

# The Book of James, Teacher's Guide

## Lesson 3: Hearing and Doing the Word

**James 1:19–27**

### Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The doctrinal heart of this lesson is the nature of saving faith as obedient faith. James will say later that faith without works is dead, and here he lays the groundwork: the word must be not only heard but done. This is squarely in line with the New Testament's call to a living, obedient faith, and it gently but firmly excludes any notion of a faith that is merely intellectual assent or warm feeling with no fruit. Help students see that hearing and doing are not two stages for the advanced; doing is what hearing is for.

There is also a rich doctrine of the word here. James calls it the “implanted word” that is “able to save your souls,” and the “perfect law, the law of liberty.” This teaches the saving power and sufficiency of God's word, received with meekness, and presents obedience not as bondage but as the path of true freedom. For students shaped by a culture that pits freedom against obedience, this is a reframing worth dwelling on: the law of liberty frees us to become who we were made to be. Keep in view that the complete New Testament is now our authority, the perfect law into which we look.

Finally, the lesson is intensely formational and practical. James targets the tongue, the temper, and the treatment of the vulnerable, and he defines pure religion in terms of compassion toward orphans and widows and holiness kept from the world's stain. Your aim is to move students from agreeable listening to actual doing, to expose the self-deception of mirror-glancing faith, and to send them home with at least one concrete act of obedience. Teach the truth clearly, and let it land in the hands and feet.

### Question 1

#### Student Question:

*James writes, “Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (vv. 19–20). What does this teach about the kind of life and speech that God's word is meant to produce in us?*

### Commentary and Teaching Notes

James opens this section with a memorable triad: quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. Help students feel how counter-cultural this is. Most of us are quick to speak, quick to anger, and slow to truly listen. James reverses the order of our instincts.

Notice that he grounds it in a doctrinal claim: “the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” Human anger, even when it feels righteous, rarely accomplishes God's righteous purposes. It tends to produce more heat than light, more division than transformation. This is not a ban on all anger but a sober warning about its limits and dangers.

Connect this to the larger theme of hearing the word. A heart that is quick to speak and quick to anger cannot receive the word well; it is too busy defending itself. Slowness to speak and to anger creates the inner quiet in which God's word can actually be heard and obeyed.

Apply it concretely to speech and conflict. In an age of instant reaction, especially online, the discipline of being quick to hear and slow to speak is a powerful witness and a means of peace. Invite students to consider where a slower tongue would change their relationships.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The character of speech and temper that God's word produces in the believer.
- Human anger as unable to produce God's righteousness (a sober warning, not a total ban on anger).
- Listening as a precondition for receiving and obeying the word.
- The witness of self-controlled speech in a reactive culture.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why does James reverse our natural order of speaking, angering, and listening?
- Where does your anger tend to produce heat rather than God's righteousness?
- What would change if you became genuinely quick to hear this week?

### **Question 2**

#### **Student Question:**

*Think about your typical conversations and conflicts this week. Where do you most need to become quicker to hear and slower to speak or to anger, and what relationship would change if you did?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question makes the triad personal. Ask students to picture an actual relationship or recurring conflict where they tend to be slow to hear and quick to speak or anger. The truth becomes powerful only when it touches a real name and a real situation.

Help them distinguish listening from waiting to talk. Many of us hear only enough to load our response. Being quick to hear means seeking genuinely to understand before we answer, a humility that honors the other person as made in God's image.

Address anger honestly. Some students carry a slow-burning resentment, others a quick-flaring temper. Both fall under James's warning. Invite them to name where their anger has been damaging rather than righteous.

Keep it constructive. The goal is not merely to suppress speech and anger but to redirect the energy toward listening, prayer, and patient love. Ask each student for one relationship they will approach differently this week.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Listening as an act of love and humility toward others made in God's image.
- The difference between righteous concern and destructive anger.
- Self-control as fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23).
- Relationships as the testing ground of the word's work in us.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Which relationship most needs you to slow down and listen?
- Is your anger usually righteous, or mostly self-defensive?
- What is one concrete change in how you will speak this week?

### **Question 3**

#### **Student Question:**

*James says to “put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (v. 21). What does it mean to receive the word “with meekness,” and how does the word's power to save relate to the way we welcome it?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Verse 21 calls for a two-sided action: put away filthiness and wickedness, and receive the implanted word with meekness. Help students see the order and the connection. The word is welcomed into a heart that is being cleared of the moral clutter that competes with it.

Focus on “with meekness.” Meekness is not weakness; it is strength under God's control, a teachable humility that submits to the word rather than arguing with it. The proud heart sits in judgment over Scripture; the meek heart sits under it, ready to obey.

Note the phrase “implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” The word is not merely informative; it is powerful, like a seed planted in the soil of the heart with life-giving force. James affirms the saving power of God's word, received in faith and obedience. This is consistent with being born again through the word of truth in verse 18.

Apply it pastorally. The way we receive the word shapes what it can do in us. The same sermon falls on a defensive heart and a meek heart with completely different results. Invite students to examine the posture with which they come to Scripture.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The saving power of God's word, the implanted word able to save souls (1 Peter 1:23).
- Meekness as teachable humility that submits to Scripture rather than judging it.
- Repentance (putting away wickedness) as the soil in which the word takes root.
- The sufficiency of God's word for salvation and growth.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What does it look like to sit under Scripture rather than over it?
- What moral clutter competes with the word in your heart?
- How does your posture toward the word change what it can do in you?

### **Question 4**

#### **Student Question:**

*What attitudes in your own heart, defensiveness, pride, the need to be right, make it hard for you to receive God's word with meekness? Where do you sense God asking you to soften and simply receive?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question names the obstacles to meekness. Defensiveness, pride, and the need to be right are universal barriers to receiving the word. Help students recognize these in themselves without shame, as the common struggles of every disciple.

Invite specificity. Where does Scripture tend to meet resistance in them? Often it is exactly the area where they most need correction that they are quickest to explain away. The places we defend most fiercely are worth examining.

Connect meekness to trust. We can receive even hard words with meekness when we trust that the One speaking loves us and seeks our good. A right view of God's goodness, established in lesson two, makes meekness possible.

Encourage one concrete softening. Perhaps it is a passage they have been resisting, a conviction they have been arguing with, a correction from a fellow believer they have brushed off. Ask what it would mean to simply receive it.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Pride and defensiveness as barriers to receiving God's word.

- Trust in God's goodness as the foundation for meekness.
- Conviction as a gift of grace rather than a threat.
- Teachability as a lifelong mark of the disciple.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What attitudes make it hard for you to receive God's word with meekness?
- Which area of Scripture do you find yourself most resisting, and why?
- Where is God asking you to soften and simply receive?

### **Question 5**

#### **Student Question:**

*James warns, "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (v. 22). How is it possible to deceive ourselves by hearing the word without doing it, and why does James consider this such a serious danger?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Verse 22 is the hinge of the whole passage and one of the most piercing verses in James: "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." This is the heaviest doctrinal note of the lesson, so dwell on it. James says that hearing without doing is not neutral; it is self-deception.

Explain the deception carefully. The hearer-only is fooled into thinking that because he has heard, agreed, and felt something, he has responded. But hearing was never the goal; it was the means. The goal is a transformed life. To stop at hearing and call it obedience is to deceive ourselves about our actual standing before God.

This anticipates James's later teaching that faith without works is dead (2:14–26). Genuine faith hears and does. A faith that only hears, only agrees, only feels, is not yet the living, obedient faith that saves. Be clear and gentle here: James is not adding works to faith as a second requirement; he is describing what real faith always does.

Apply it without crushing people. The point is not that one slip proves false faith, but that a settled pattern of hearing without doing should alarm us. Invite honest self-examination: is the word actually changing how I live, or am I merely an appreciative audience?

#### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Hearing without doing as self-deception, not neutral or harmless.
- Doing the word as the goal of hearing it, not an optional extra.
- The continuity with James 2: genuine faith hears and obeys (faith without works is dead).
- Living, obedient faith as the only saving faith, against mere intellectual assent.
- Self-examination regarding patterns, not isolated failures.

### Discussion Prompts

- How exactly does hearing without doing deceive us?
- Why is doing the word the goal rather than an optional extra?
- What is the difference between appreciating a truth and obeying it?

### Question 6

#### Student Question:

*Where have you mistaken the good feeling of hearing truth for actually obeying it? Name one area where you have been hearing without doing.*

#### Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses verse 22 into the student's life. Almost everyone can name a truth they have heard many times, fully agree with, and have not yet obeyed. The aim is to surface that one thing and bring it into the light.

Help students distinguish emotional response from obedience. A stirring sermon, a convicting verse, a moving song can all produce a real feeling that masquerades as a real change. Feeling moved is not the same as moving.

Be specific and bounded. You are not asking students to overhaul their entire lives; you are asking them to name one area of hearing-without-doing. Specificity makes obedience possible; vagueness lets us off the hook.

Point toward grace. The remedy for hearer-only faith is not more guilt but a single step of obedience, taken in dependence on Christ. Ask each student to identify that step and, if possible, to share it so the group can encourage them.

#### Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The danger of mistaking emotional response for obedience.
- Obedience as concrete and specific, not vague intention.
- Grace as the power for obedience, not just the pardon for failure.
- Accountability within the body for following through.

### Discussion Prompts

- What is one truth you fully agree with but have not yet obeyed?
- How do you tell the difference between feeling moved and actually changing?
- What single step of obedience can you take this week?

### Question 7

#### Student Question:

*James compares the hearer who does not act to a man who looks in a mirror and forgets what he saw, while the one who looks into “the perfect law, the law of liberty,” and perseveres will be “blessed in his doing” (vv. 23–25). Why does James call God’s word a “law of liberty,” and what does this reveal about how obedience and freedom relate in the Christian life?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Verses 23 through 25 develop the mirror image. The hearer-only is like a man who sees his face in a mirror and immediately forgets what he looks like. The mirror of the word shows us the truth about ourselves, but if we walk away unchanged, the encounter is wasted.

By contrast, the one who “looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres” is “blessed in his doing.” Note the verbs: looks intently, perseveres, does. This is sustained, active engagement, not a passing glance. And the blessing is found in the doing, not merely in the looking.

Focus on the striking phrase “the law of liberty.” James does not see God’s commands as a cage but as the path of freedom. Help students grasp this counter-intuitive truth: obedience to God frees us to become what we were created to be, the way a fish is free in water and a train is free on its tracks. Sin promises freedom and delivers bondage; the word commands obedience and delivers liberty.

This also affirms the perfection and sufficiency of God’s word. It is the “perfect law,” complete and reliable, into which we look to see both God and ourselves truly. For our purposes, the complete New Testament is that authoritative word for the church today, needing no addition or new revelation.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The word as a mirror that shows us the truth about ourselves.
- The “law of liberty”: obedience as the path to true freedom, not bondage.
- Sustained, persevering engagement with the word versus a passing glance.
- Blessing found in the doing of the word.
- The perfection and sufficiency of God’s word (the complete New Testament as our authority).

### **Discussion Prompts**

- In what sense is God’s law a law of liberty rather than a cage?
- What is the difference between glancing at the word and looking intently into it?
- Where has obeying God actually made you more free, not less?

### **Question 8**

**Student Question:**

*Consider a truth from Scripture that you encountered recently. Did you carry it into your week, or did you forget it like the man in the mirror? What practice would help you remember and do what God shows you?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question applies the mirror to the student's recent experience. Ask them to recall a specific truth from Scripture, perhaps from a recent sermon, reading, or even an earlier lesson, and honestly assess whether they carried it into their week.

Most will admit they forgot, like the man in the mirror. Normalize this honestly while taking it seriously. The point is not to shame forgetting but to build practices that help us remember and do.

Talk about practical means of remembering: writing the truth down, praying it back to God, telling someone, setting a reminder, building it into a daily rhythm. The word that is merely heard evaporates; the word that is written, prayed, and shared takes root.

Connect remembering to community. We help one another remember and do. Part of the church's purpose is to keep the word in front of one another so none of us walks away and forgets. Invite the group to consider how they might help each other persevere.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Practices that help the word take root: writing, praying, sharing, repeating.
- The role of the church in helping one another remember and do the word.
- Perseverance in the word as the path of blessing.
- The danger of spiritual forgetfulness.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What recent truth from Scripture did you carry into your week, or forget?
- What practice would help you remember and do what God shows you?
- How can this group help one another keep the word in view?

### **Question 9**

#### **Student Question:**

*James says, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (vv. 26–27), after warning that an unbridled tongue makes one's religion worthless (v. 26). According to James, what are the marks of genuine religion before God, and what does this teach us about the relationship between faith, compassion, holiness, and the way we speak?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Verses 26 and 27 define “pure and undefiled religion,” and they are bracing. First, James returns to the tongue: anyone who thinks he is religious but does not bridle his tongue deceives his heart, and his religion is worthless. The way we speak is a primary test of whether the word has reached us. This previews chapter three's extended teaching on the tongue.

Then James gives the positive marks: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. Note that he chooses the two most vulnerable groups in his society, those with no provider and no protector. Pure religion has a face turned toward the helpless and a willingness to enter their affliction, not merely send good wishes.

Hold the two halves together: compassion and holiness. Genuine religion both reaches out to the vulnerable and keeps itself clean from the world's corruption. Some traditions emphasize compassion and neglect holiness; others emphasize holiness and neglect compassion. James binds them together as two marks of one true faith.

Be careful to teach that James is not reducing all of religion to social work, nor is he setting aside worship, doctrine, and the church. He is exposing the hypocrisy of a religion that is all talk and no love, all ritual and no righteousness. True faith worships God rightly and shows itself in controlled speech, active compassion, and personal holiness. This is the obedient faith the whole passage has been driving toward.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The bridled tongue as a primary test of genuine religion (previewing James 3).
- Active compassion toward the vulnerable (orphans and widows) as a mark of true faith.
- Personal holiness, keeping unstained from the world, held together with compassion.
- Faith expressing itself in deeds of love (Galatians 5:6; 1 John 3:17–18).
- True religion as worship of God that bears fruit in speech, compassion, and holiness, not mere talk or ritual.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why does James make the tongue a test of whether our religion is real?
- How do compassion and holiness belong together rather than competing?
- Who are the vulnerable people God may be calling you to enter alongside?

### **Question 10**

#### **Student Question:**

*Look back across the whole passage. James wants the word we love to reshape our ears, our tongues, our tempers, and our hands. Name one specific way Jesus is calling you to move from hearing to doing this week.*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This capstone asks for one concrete move from hearing to doing. The whole passage has been pressing toward action, so do not let students close in generalities. Ask for something specific, nameable, and doable this week.

Help them survey the passage's targets: the tongue, the temper, the posture of meekness, the practice of remembering, the care of the vulnerable, the keeping of holiness. Where is Jesus putting His finger on their life right now?

Encourage a single sentence of commitment anchored in the text, such as, "This week I will do the word by actually visiting, not just praying for, the person I keep meaning to help." Specific and ownable.

Close by reminding them that the implanted word is able to save their souls and that obedience is the law of liberty. They are not being burdened; they are being freed. Christ himself, the Word made flesh, is forming them into doers, not hearers only.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Sanctification as the word working its way into hands and feet.
- Obedience as the path of freedom and blessing.
- Christ forming doers of the word, not hearers only.
- The integration of doctrine, compassion, holiness, and speech in one obedient life.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- In one sentence, how is Jesus calling you to move from hearing to doing this week?
- Which target of this passage, speech, temper, meekness, compassion, or holiness, is He pressing on?
- How can the group hold one another accountable to actually do it?