

# Do What God Says (All-Age Talk)

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[ 0 : 00 ] What a passage that is. Okay, here's the first thing, straight out of the fact that we're told by God here in this passage. You're meant to shut your mouth and listen. I was going to say shut up and listen, but that sounds a bit rude. Shut your mouth and listen. So James is speaking here to people who have said, we're going to put our trust in your word. And this is the very first thing. Verse 19, look. My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. What James wants us to do, what God wants us to do, we can put our hope in God's word, is to shut your mouth and listen. He's not criticising us. He's speaking here to dear brothers and sisters, did you notice that, who belong to their God and Father. And he wants us to be listeners. Listen, firstly, to one another. That's verse 19. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. So in this verse, God is talking about what we do with our ears, and what we do with our mouths, and what comes out of here. What he wants us to do is to be like this. You see? You've got to have a smaller mouth that doesn't open so much, and you've got to have big ears that are ready to listen. I'm going to keep these on for a little bit, so you can remember this as you go home. You can make some if you want, when you get back home. This is what on the ground obedience to Jesus looks like in our lives. Be quick to listen with very big ears, and much, much slower to open our mouths than we are normally. I think, grown-ups and children, that is very relevant teaching.

Think of our world. Think of general election campaigns, or think of people arguing about the migrant crisis. One person speaks, but no one's really listening. People are working out what to say next, or just shaking their head, or interrupting, or screaming. No, you're wrong, listen to what I'm saying. No, you listen to me. And tempers rise. Or think of Twitter, or X, and blog comments, as people trumpet their opinions, and mouth off at others. Not much interest in listening. Or think of this verse in relation to a church, or a workplace, or at home in your family. How tempting it is to not actually listen to the person in front of you. Around the table, or when you're talking, as they are speaking, you are ready to butt in, and get your voice heard, and get your point across, and take the conversation in the direction you want. Listen to me. As though you're the centre of the world. And when that happens in families, or churches, it leads so easily to arguments. And arguments lead to anger.

Shouty anger. Or, I'm going away from you, anger. Let's just lead it. And when you're angry, because you want to speak, and other people won't listen to you, your ears close up even more. And verse 20 says, human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires. God doesn't want that. So here's a first question for us this morning. Do you recognise the danger of being a talker, but not much of a listener?

When we love the sound of our own voice, and won't listen carefully to others, actually, it's a very proud thing.

[ 4 : 00 ] Listen to me. And you think the person in front of you is not worth listening to. That's it. That's not loving your neighbour. That's not loving God.

A few years ago, I memorised Proverbs 18, verse 2, because I thought it was relevant to me. Fools find no pleasure in understanding, but delight in airing their own opinions.

James says, if you want to follow God, don't be a fool. Be wise. Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

Can you imagine your family, or a community, or a country, where actually we loved the sound of other people's voices, and we listened carefully? Imagine how much more peaceful that would be. How much more pleasing to God. Is there something in verses 19 and 20 for you this morning? Can you cotton on to that command?

[ 5 : 10 ] Be quicker to listen, and slower to speak, and slower to become angry. Hey, that's about listening to others around us.

But verse 21 takes us on to something else, where we are meant to humbly accept God's word. Look at this. 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.

Grown-ups, and children, do you think there's a connection between how we relate to other people's words, and how we relate to God's word?

I think there is. If you're a talker, if you're always keen to get your point across, because you're right and life's about you, it's very unlikely that before the words of God, you will suddenly change, and become humble and listen.

But that's what being a Christian looks like. You're committed to him, and so you're meant to get rid of anger and envy and pride, and the stuff that you realise is filthy in your life, and hate that.

[ 6 : 27 ] You ditch all that, and you humbly accept the word that is planted in you. It's such a beautiful thing to think about.

In the Old Testament, before Jesus came, God promised one day he would deal with people who have proud and stubborn hearts, and he would change them from the inside out.

A promise. In the prophet Ezekiel, I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit in you, and I'll remove from you your heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh, and I'll put my spirit in you, and move you to follow my decrees, and be careful to keep my laws.

A promise in the prophet Jeremiah, I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. Promises to give human beings new hearts and lives, and to plant his words, and his spirit in us.

That's what this verse is talking about. When you start to follow Jesus, as an adult or a child, God's promises get activated, and you receive, not just the forgiveness of your sins, but his Holy Spirit in you.

[ 7 : 43 ] A new life. And his words become alive to you. They are planted in you. And you know him as your God, and you want to start to follow his voice, and you know he can save you.

And James says, that is what you receive as a believer, from this good father. Now, humbly accept his words. You see what it looks like?

I'm just giving you an image of me with my ears. Listen, not just to people around you, but listen to his words. Here. Say a simple yes to what he teaches and commands.

Don't argue with what he says. Hear his words. Allow his words to shape you, and change you. Verses 19 to 21.

Loyalty to God right now looks like listening to one another and to his words. How do these verses connect with us?

[ 8 : 49 ] Here's a question. Will we be humble listeners as we step into our water? With other people, with God, do you, forgive me for putting that on this, do you need to shut your mouth a bit more?

Stop talking. Stop mouthing off. Stop sharing your opinion. And be a listener to people you love. To the words of the living God and acceptance.

First thing, from this wonderful, practical letter, set us off on August the 31st. Will we shut our mouths and listen? But not just that.

Okay, let's go on together. Because come to verses 22 to 25, and now, James says, don't just listen, do what God says.

Let me read, I'll just find my page again. James 1, verse 22 onwards. Do not merely, follow it along with me if you can, do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves, do what it says.

[ 10 : 04 ] 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 into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues in it, not forgetting what they've heard but doing it, they'll be blessed in what they do.

Did you know, it's just do, do, do. Listening to God is good. Like we're meant to do that. It's pleasing to him. But if we only listen, we deceive ourselves.

Could you imagine that? You're someone who listens to his word. You come to church on a Sunday and maybe you join a midweek group and you meet up with other Christians and you have a Bible

and it's really well-thumbed and you read it sometimes and you hear it read on your phone. Maybe you've been baptised and you've given your testimony. You talk about Jesus dying for you. You can do all that and feel as though you're fine and God will smile at you when you meet him and yet deceive yourself.

[ 11 : 17 ] Because although you listen and listen and talk a little bit, you don't actually do what God's word says. James wants to say to us, that is really, really stupid.

It's so stupid. Anyone who listens to the word but doesn't 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.

Can you imagine doing that? So here I am in the morning with my large ears and I get up in the morning and I stumble downstairs for a cup of tea and a piece of toast and then I wander in the bathroom and I lean up and I look in the mirror and as I look in the mirror, ooh, I see there's some sleep in the corner of my eye and my hair's sticking up all over the place and last night's salad is stuck in my front tooth and there's a jam smear at my cheek and I see in the mirror what needs to happen and things need to change in my life and I think, thank God for a decent mirror.

Hooray! And then I turn and I leave the bathroom and I kind of forget. And I do nothing about it. No comb, no soap, no picking the salad out of my teeth and I go into my day forgetting what I've seen and thinking I'm just fine.

That is stupid. Unless I'm deceiving myself somehow. I listen and listen to what God says and I do some good singing, maybe I ask for some prayer that God would change me and make me more like Jesus and I learn some things on Sunday about how I should change and become more like Jesus and then off I go into my week and I actually do nothing.

[ 13 : 08 ] That is deceiving. Is it possible to be like that? Maybe a question to ask you is when was the last time I changed?

When was the last time I read a command in the Bible and did it that very same day? Because if I look and listen and I don't do, there's no blessing there.

But, verse 25, whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues in it, not forgetting what they've heard but doing it, they will bless in what they do.

Did you know that God's words here are the perfect law that gives freedom? Gives freedom. A lot of them, it's a very old film, a long time ago, as a family, we watched Free Willy.

Anyone seen Free Willy? It's a story about an orca, that's the, it's a whale kind of thing, I think.

There he is, that's, I think that's, I think that's, Willie is the orca, right?

[ 14 : 23 ] Yeah, not the boy. And an orca is meant to swim in the ocean with its friends, its little family pod are the orcas. And that's how God has made them, that's how they're free, as they swim freely.

But the story is that the orca, I think I'm right, Hannah, I think Hannah knows the film, I think the story is that some bad men take the orca captive and he's all trapped. And then there's a boy who tries to help save it and at the end of the film, wonderfully, and it used to make me cry although I wouldn't tell you more, the boy encourages Willy to jump and amazingly, the orca does.

And he jumps over the wall and gets back into the ocean and swims off into freedom. He's free. Do you know what?

Our creator, our God, has spoken. He's spoken for our good. He's told us how to live in a way that's free, the way we're designed to be, like an orca in the ocean.

He's spoken in his word, a perfect word that sketches out for us how to become like his son, the perfectly human one. When we follow what God says here, we're free, we're genuinely free and we will be blessed.

[ 15 : 44 ] So says James in this very simple word, will you be a listener and will you be a doer? Okay, we're drawing things together.

We're talking this morning about how to respond to God, how to live in his world with loyalty to our Lord. When you love him, listen and accept and do.

Do you see? I've got my ears because I'm listening. I'm listening to what God says and then I go out and I do it. I'll happily make them to me as I want these signs if you want and give it to you in the week so you can look at it together.

I listen, I humbly accept and I go out and do. And as you do that this September, you will be free and you will be blessed and you will be happy.

Maybe we should just stop there. Easy to stop there. I should listen to do what he says. Yes, that's good. Right, let's go. I'll do what God says. But now, thirdly and finally, James has three concrete commands for you to take hold of and do this week.

[ 17 : 04 ] Are you ready? Do this. Firstly, go in through where you can control your tongue. Verse 26, those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a type ring on their tongues deceive themselves and their religion is worthless.

This week, bridal or tongue. Most of us speak about 16,000 words a day, I got told on Wikipedia. I guess some people speak a few less than that, some people speak a few more and I'm not saying who's who.

But like a rider with a horse, we're meant to keep tight rein on our tongues like Jesus did. So gossiping and lying and shouting at your brother and dominating and bashing and name calling and lashing out.

If our tongues are out of control this week, it may be the power we're deceiving ourselves and our religion is vain. Control your tongue.

Care for the helpless. Look, verse 27, religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this, to look after orphans and widows in their distress.

[ 18 : 17 ] Those are people who are helpless to provide for themselves. They are weak and vulnerable. And in Psalm 68, God is described as a father to the fatherless and a defender of widows and all through the Bible, God's heart is for the weak.

And Jesus comes in the Gospels to the poor and the leper and the widow and our Lord's command is that we copy them. Not by praying from a distance. Don't think big, general thoughts about people who are distressed.

They're meant to get involved with time and energy. Look around at your family, your church family, your neighbours and then those beyond and do what you can to care.

And if I say to myself over this coming month, say, I'm sorry, I've got too much going on in my life for that. There's too many friends to catch up with and I want to get a better deal on my internet and so on.

What time do I have to look after the week? This verse might say, is your religion faulty? Last thing, avoid worldliness.

[ 19 : 33 ] Pure and faultless religion is to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. Like we live in a good, created world. We're meant to eat and drink and grow flowers and do good.

This is God's world and yet at the same time, this world is stained through with rebellion against God. Teenagers, our culture's values, what you will pick up from other teenagers around you, have little reference to God.

and if you copy them, you can become polluted. So this week, seriously, concretely, as you go to school, live differently, keep yourself from that kind of behaviour and live as the Lord Jesus did.

That's it, James 1. Shut up, shut your mouth and listen. Listen to one another, listen to God, accept what he says, the word planted in you, and then go out into your week and do it.

There will be lots for some of us to think about this coming September, but if you want to do the most important thing, it's this, listen, accept, and then do.

[ 20 : 58 ] Well, we're going to pray together, we're going to pray in the light of God's word, we're going to pray for one another and Tyler is going to come and lead us in some way. so