

**Text: James 1:19-25 (Pew Bible, pg.1198)**  
**Title: “Holy Habits ... Living in the Word”**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Our church has something we call our “Blueprint for Spiritual Formation.” It states our understanding from Scripture as to what we are to be and do as a church and as individual believers. It states our mission:

**Travis Avenue Baptist Church ... joining God in developing passionate followers of Jesus Christ.**

And then we go on to describe the attributes of a passionate follower of Jesus Christ. The first attribute we identify is:

## **TO LEARN AND APPLY THE TRUTH OF GOD’S WORD**

That’s where it all starts and that is what I want us to focus on today. Open your Bibles to James 1:19. We’re talking about “Holy Habits” that move us toward spiritual progress in our lives. The Bible says to train yourself for godliness. We don’t just *try* to be godly; we *train* to be godly. There is no spiritual growth and progress apart from our encounter with God in His Word.

James is writing to believers who are scattered in various places and cultures, but one thing remains the same, no matter where we live or when we live ... our spiritual progress is directly linked to our experience with God in His Word. To get started let’s just read the first verses beginning in...

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

**James 1:20 - for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.**

So there is a righteous life that God desires of us. God has saved us, and given us life through His Son Jesus Christ. But the shaping of that life into the likeness of Jesus and in the holiness of God is an ongoing, active partnership between God and us.

**James 1:21a - Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent...**

“get rid of...” = to once for all lay aside, like a filthy garment.

**ILLUSTRATION** – If you’ve been working in the yard, digging in muddy flower beds, when you finish your clothes are probably filthy. So what do you do? You lay them aside. Why? You don’t want to mess up your furniture by sitting on it with filthy clothes. And besides, you have a certain amount of decency about you that you’re just not comfortable sitting around in filthy clothes. That’s the picture of this command.

The way we get rid of all moral filth is to humbly accept the Word that is planted or sown into our lives in various ways and at various times.

**James 1:21b - Humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.**

You see, contained in this Word is the Gospel ... the message of God's gracious activity of coming to us while we are lost in our sins and redeeming us through His Son Jesus Christ. Apart from that there is no hope for change in our lives. When the Gospel is preached it's like a seed being planted in our hearts. And when that seed falls on the right kind of soil it begins to spout and grow and produce the fruit of a changed life. So a person is saved when, by faith, they humbly accept or receive this message. And after we are saved we continue to humbly accept the Word as God uses it to sanctify us and shape us into the likeness of His Son. So James continues ...

**READ JAMES 1:22-25.**

So there is an imperative here for us to obey ... "humbly accept the word that is planted in you." And then in the following verses there are three actions related to accepting the Word of God.

**1. LISTEN TO THE WORD (James 1:22).**

Now God is a revealing God. He has revealed Himself through His Son, the Word, Jesus Christ. And He has revealed Himself and continues to reveal Himself through His written Word ... the Bible you hold in your hands. Now if the God of the entire universe has revealed Himself, we ought to try to discover what He has shown us about Himself and about life in His Word. And it starts with listening to the Word.

**James 1:22 - Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.**

Now obviously we do not only listen to the Word. It doesn't stop there, but it does start there. This is our first exposure to the Word; what we do with it will be addressed later. But we start by listening to the Word.

Note: How did the church first receive the Word of God in James' day? They listened to it. In ancient times, most of them did not possess copies of Scripture (the OT). Their exposure to the Bible was hearing it read by a leader in the synagogue or the church. And this NT letter (which is also Scripture) was likely read to them. So their experience with the Word of God was not just a private thing; it was a corporate experience.

**Acts 2:42 - They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.**

**Colossians 3:16 - Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.**

O how blessed we are to have a copy of the Bible to read. But we don't get what we need out of it just reading it on our own. We listen to it in community with other believers as it taught by teachers and preachers. One of the goals of our pastoral team for the coming year is to see more of our members and their guests actively involved in Bible study on Sunday mornings. Why? It's not because we just want to have greater numbers. It's because we want to see every member, and as many guests as we can invite, are having a life-changing encounter listening to the Word of God each week.

So the first way we accept or receive the Word into our lives is that we listen to it. Next we...

## 2. LOOK INTO THE WORD (James 1:25).

If we are to accept the Word, embrace and receive the Word, it will have to go deeper than just listening to it or hearing it. We need a deeper engagement with the Word. And that's what James describes in ...

**James 1:25 - But 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.**

So we must not only listen to the Word, but we are to look into the Word. When it talks about “the man who looks intently into the perfect law...” it means “to stoop sideways, or to stoop to look.” That's the picture.

**ILLUSTRATION** – If you want a great illustration of this, just look at the difference between the way women shop and the men shop. My wife Nan is diligent shopper. She's always looking for the best bargains. She knows her way around every store in town. She knows what's on every aisle. If somebody looks like their lost in a store she'll ask them, “May I help you find something.” She knows where everything is located. When she sends me to the store to get something, she can say, “Go to aisle #6, and about halfway down the aisle on the left, on the top shelves there's this kind of canned fruit. And about the middle there's this kind. Don't get that. Down on the bottom shelf you'll find just the right size can of fruit.

One time I went to the store and I couldn't find what she was looking for. The manager happened to be walking by and I grabbed him and asked him. He couldn't find it either. So I called Nan on my cell phone. She knew exactly where it was. Why? Because she had studied it intently. She had been up and down those aisles time after time looking at what's on the shelves.

And it's not just a one-time thing. Because it goes on to say, “and continues to do this.” The words there mean, “to remain beside or near something.” I think you can see that that's a far cry from the hit-and-miss encounters than many believers have with the Word of God.

The Bible through which God has revealed Himself deserves our careful attention. If you've never read through the entire Bible, I want to challenge you to do that. It may get a little tedious at times, but stay with it. All of God's Word is God's Word and it is profitable. At other times, you may

want to spend an extended period of time in one particular book of the Bible. At other times you may want to focus on a theme in the Bible, like prayer or righteousness or some other theme.

And to our Bible teachers, let me encourage you to serve up a feast of God's Word for your class. Don't spend half the time talking about the weather or football games or politics. Get them into the Scriptures. That means you have to prepare.

Now before I leave this, notice that James talks about the "perfect law." is referring to the Scriptures. He talks about it later in...

**James 2:8 – "If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right."**

The Bible, OT and NT, is the "perfect law." It reflects the heart of God. It is right and true, always! Nothing but a perfect book could come from a perfect God.

Now people get hung up on the word "law." Aren't we in the age of grace and freedom? But notice that it says that this is "the perfect law that gives freedom."

Don't think of God's Word as something that merely restricts your life. It releases your life. It frees you to live as you were designed to live ... by God's way, by God's will and by God's Word. That's freedom! Jesus said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

**ILLUSTRATION** – I love the story of the boy flying a kite. The boy holds the string and the kite soars up into the sky. But one day the kite said to the boy, "Cut me loose, I want to be free to go as high as I can." So the little boy cut the string attached to the kite ... and anyone who has ever flown a kite knows what happened ... it plunged to the ground. You see that kite thought the little boy on the other end of that string was holding him down. What he thought was holding him down was really what allowed him to soar in the sky.

So this is the perfect, royal law of God that deserves our careful attention as we listen to it and look into it. But it doesn't stop there. We must also...

### **3. LIVE OUT THE WORD (James 1:22-25).**

**James 1:25 - But 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.**

It's not enough to just sit and listen to teaching and preaching. That's where it all starts, but it doesn't stay there or stop there. The process isn't complete until we apply the truths of God's Word to our lives. Now we can listen to the Word and look into the Word, but it still may not produce the transformation that God desires. Let me show you how this happens.

**James 1:22 - Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.**

Literally it means, “Keep on being doers of the word and not hearers only.” Incomplete or partial obedience is disobedience.

**John 8:31b (NASB) - “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;**

Remember that the Bible is a mirror that reflects the condition of our lives back to us. That’s the way God uses the Word. So we need to give enough time and thought to the Word of God that we can let God show us things about ourselves as we gaze into the Bible. God is speaking to your situation. We don’t just read the Bible; it reads us.

**ILLUSTRATION** – A while back I read about an interview with Actor Sir Ian McKellen, who played Gandalf in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and in the *The Hobbit* trilogy. Ian McKellen, who is an avowed homosexual, confessed in the interview: “Whenever I stay at a hotel, I always check to see if they have a Gideon Bible, and if they do I tear out a page. I turn to Leviticus 18:22 and rip out that page, which is directed against homosexuals ... I think by now I must have ripped out a few hundred.” Why would he do that? McKellen said, “Who knows? There might be someone who has insomnia...who reads the Bible because they have nothing else to do and who might be especially vulnerable to what I really think is Leviticus's pornography.”

Note: We shake our head at that. What a perverted way to look at the Bible. But are we really any different if we see our reflection in the Word of God, and don’t do anything about ... we don’t change our ways? We may as well rip that page out of the Bible.

Now let me show how this works right here in the text we are studying.

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

**James 1:20 - for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.**

**James 1:21 - 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.**

So we’re reading along in our Bibles, studying and meditating on a passage. And we come here to James 1, and the Holy Spirit gets all up in our business about taking control of our mouths and the anger that spews out of our mouths. That’s moral filth, pure and simple. It’s part of the evil that is so prevalent in the world, and we should have no part of it.

Now it’s like we just looked into a mirror and the Holy Spirit showed this to us about ourselves ... that we are really slow to listen and quick to speak and quick to become angry ... and that anger isn’t in keeping with the righteous life that God is working out in us. But we often read that and ignore it, or think it pertains to someone else. And we move on. It doesn’t soak in and bring conviction to our hearts. What we’ve done is that we have looked into the mirror of truth, seen what the Bible says about our condition, and walked away without doing something about it.

**ILLUSTRATION** – It's like looking in the mirror and realizing that spilled ketchup on your shirt and lunch, and it's left a huge red stain right on the front of your shirt. You see ... and just walk away without doing anything about it. That's what the Bible says...

**James 1:23 - 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**

**James 1:24 - and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.**

Hearing is not the same as doing. How can we read a condemnation of gossip in the Bible and walk away and start gossiping about someone? How can we read a condemnation of sexual immorality, then walk away and commit it? How can we read the instructions in God's Word about using our money and walk away and ignore it? The process isn't complete if there is not life-change that occurs for us.

**James 1:25 - But 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.**

What a promise! God will be a debtor to no one. If he promises a blessing for obedience, then He will give it. Maybe not on our timetable, but He will always honor His Word and the one who follows His will and His way.

## **CONCLUSION**

**ILLUSTRATION** – I think about the seasons of my life as a person and as a follower of Jesus. Like many of you I have many Bibles that I've accumulated over the years. And I was looking at some of them last week and reflecting on where I was spiritually. Where are you in your relationship with God and His Word? God is ready to take you to the next level.