

In America, Bibles are everywhere. You can find them in grocery stores, bookstores, motel rooms, everywhere. They're available in all sizes, shapes, translations, versions, leather bound, paperback. Every year the Bible out sells every other major bestseller. Last year there were 500 million Bibles published in the world in 1,800 different languages. We are glutted with the word of God on the airways, radio, TV, books, magazines. It's everywhere. Yet millions of people still miss the blessing of the Bible. Why? Because it's not automatic. The Bible is a book of blessing. It promises comfort, strength, hope, wisdom, joy, power, and purpose. But just because you have a Bible doesn't mean you're going to get the benefit from it. The book of James, being a very practical book to study, gives us three steps on how to be blessed by the Bible.

Reading: **James 1:19-27**

We have a tendency to be forgetful as human beings. Do the words, "I'm sorry, "I forgot" sound familiar to you? If you go to the Hallmark store, you'll find a whole section of specifically designed "Belated Birthday" cards because we as people tend to forget things. Remembering what we read and hear in the Bible is no exception. If you look back at those verses, I think verse 25 is the key verse for us today: ***"But those who look intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continue in it—not forgetting what they have heard but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do."***

The Bible is called the perfect law because it's exactly what I need. It promises freedom and it promises blessing. But it's not automatic. We play a part in whether or not we benefit from those promised blessings. James gives us three steps if we want to be blessed by the Bible:

A. I MUST RECEIVE GOD'S WORD IF I'M GOING TO BE BLESSED BY IT.

Verse 21 says: ***"Accept the word planted in you."*** If you're taking notes, circle the word "accept" on your outline. This word in Greek (*dechomai*) is a hospitality term which literally means "to welcome"—come on in. If we're going to be blessed by the word of God, first we must welcome the Word into our lives. We must be receptive. James gives an illustration. He says it's planted in you. He gives the illustration of a garden and seed. The Bible, all through Scripture, compares itself to seed. Jesus told the parable of the sower and said, "The word of God is a seed and it's planted in our hearts." How is it you can take two seeds that are exactly the same and plant them and get two different levels of fruitfulness?

The difference is the soil the seed falls upon. One soil is prepared and the other is not. How is it that you can take two people and put them in the same service, with the same message, and one person gets blessed by it and the other person says he didn't get anything out of it. One heart was prepared and one wasn't. James says we must receive the word of God with the right attitude. He gives us four attitudes you need to be blessed by God's word. These attitudes are what I like to call your spiritual hearing-aides.

1. Be CAREFUL. I must have a careful attitude. Verse 19 says: ***"Be quick to listen..."*** Give it your full attention. Be alert. Don't miss it. ***"... slow to speak ..."*** When I'm talking, I'm not listening. God gave us two ears and one mouth so we ought to listen twice as much as we talk. An article I read from Reader's Digest said when you listen it actually lowers your blood pressure. When you speak it raises your blood pressure. Interesting? Many of our problems are caused because we're quick to speak rather than being quick to listen. Be careful in your attitude. Be ready to listen receive God's word.

2. Be CALM. You have to be calm if you're going to receive God's word and be blessed by it. Verse 19b says we need to be: ***"slow to become angry ..."*** A relaxed attitude increases receptivity. If you're relaxed, God can communicate with you more. I try to use some humor when I speak because laughing relaxes you. It's hard to be tense when you're relaxed, right? And we don't hear much when we're angry, upset, bitter, resentful. Bitterness is a barrier. It's an emotional block that keeps us from hearing God's word.

Some may ask, "How come God never speaks to me?" Maybe you've got some resentment in your life you need to get rid of. That's why God says be calm, be slow to anger. What is your emotional state, normally, when you come to church on Sunday morning? Do you come with a calm attitude? In many homes on Sunday morning it's kind of hectic. Then we come at the last minute and expect God to speak to us. What kind of preparation is that? You need to be calm. This is radical: But maybe you need to get up a little bit earlier. What?! I'm serious. Maybe you need to take what happens here on Sunday morning a little more seriously. You are feeding your spirit in this hour. That's not something to take lightly or to rush into. You need to do whatever it takes to arrive here with a calm, prepared attitude.

3. Be CLEAN. Verse 21 says: *"Get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent..."* The Living Bible says *"Get rid of all that's wrong in your life, both inside and out."* You see, before you can plant the seed you need to do a little weeding. The word translated "filth" that he says you've got to get rid of is actually a word that is related to our modern word for "earwax." Think about it...

When you have a sin in your life it blocks your hearing. It prevents God's word from getting into your heart. Now I know this idea of cleaning out earwax is pretty gross. Have you ever seen anyone with a chunk of earwax lodged in their ear canal? It's disgusting. And if you've ever dug some of that stuff out yourself, you know how disgusting it looks and smells. The point is, earwax is "filth." James says get rid of the filth, the evil, anything that we know that isn't right in our lives. God says here, "Lay aside all of the garbage, the bad habits, the useless filth in your life so that God's word can get through to you."

Because you can't hear the Word of God clearly when your mind is filled with dirt. Some of you this morning, you need to be free from the guilt and shame, and you need to be clean. How can we be clean? It starts by confession. *"If we confess our sins, He's faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* And after confessing, you have to repent—turn the other direction and move away from that sin you just confessed.

This morning when you leave the auditorium, the ushers will have a special gift to give you to remind you of this point. You will receive your own personal Q-Tip. It's not for cleaning your ear out, but it's to be used as a symbol to remind you each day to clean out the moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent in our lives. You could also use it as a reminder to keep your ears open to hear and respond to God. The last spiritual hearing-aid for us is...

4. Be COMPLIANT. This means that we need to be teachable, yielded, humble, and willing to be changed. He says *"humbly accept the word of God planted in you..."* Don't act like you know it all. If you think you know it all, God's word can't get through to you. Pray, "God, do what You need to do in my life." God says if you want to be blessed, first you have to receive it, and be receptive with these four hearing aids. Of course, reception is not enough. James says we not only need to receive the word of God, but...

B. I MUST REFLECT ON THE WORD OF GOD IN ORDER TO BE BLESSED.

Verse 23 says: *"Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and after looking at himself immediately goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like."* James uses an illustration here. God's word is like a mirror. The purpose of a mirror is to evaluate ourselves. We look in a mirror to assess the damage from the night before. Then we do something about it. What good is a mirror if we don't do anything about what we see? God says a mirror reflects what we're like on the outside. God's word reflects what we're like on the inside. Have you ever seen yourself in the Bible?

Hebrews says, *"God's word reflects the thoughts, intents, motives and desires of the heart."* Many years ago Queen Elizabeth, who was beautiful in her youth, ordered that all of the mirrors be removed from Buckingham Palace because she couldn't stand to face the fact that she was growing old. Do you ever have a hard time accepting the reality about yourself? A lot of people don't read the Bible because they're afraid. They're unwilling to face themselves and see themselves as they really are. They don't want to look in the mirror of God's word. James gives us three practical ways to reflect on the word of God.

1. READ IT. Verse 25 says: *"those who look intently into the perfect law"*. He's actually talking more about research that he is reading. Investigating. The word "look" in Greek means "to stoop down and gaze in." It's the word used when Peter went to the tomb on resurrection Sunday when he stooped down and peeked in. It means to "curiously inspect". Focus your attention on the Word of God. There are two ways you can look at a mirror. You can glance at it or you can gaze at it. All of us have done both. It's human nature, most of the time you can't walk by a

mirror and not look at it. When you glance at it, you immediately walk away and forget what you've seen. It didn't do you any good.

Many people try to have a quiet time that way. They don't want to gaze at it, but glance at it. They give God five minutes. God says that He wants us to gaze at the word. You should look at it intently in detail. Now I'm going to give you some more practical help here. I'm going to show you nine things to look for when you study any passage in the Bible. It spells out what I will admit is the worst acrostic ever ... **S. P. A. C. E. P. E. T. S.**

S - Is there a Sin to confess? **P** - Is there a Promise to claim? **A** - Is there an Attitude to change? **C** - Is there a Command to obey? **E** - Is there an Example to follow? **P** - Is there a Prayer to pray? **E** - Is there an Error to avoid? **T** - Is there a Truth to believe? **S** - Is there Something to thank God for?

That's how you look intently at the word of God. Look at the details. James says we need to receive the word of God and then reflect on it, first by reading it and second by reviewing it....

2. REVIEW IT. Verse 25 says: "*you continue to do so...*" That means looking at it over and over again and again. The Bible calls this meditation. When you think about something over and over, it's meditation. Meditation is not about emptying your mind and humming some chant like Eastern mystics do. Biblical meditation is just the opposite. It's not about emptying your mind (that just gives the devil a foothold.) Biblical medication means to fill your mind. It's about thinking seriously about His Word over and over.

How many of you have a problem with worry?... Good, because if you know how to worry, you know how to meditate. Take a negative idea and think about it over and over, and it's called worry. Take God's word and think about it over and over, and it's called meditation. Jesus said, "*...if you continue in My word, then you're truly My disciples.*" Read it and review it. The outlines or transcripts we give you each week are not so that you can keep up with us, it's so that you can review it during the week. James says, "You want to be blessed? Reflect on the word. Then, think about it by reading it and reviewing it."

3. REMEMBER IT. Verse 25 again: "*... not forgetting what you have heard.*" Nothing will do more for your spiritual life than developing the habit of memorizing Scripture. Memorize God's word if you want to be blessed by it. We remember what's important to us.

A few years ago, the United States Air Force did a study and found that we forget 95% of what we hear within 72 hours. That statistic is depressing to me as a pastor. I spend all week preparing a message to give on Sunday. By Wednesday you've forgotten 95% of what I've said (unless you've written it down and review it.) James says, "Receive God's word with the right attitude, reflect on God's word by reading it, reviewing it, remembering it." But even that's not enough. The third way to be blessed by the Bible, (and this is the most important) letter "C"...

C. I MUST RESPOND TO THE WORD OF GOD TO BE BLESSED BY IT.

I must do something about it, act on it, live it, practice it. Verse 22 says: "*Do not merely listen to what the word says and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*" In other words, put it into practice. What good is a mirror if you look at it and don't do anything about it? The word "listen" in Greek is the word for "auditor". If you audited a class in college you didn't take it for credit, no tests, no responsibility, no research. You were totally relaxed. You just listened, you didn't have any intention of applying it. We have a lot of auditors in the church.

They come to church, walk in, hear the word of God, walk out with no intention of ever being changed. I've done that many times. I took notes, wrote things down, but it never changed me. The Bible says, we must respond to God's word—let it change us—if we're going to be blessed by it. James says it's self-deception when we don't let it change us. We think that just gaining content is making us spiritually mature. But a lot of people have great Bible knowledge and yet they remain spiritual weaklings.

The truth is, more knowledge increases responsibility. The more we know the more we're accountable for. What am I doing about what I know? Jesus said, "*To whom much is given, much is required.*" And James said, "*To him who knows to do good and doesn't do it, it's sin.*"

Just to illustrate: Let's say you folks as a church decide to get concerned about my health. You come to me and say, "JT, as you move into your older years we don't want you to have a flabby body, so you take up an offering and buy

me as a gift: Arnold Schwarzeneger's Bodybuilding Book. You say this book can change your life. It's fantastic. It has changed the lives of millions of people. It will keep you strong. It will "pump" you up. Read this book. It will make a difference." I say, "Great" I go away for 6 months, and then come back and I'm the same guy. No change.

You say, "What happened? Didn't you read the book?"

What if I said to you, "I read the book. I enjoyed it. This is the greatest book I've ever read. I loved it. I even underlined portions of it with colored markers and memorized sections of it and even started a group study of the book and translated into other languages. We looked at the meaning of every single word of the book. I even memorized whole chapters in it. And, of course, the pictures were interesting too."

What if that was my response. You'd be disappointed wouldn't you?

How often do we do that with the word of God? In church sometimes, we give awards for memorizing Scripture, but we don't give awards for doing Scripture. We get a certificate that says "I read through the Bible" but we don't get one that says, "I did the Bible." We like to mark our Bibles, but we need to let the Bible mark us. It's not how many times you've been through the word of God, it's how many times it's been through you. You've got to be a doer of the word. I deceived myself in thinking that because I had knowledge, that made me mature. Having knowledge of a bodybuilding book doesn't produce muscles. Just because we know something doesn't mean we act on it—and if we don't act on it, we're not changed, we don't grow.

A lot of us are lulled into the fact that because we're hearing a lot about God, we are maturing. But the truth is, many believe but don't practice. James would say, "They are hearers but not doers." That is what James is attacking. He's saying, "If you want to be blessed, you've got to live the word of God, not just hear it. Not just know it."

I heard about a story about a guy who came to church late. He walked in just as the service was getting over. He said to an usher, "Is the sermon done, yet?" The usher was wise and said, "The sermon has been preached, but it is yet to be done."

I like that. My prayer on Sunday afternoon is that you will remember what's been said and put it into practice. I pray that First Free Church will develop the reputation that people say, "They're doers of the word. They practice what everybody else talks about. They live it." One translation of the Bible is known as the "Living Bible." You and I ought to be a Living Bible. The best translation of Scripture is when you translate it into your life and let it change you.

James concludes this section with three examples of practicing the Word. In verse 26 he says: One of the ways you can know that you are a doer of the word is you have...

A CONTROLLED MOUTH. *"If any one considers himself religious and does not keep a tight reign on his tongue he deceives himself and his religion is worthless."* One of the ways you can know if you are a doer of the word is you have self-control over your words. Another way you know...

A CARING HEART. *"Religion that our God and Father accepts as faultless is this. To look after orphans and widows in their distress."* I'm a doer of the word when I help the helpless. Social concern, a caring heart. And the third way you know...

A CLEAN MIND. *"To keep oneself from being polluted by the world."* Spiritual integrity. Keeping your thought life pure. Keeping your mind focused on God. That is genuine Christianity. So how do you apply what you've heard today? How do you become a "doer" of the word?

James is saying that the blessing of the Bible comes when we start living it. How will you start doing that this week?

Closing Prayer