

Week 3—James 1:19-27

DAILY DOSE OF JAMES



Monday June 21

James 1: ¹⁹My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry...

The first person who wrote a book on being a good listener was God. He wrote in James 1:19...Everyone should be quick to listen...

Being a great listener can win you friends, improve your marriage, boost your business profits or advance your career. It can make people feel so good about being with you that they'll literally follow you anywhere.

God connects the need to be a good listener with the best order of events...listen first, speak second. In fact He says to be quick to listen and to be slow in 2 other areas. James 1:19,20... Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.

God knows – and we should learn – if we're listening we can't be speaking. Rarely do we get our self in trouble by listening. But we get into plenty of trouble when we stop listening and start talking. In some situations our process of talking too much leads us to anger. Strong emotions cloud good judgment and mistakes and damage often follow.

When the next opportunity comes your way, when you feel the emotions starting to build up inside you, force yourself to follow God's advice. Be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. By listening first you may find your assumptions were incorrect and you have no reason to be angry. By listening you create the opportunity to learn and to avoid the embarrassment and damage of speaking inaccurate emotionally charged words.

Lesson to learn: Control your temper by making listening, not speaking, the very first thing you do.

Tuesday June 22

James 1:²⁰for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. ²¹Therefore, 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.

This passage in James has parallels to what Paul wrote to the Ephesians

Ephesians 4: ²⁵Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶"In your anger do not sin": Do

not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷and do not give the devil a foothold.

We all struggle with anger. Some have it under better outward control than others. But anger can fill us on the inside with bitterness, even if we do not lash out openly.

James and Paul are not talking about anger as the emotion that arises in us when we, controlled by the Holy Spirit, see or hear of an injustice that violates God's character and laws. Those are the times that righteous anger is to arouse us to action.

They are talking about the anger we feel when we feel wronged, when our selfish pride has been stepped on, when we do not get our way. That anger is what James calls "man's anger", the kind of anger that is mean and vengeful and wants to hurt someone. We must see that such anger is connected with moral filth, evil and the devil and communicated via our tongue. Giving vent to our anger cracks the door of our life open to the harm that comes from moral filth, evil and the devil and does not bring about the righteous life God's desires for us.

Lesson to learn: Control your temper to avoid sin and to gain righteousness.

Wednesday June 23

James 1: ²²Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

James now makes a turn in his advice. Earlier he was emphasizing listening. Now he says don't stop at listening. Keep going and become a doer.

He didn't say become a talker. Earlier – and later in his letter - he did and will point out the problems that can come by talking too soon and too much. He wants us to listen. But he wants us to do more. He wants to move us from being a listener to being a doer.

It has been said there are two types of people...those that talk about work and those that do work. I once had a job where the company formed a huge number of committees to study the problems the company was having. I couldn't get the work done because of all these other people who wanted me in their meetings to talk about what should be done, but they were doing nothing to get it done! I had an honest conversation with my boss and told him we needed less talk and more doing. I am glad to report my boss left our meeting, called a vice-president and told him we were having so many meetings we couldn't get the work done and therefore we would attend no more of these meetings.

Within a few months of doing, not talking, we solved all the problems that others only talked about.

James is saying the same thing. God in His word has made what He wants us to do very clear. If we listen to God's word and then live like we did not hear Him, if we talk but never do, we deceive only ourselves. We may deceive ourselves, but everyone else knows we're only talking, we're not doing, we're not changing, we aren't working on changing and we're living as though we have no memory of what God said.

But the person who listens to God, acts upon what he has heard and becomes a doer finds a life of freedom and blessing.

Lesson to learn: Listening is a necessary but not sufficient condition to be blessed by God. To be blessed we must also do what God's word says.

Thursday June 24

James now begins to tie all the thoughts of verses 19-27 together. He has discussed listening, speaking, anger, talking versus doing, Godly living and immorality. He now makes a powerful penetrating statement to the religious recipients of his letter: *James 1:²⁶If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.*

That is "in your face" confrontation. Notice there are no ravings of an angry man. Just a statement of truth.

Ouch!

Before you and I get angry at James let's see if he has been fair. He has told us to keep a tight rein on our tongue. Can you see the rider of the horse pull on the reins to control the horse? The horse is so much more powerful than the rider. But with tight reins the immense power of the horse can be brought under control. Isn't our tongue more powerful than our other muscles? Haven't we seen more good – or bad – done with words from the tongue than with the muscles of the arms and legs? We know James is right. We must keep a tight rein on our powerful tongue.

So we move on to his next statement that hits us hard. James says when we loosen the reins on our tongue we deceive ourselves about how religious, how good, we are and actually make our religion worthless. Though we would like to argue with James, we know too many stories, some of which involve our self, when the tongue was let loose and all creditability of being a Christian was lost. He's not talking about the 1 time in 20 year slip for which you apologized and made things right. He's talking about a pattern of pretending to listen on Sunday and then talking and living like the devil on Monday. Such a person is deceived, because Sunday church is making no difference in their life. Everyone but the person knows the "religion" they have is worthless.

Lesson to learn: A "loose tongue" and a "tight relationship with God" are contradictory terms that can not coexist in the life of a true follower of Christ.

Friday June 25

²⁷Religion 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.

James now moves us from listening to God, to being doers of what God says to some practical application. In anticipation of our question "What are we to do?", he tells us.

James tells us to be practical in our doing. He focuses our attention, our call to doing to 2 areas.

The first call to action is for us to do for those who are unable to do for themselves, the orphans and widows. These are the members of society who are powerless, who have no voice, no representatives, no provider, no protector. We who genuinely seek to please the Father have been told what to do. We must do for them what they can not. What they can do they must do. But the shortfall is our responsibility. "Look after" is such a great phrase. We must look after the widows and orphans through legislations, legal representation, provision of food, clothing, shelter, education, jobs, transportation.

At Amerifest this year we will have the opportunity to be doers of the Word. Outside of our buildings we will have large boxes in which we can bring groceries for the Waukesha Food Pantry. We will be doers who feed orphans and widows who can not feed themselves.

On the inside, at our Amerifest concert, we will receive an offering for Shepherd's Ministries located in Union Grove, Wisconsin. This ministry, started more than 50 years ago in one of our Adult Life Groups, is today a nationally recognized organization that provides compassionate Christian care, vocational and college education and job opportunities for adults with developmental disabilities. We will be doers who provide funding to help these people attain appropriate independence with fulfilling jobs and lives, while also providing for their spiritual development.

James then reminds us that we not only need to do for others, but we also need to do for ourselves. And one of the best things we can do for ourselves is not allow ourselves to be polluted by the world.

There is always a way to stay pure. Think of the Milwaukee days when the snow melts and there is nothing but slush and water and mud everywhere. Walk on the pavement. Keep away from the gutter. Steer clear of the puddles. Watch out for the cars and trucks as they come near those pools of water - you know that there is going to be spray and mud.

There is also a way of Christ likeness and walking in step with the Spirit to keep pure. Keep on the narrow way. There are the little things that can make us dirty. There is the ceaseless bombardment of our eyes, ears, thoughts and imaginations. Keep on the narrow way. Our values are under attack, our standards are threatened. Keep on the narrow way. Never mock holy things. Always admire purity, innocence, gentleness and modesty. Never think it is sophisticated to use some bad language, to drink just a little too much, to get a little way-out in your clothes, to have to see every movie that everyone is talking about. Know that God expects you to keep yourself from being polluted by the world.

Lesson to learn: Control your tongue, get your hands dirty helping others and keep your life clean.