

**The World According to Jim**  
**“Word-Diggity”**  
**James 1:21-27**

**Introduction**

- [Video]
- According to the [Gallup News Service](#) most people really do believe the Bible is the Word of God. One-third of adult Americans believe the Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally word for word. One-third. Of the other two-thirds. The majority of that other two-thirds believe the Bible is the inspired word of God but that not everything in it should be taken literally. That's remarkable. And then, about one in five or twenty percent of Americans believe the Bible is an ancient book of "fables, legends, history, and moral precepts recorded by man."<sup>1</sup> We really do believe the bible is the word of God. What is your view of the Bible? Is it the word of God?
- Have you ever wondered what the Bible says about itself? What is Bible's view of the Bible? What is Scripture's view of Scripture? Have you ever thought about that?
- Proverbs 30:5 *Every word of God is flawless;*
- Psalm 119:89 *Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.*
- Jeremiah 23:29 *"Is not my word like fire," declares the LORD, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"*
- Psalm 119:138 *The statutes you have laid down are righteous; they are fully trustworthy.*
- Isaiah 55:10-11 *As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, 11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*
- Psalm 119:105 *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.*
- Psalm 119:29-30 *Your statutes are wonderful; therefore I obey them. 130 The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.*
- Psalm 119:160 *All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal.*
- Hebrews 4:12 *For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*
- Psalm 19:7-10 *The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. 8 The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The*

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<sup>1</sup> Gallup News Service, "One-Third of Americans Believe the Bible is Literally True" by Frank Newport, May 25, 2007.

*ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. 10 They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.*

- 2 Timothy 3:16 *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*
- And lastly in Matthew 24:35 Jesus says *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.*
- This is what the Bible says about itself, about the dynamic Word we neglect. Without equivocation the Bible views itself to be the living, enduring, powerful, perfect, inspired, inerrant Word of God. No other book is like that. Not Mormon texts. Not the Quran. The Bible alone is unique.
- The problem is that for many of us, even though we have a high view of Scripture, we believe in the inerrant, authoritative word of God, our relationship to the Word is marked by paradox. We are birthed into the Kingdom by this Word of truth, James 1:18, and then find ourselves mysteriously weaned off its nourishment. We deeply love the Word and yet spend no time listening to what it has to say. His word is word-diggity to us. It's awesome. It's the coolest. And we believe it with all our heart but can't quote a single thing from it. We show great respect for it but not enough to let it change our behavior. We care for it deeply but let it collect dust next to the nightstand.
- If we are really honest with ourselves and with God, his Word just doesn't have the dynamic impact on our lives like it should. And that, I think, is the very problem James confronts at the end of chapter 1. The challenge before every follower of Christ is to continually open our lives to the influence of the Word of God—to allow God's word to do its intended work.
- [Slide #2] The message of James 1:21-27 is this.

### **Proposition**

- **Let the word of God have full access to and free reign over your life**
- And by way of reminder, we don't just believe the Bible contains God's Words. It is God's breathed out Word to us so that when we read the Bible it's not just the pages of some dead letter but it is God himself speaking. René Pache says it like this, "If our faith depended only on a lifeless book, a relic of a grandiose past, we would be simply legalists, groveling in slavery to a dead letter. But from the inspired Book there leaps up an overwhelming dynamic, potent with judgment, life and resurrection."<sup>2</sup>
- If you've spent any time at all reading the Bible you know exactly how dynamic the Word of God really is. And so the question is why in the world do we neglect it? We read this litany of verses about what the Bible says about itself and we are forced to ask why the Word of God doesn't have more influence in our lives?
- James has the answer. James says in [verses 21-27](#) that in order for the Word of God to accomplish its intended work we need to take care of a few things. [Slide #3] Jim gives us...

### **Organizational Sentence**

- **Three behaviors that allow God's Word to do its intended work in our lives**

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<sup>2</sup> Rene Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, p. 87.

## Background

- James says the reason God’s Word doesn’t have the dynamic influence in our life like it should is because our relationship to the Word is dysfunctional. Our behavior as we approach the Word is out of whack.

## Transition

Look at [verse 21](#). Verse 21 describes the [first behavior](#) necessary for God’s Word to do its intended work in our lives. [[Slide #4](#)] What does James say? *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.* In other words, [weed the garden that is your heart](#).

## Main Points

- The image behind [verse 21](#) is that of weeding a garden. The weedy things of life, the *moral filth*, the *evil that is so prevalent*, keep God’s word from taking root. As [James Motyer](#) puts it, “many a gardener sighs over the ‘losing battle’ against weeds.”<sup>3</sup> In the same way, many a Christian sighs over the losing battle against the moral filth and evil in the garden of the heart. The Buckthorn, the Creeping Charlie, the Bindweed aren’t confined to the garden. In order for God’s Word to work the way it should we need to create a hospitable environment for the Word to thrive. You’ve got to weed the garden that is your heart.
- Weeding is a constant fight, isn’t it? You pull a weed one day and it’s back the next. Sometimes God’s word loses its potency because we stop weeding. We fail to get rid of the pre-marital sex, the affairs, the pornography, we refuse to work on our marriage. We allow bitterness, and slander, and lying to spring up. We let the attraction to occult things like channeling, astrology, astral projection take hold. We rationalize our substance abuse, dependence on alcohol, and recreational drug use. And those weeds send down big long tap roots into our hearts. We become insubordinate at work. We steal from our employer, steal through our laziness and the weed bed grows. Materialism and greed and covetousness creep in. Attitudes like unbelief and bitterness toward God pollute the soil.<sup>4</sup>
- James says the Word can’t even get planted in soil like that. The “filthiness and rank growth of wickedness” have got to be cleared away.<sup>5</sup> Christians have the responsibility to weed. James says get rid of them. In other words, repent. Admit to God those weeds have no right to take root in the garden of your heart. Pull the weeds. Prepare a nice little plot of ground and, as the text says, *humbly* allow the Master Gardener to implant the Word into your life. It takes humility, meekness to receive the Word. Being quick to listen to the word is good. But listening with a prideful heart only causes the seed to bounce off the soil. Humbly accept the seed, the Word, as if you know that you desperately need what it has to say. It is right. You are wrong. It has the answers you have none. It shows the way, yours leads to death. And once the Word has taken root; the living, enduring, powerful, perfect, inspired, inerrant Word of God will begin to work wonders. It will do nothing less than *save you* as James says. The word that saved you can’t be forgotten after conversion.<sup>6</sup> What kind of soil is your heart? Right now, this morning. Not what kind of soil was it six months ago or a five years ago when you were on fire for God. What kind of soil is your heart right now?

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<sup>3</sup> Motyer, p. 68.

<sup>4</sup> Gary DeLashmutt, James 1:21-27, “Getting The Most Out of God’s Word,” 1993.

<sup>5</sup> Motyer, p. 68.

<sup>6</sup> Moo, p. 87.

## Transition

What does it mean to accept the word? What's the **second behavior** necessary for the Word of God to do its intended work? James tells us. [Slide # 5] **Peer into the mirror of Scripture in the right way.** Listen. *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 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 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 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.*

- James uses the analogy, the experience of looking in a mirror to help us understand the difference between simply listening to what God's word says and doing what the Word says. Look at **verse 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 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 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.*
- In other words, the important difference James highlights is the way in which a person looks or peers into the mirror. The person who listens but doesn't do what the word says just glances at the mirror. You wake up in the morning, quickly look in the mirror and think all is well, but you're deceived. You really don't look all that good. But, you go about your day and at the end of a busy day come back, look in the mirror only to see the huge zit on the end of your nose, there all day for everybody to see because no time was taken to look in the mirror. As **Doug Moo** says, "It is precisely because a person does not look carefully at the mirror that he immediately forgets what he has seen."<sup>7</sup>
- Whereas, the Christian who listens to the Word and puts it into practice does so because she has looked into the mirror in a completely different fashion. She *looks intently* into God's truth as James says in **verse 25**. That word means "penetrating absorption."<sup>8</sup> You wake up in the morning, fix your gaze intently on the mirror of scripture, and it shows you every zit, every unsightly blemish in your character. It shows you the deformity of your own spirit.<sup>9</sup> And when you continue to look, when you persevere and keep looking, with careful observation and contemplation, even though it's painful, you realize something has to be done about what you see. And as you peer into this perfect mirror, the mirror of God's Word that shows everything just as it is, and begin to put into practice remedies and cures and a plan of action that the mirror suggests, you find that after a while you're changed. You're different. I like how **Donald Burdick** says it. "Listening to truth is not an end in itself any more than gazing at one's face in a mirror is an end in itself. The purpose of listening to truth is to act upon it."<sup>10</sup> In order for God's word to do its intended work in our lives we must peer into the mirror of Scripture in the right way.
- Last week **Darin Fruit** issued you a challenge to read the bible everyday. I hope you've taken him up on that challenge. But I would add to Darin's challenge and say this to you. So,

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<sup>7</sup> Moo, p. 92.

<sup>8</sup> TDNT, 5:815.

<sup>9</sup> Manton, p. 102.

<sup>10</sup> Donald Burdick, *Expositors Commentary*, James 1:22-25.

you've spent thirty minutes reading God's word. Good. Well done! You read it everyday? Fabulous. But what about obeying what you've read. What about applying it?

- Do you know what a sit and soak Christian is? Sit and soak Christians, super soakers, are Christians who believe the Bible, who love God's Word, who soak up its truths, who listen to sermons dutifully, and read the Bible faithfully, but do nothing with those truths. They sit and soak. James says if you listen to the Word of God but fails to put those words into practice you are on seriously dangerous ground. You're deceived. *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves.*
- That word *deceived*. It's the same word Paul uses in Colossians 2:4 to describe the *fine sounding arguments* of false teachers. Let me be very blunt with you. Look at me. Listening to the Word of God without putting it into practice is as deceptive as false teaching.<sup>11</sup> None of us here would tolerate false teaching. Anathema. Throw the buggers out. And yet most churches, including this one, allow a culture to persist where people sit and soak up biblical truth but never put that truth into practice. If you've got a church full of quick to listen to the word Christians who don't put those truths into practice James would say so what. James would say "you're not creating followers of Christ, you're not making disciples; you're filling the seats with racks of deceived people." Look at [verse 25](#). The blessing doesn't come in *studying* the Word. Study is good. But the blessing comes from *doing* what the Word says.<sup>12</sup> Otherwise you're just deceived.
- What mechanism do you have in place to ensure you are applying the word of God? The Word can't work in your life the way it should, you won't experience it as a life changing thing, if you don't put it into practice. Listening is not enough. *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*
- *Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.*<sup>13</sup>

### Transition

[Slide # 6] That brings us to [verses 26-27](#). The third behavior that really allows God's word to do its intended work in our lives. Be religious. But make sure you're religious in the right kind of way. *If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. 27 Religion 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.*

- I don't know if you realize this. God really isn't all that religious. Nor is he into people who are religious. In fact, the testimony of the Bible is that He hates religion. And that means, from God's perspective there are a lot of worthless religions out there as [verse 26](#) says. And yet most people work really hard at being religious. We're really good at doing religious kinds of thing. We dress the dress and talk the talk. We carry the Bible. We learn to speak

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<sup>11</sup> Moo, p. 89-90.

<sup>12</sup> Constable, note on James 1:25.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 7:21-27

like a Christian. We go to church regularly. We sit and listen to the sermons patiently. We put on the smile and play the charade. We go home and come back to do the same thing all over again the next Sunday. But those things only make us nice; they don't make us Christians.

- “So if you really want to be ‘religious,’” James says, “here’s a tip. There’s only one kind of ‘religion’ God really cares about. And it’s when his people put his word into practice. So if you’re going to be ‘religious’ you might as well be religious in the right kind of way.” Live out God’s word. Put the word into practice. Do the word in such a way that your behavior changes and others are affected by your beliefs. Only then God will agree you’ve found a worthwhile, acceptable “religion.”
- In [verses 26-27](#) James highlights three areas which demonstrate worthwhile religion: controlling the tongue, helping orphans and widows, and keeping oneself unstained by the world. James’ point isn’t that these three things are the be all and end all of what it means to put God’s word into practice. His point is simply to say if you say you love God’s word and read God’s word, and care for God’s word but that Word hasn’t led you to control your tongue or care for others in need or live a righteous life then you’re just a listener of the word and not a doer and your so called religion is vain, empty, nonproductive, useless, and dead. You’re really a practitioner of worthless religion.<sup>14</sup> As [Peter Davids](#) says, “religion which does not have ethical results...is totally useless before God.”<sup>15</sup> Or as the Message puts it, *Anyone who sets himself up as "religious" by talking a good game is self-deceived. This kind of religion is hot air and only hot air.*
- The issue in verses 26-27 is nothing more than a restatement of what James said in [verse 22](#). Don’t just listen to the word. Do it. If you look into the mirror of the Word and it shows you you have a filthy mouth and do nothing about it you’re religion is really worthless. If you look into the mirror of the Word and it says to care for those in need and you look the other way and ignore the need James says you’re religion is worthless. If you look into the mirror of the Word and it shows you how polluted you’ve become because you’ve imported so much moral filth into your life and you do nothing about it. You’re religion is worthless. Add to these three a thousand other things. James says to listen to what the Word says and fail to put it into practice, to hear the word and do nothing with that truth is about the most worthless religion there is.

## Conclusion

- What do we do? In [Lee Strobel’s](#) book *The Case for Faith* he tells of a cartoon involving two turtles. The first turtle says to the second, "Sometimes I'd like to ask why God allows poverty, famine, and injustice when he could do something about it." The other turtle responds, "I'm afraid God might ask me the same question."<sup>16</sup>
- The absolute greatest challenge we face as a church at this very moment is the epidemic of unapplied biblical truth. The difficult thing is, we already know so much. We sit and sit and sit and soak up so much good teaching from the Word and the chasm between what we know and what we’ve applied continues to grow and grow. And the more it grows the harder it

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<sup>14</sup> Dave Veerman, *James*, Life Application Bible Studies, p. 32.

<sup>15</sup> Davids, p. 102.

<sup>16</sup> Taken from [www.preachingtoday.com](http://www.preachingtoday.com)

becomes to cross the chasm. And one day the King will return and unless something is done, something drastic to shorten the span between the two sides of the chasm, if we fail to put God's word into practice, we'll find ourselves on the outside of the Kingdom looking in. And we'll wonder "how did that happen. What went wrong?" And the King will say *if you truly loved me you would have obeyed what I commanded.*<sup>17</sup> Let's pray.

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<sup>17</sup> John 14:15