listen to the word, and like a man who walks away from the mirror, forget everything we have heard.

Instead, let us look intently and continually into the word, not forgetting what we have heard, but doing it, and in turn, experiencing the blessedness that comes, not from conforming to the world, but from acting on every word of God.

let us listen, wait, and respond with grace when we speak. Let us put everything we hear in the world through the filter of the word, and let us reach out in love to those who are in need around us.

Let's be doers of the word, in carigaline and around. Let's be like trees planted by streams of water, which yield its fruit in season, and whose leaves do not wither, whatever they do prospers.

[ 33 : 37 ] Amen. I think that we should take a practical step right now to do what we've heard in the word today, so I'm just going to leave a time of reflection for all of us to talk to the Lord and to ask him what do we need to change in our lives as a result of this.

So I'm going to play a song in the background. If you know it, feel free to join in and sing, but you can just stay in your seats and meditate and really ask the Lord where to go from here.

So Lord, we just ask for your help now. We ask for your help not just to listen to your word, but to do what it says. Right now, Holy Spirit, please show us what needs to be changed in our lives.

We ask for your power to change and to become more like Christ. Amen.