

The Letter of James

Faith that works!

Study 4 – Listening is doing

Introduction

This week's passage is all about how we listen and respond to God's word.

We live in a world where we usually have more than one voice speaking to us at a time. Multi-tasking has become almost essential. While you are talking to me on the phone I can also be responding to an email while the radio or TV is on in the background. Perhaps it's no surprise then that we are losing the art of listening to anyone properly. However, when it comes to God and his word, the stakes are much higher. God brings new birth through his word of truth (1:18). He relates to us through his word and so it matters very much how we listen and respond to it. God's word not only brings life (salvation), it brings a transformed life (change). However, for that to happen we have to listen to it in such a way that results in obedience. Verses 19-27 aren't particularly difficult to understand; Listening to God's word properly means you must do it. But putting them into practice? Well, that's a different story altogether. The German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, 'One act of obedience is better than a 100 sermons.' His point is that if we listen without doing, it doesn't matter how many sermons we hear or bible studies we sit through. God's word is only powerful to bring the change we need if we 'humbly accept' it.

Read James 1:19-27



Investigate and



Think

In verses 19-21 James tells us how we should listen to God's word.

1. What does vv19-20 tell us is important if we want to listen to God's word in a way that produces the righteous life he desires?

2. In v21 we discover that listening is not passive. What action must we take if we want to hear God speak through his word?

In verses 22-27 James tells us how we should respond to God's word.

3. What is the deception James warns us against in v22?

4. In vv23-24 James uses an illustration. In what way is listening to God's word but not doing it, like looking in a mirror and then forgetting what you see?

5. What is the blessing that we get when we listen to and do God's word? (v25).

6. When has obedience to God's word led to blessing and freedom in your own life?

Share that with your group in order to encourage them (and remind yourself) to be both a listener and a do'er.

Religion is a loaded word for many Christians today, a word we may try to distance ourselves from. ('Christianity is not a religion but a relationship'). But James uses it as a catch all term for the outward expression of our faith.

7. Why is the religion in v 26 'worthless'?

8. According to James, what two priorities demonstrate that you really are a do'er of God's word? (v27)

Apply



MIND: Twice in this passage James warns us against deceiving ourselves. Is there an area in your life where maybe you 'consider yourself religious' but are finding ways to avoid real obedience?



HEART: James tells us to 'humbly accept the word planted in us.' How would you describe your attitude to God's word right now?



LIFE: Making the switch from being a mere listener of God's to a do'er can be daunting. What do you fear might have to change in your life if you put this into practice?