

## Faith in Action - Know the Word, Do the Word

James 1:19-25

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I really loved to be on my bike, it made me feel free and independent. I'd go to the shop, go to the beach, go to the park, go to soccer practice, go hang out with my friends, we created race tracks and jumps, it was great fun. With a bike you could go almost anywhere, as long as you were committed to pedalling.

My bike wasn't the flashiest in town, it was an old Raleigh Twenty, a hand me down from my brothers, I wanted a chopper with a flag, but no such luck. I needed to maintain the old bike and that was part of the fun in some ways. At one stage I had trouble with my pedals, one of them broke, so I was left with a bike with only one pedal. I was still determined to ride it until I got a new pedal. Have you ever tried riding a bike with one pedal? It's not easy, it's not easy to make progress, the whole rhythm thing doesn't work, especially up hill, which is virtually impossible, you don't make much progress at all. The balance of two pedals is vital to riding a bike. Keep that image in your mind.

We have been going through James in a series called Faith in Action and today we look at James 1:19–27. Here's what I want you to think about as we go through this whole section of Scripture: The Christian life is like the balance of two pedals on a bike. Know the Word, Do the Word. Know the Word, Do the Word.

### Know the Word, Do the Word

Some of you are know-the-word people. You read books, you've got footnotes in your bible, you underline, you memorise, you debate, study, meditate, you're totally nerdy.

You will know Acts 17:11 off by heart

*And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul's message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth.*

Right now you are probably double-checking everything I'm saying on the Internet to see if it's true. Know the word, know the word, know the word.

And some of you are do-the-word people. Real practical, real faithful, real consistent. You are not so keen on the books because you did that at school, and

swore never to look at another book! You love to serve, to help, to get out there and walk the talk, and make a difference.

Know the word, do the word, know the word, do the word. Remember those pedals of the bike that keep it moving forward. When I came across this illustration I thought, that is a good illustration—keep it in your mind for the rest of the sermon. Actually for the rest of the sermon series, actually the rest of your life. James is going to teach us that we need to know the word of God and do the word of God.

### James learned this from his big brother

James learned this from his big brother Jesus. If you weren't here a few weeks ago, James, the author of this letter, is a pastor at this point but growing up, his big brother was Jesus Christ.

They would have sat together in the synagogue, their equivalent of church every week, hearing the lesson, talking or maybe arguing, about it on the way home. "Jesus, what did you think about what the rabbi said? "James, what did you think? "What are we going to do? "What does this mean?"

These are guys who probably shared a bedroom together growing up. They would have sat at the dinner table, praying, talking, with the rest of the family. They went to school together. So James watched his big brother Jesus grow to know the word of God and then do the word of God.

He even heard Jesus say this very thing. In Luke 11:28. Jesus said, "*But even more blessed are all who hear the word of God and put it into practice.*"

So, from Jesus' actions, how he lived his life, and his words, the things that he taught, James learned what to do with the bible, God's word, the most important book written in the history of the world. This is the word of God.

This is so incredibly important because we live in a world that is filled with words about God: philosophy, religion, speculation of various sorts and kinds. Some of it is truthful, and helpful, and much of it is not. This is not a word about God. This is the word of God, and so it is vital for us to determine, "What do we do with this?" What do we do with this word of God? And following in Jesus' example and instruction, James says, "Know it and do it." And so we start at James 1:19, where he begins with his urging that we "know the word".

### Know that you are God's beloved

"*Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters.*" That's the Christians, brothers and sisters in Christ. They're much loved. They have an inheritance. They carry the family name and legacy.

*James 1:19-27*

*19 Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. 20 Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires. 21 So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls.*

He starts with this: “Understands this. Know this!” He’s trying to grab our attention. He’s trying to grab our mind and to open it up to receive an amazing truth from God. Know this, listen to this, because we as the church sometimes want to rush to the “things to do and not do”, we can rush right to the “to-do list”. And he’s saying, “Don’t do that, just yet. “We’ll get to what you should do and not do, but first, there’s something you need to know.”

He says, “Know this, my dear brothers and sisters, my beloved.” It all starts with the love of God. Receive this. Sit in it for a moment. “You are God’s beloved. Brothers and sisters, if you’re a Christian, you are God’s beloved.

See, my wife is here. She’s my beloved. God loves you like that. My kids are my beloved, I love them to bits. God loves you like that. God loves you, the Bible says, like a husband loves his wife, like a father loves his kids. God loves you. This establishes our identity, and out of our identity comes our activity. Before he tells us what to do, he tells us who you are. It’s very important to get that right. The result is that when we obey God, when we do what God tells us to do, we’re not working to gain the love of God, we are working because of the love of God.

This is the difference between Christianity and all other religions. Christianity begins with the love of God. God can’t love you anymore, and no matter what you do, God won’t love you any less. This changes our obedience.

So, James starts with, “My dear brothers and Sisters, know this.” You are loved. His love is a gift.

Then he speaks of a second gift that God wants to give us and we need to receive, and it’s the word of God (verse 21). So, it’s the love of God and the word of God. He starts with these two gifts.

### **The Word that saves**

He talks of the word of God, “*humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls.*”

Now, I am not much of a gardener, but I do dabble and bit. The whole concept is pretty amazing, being able to take seeds, and even more amazing take just a cutting, place them in the ground, and then with a bit of water, a bit of nourishment, and a bit of time, they’ll spring to life, and something beautiful will come into existence,

something fruitful will happen? God is like a gardener. God wants to take his word, and he wants to plant it in our soul so that there could be life and fruit that proceeds out of our relationship with him. And so what he’s telling us is that the word of God has power of life within it.

So God says, “Know this: My love is a gift. “My word is a gift. “We’re going to do something together that is wonderful, and your life is going to change.”

### **Ways to hinder growth**

But James says be aware of things that with trip you up, that will stop you growing. *You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.*

- Being quick to listen is something to develop. A bad listener is often a person who’s distracted, there’s so much going on in their mind, they’re so frazzled and frantic that they’re not listening.

Chances are most of us have been accused of not listening!” Some of us have got information, we’ve got truth—maybe even God’s word—we just don’t listen to it. Either we don’t hear it, or we don’t ponder it, we don’t consider it, we don’t receive it, we don’t plant it.

What we don’t need is more information, we need more receptivity.

- Slow to speak - One commentator I read said don’t be a chatter box, well I don’t think it is about how much chatter we do, it’s more the connection between the quick to listen and the slow to get angry, the best way of achieving both of these is to think before you speak, listen before you speak, control your emotions before you speak, be slow to speak.
- The third hindrance James says is some of us have short fuse, quick to anger. He is not saying anger is wrong, but engage the brain, listen, and make sure you have yourself under control, he goes on to say...

*“21 So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives”?*

How much? All. All. He’s saying, “Don’t segment your life, surrender all your life. “Don’t clean up part of your life and allow filth and evil in another part of your life.”

- The fourth hindrance is compromise. The compromiser is the person who is inconsistent, and we might call them hypocritical. These are people who will not submit their whole life to the Lord. Instead, they will segment their life to the Lord. “And this part, I’m going to keep that in order. “And this part, well, I kind of enjoy that.

And so the first thing James is saying is, “You need to know the word of God.” I want you to think about: how well do you know the word of God and what might be hindering this great gift of God being planted in your life to cause beauty and fruitfulness?

And James transitions from “Know the word” to “Do the word,” because it’s not just enough to know the word. We have to do the word, otherwise we end up like this story.

### **Did You Take The Rubbish Out?**

I’ll give you story, a parable, not a bible parable, a today parable. Imagine a dad who gets up early in the morning before the kids go to school and he realizes, “Bother, it’s rubbish day, the bins in the house are all full, the bin in the kitchen is overflowing. I don’t have time so I need my kids to deal with it all and take the rubbish out.”

So, dad goes back in, writes a note and he starts, “I love you guys. You’re the best kids in the world. I wouldn’t trade you for anybody, “It is rubbish day. The bins are full and they stink. I need you kids to take all the rubbish out of the house and take it to the big Wheelie Bin, drag it out to the curb because the rubbish truck is coming today. I really need you to do this before you go to school. Love, Dad.” PS I’ll give you a hug when I get home.”

Kids get up, read the letter, go to school, and come home. Dad comes home from work, there’s no wheelie bin out on the curb. Drives up, bin is overflowing. Goes in the house, still the smell, rubbish everywhere. Nobody cleaned out anything.

Family meeting—“Hey kids, sit on the couch. We got to talk about this. Did you kids get my letter?”

“Yeah Dad, it was amazing. The prose was fantastic. “The imagery was astounding, and the punctuation was perfect. “All the verbs were in the right tense. “Dad, you are a very good writer, and we really got the heart behind the letter because you were so loving toward us.

“So yeah, Dad, we took it very seriously. So much so we skipped school. We spent the whole day studying the letter. We never really thought about rubbish like this. We started researching how other nations dispose of their rubbish, and it got us into other fields of study—carbon footprint, recycling. It really got us thinking how we could study rubbish removal in a gospel-centred way. So actually, Dad, we brought some friends over. We’ve spent the whole day going through the Scriptures, examining this issue of rubbish because we, frankly, overlooked it until your note. And what we found is that this is a theme in the whole Bible. Dad, we found in the Old Testament that they would take their rubbish outside of the city. And that rubbish was, like, symbolic of sin, and it needs to be away, a long way away. Dad, we learned that they would take it to a place called Gehenna, and they would set it on fire to burn it, and that that was imagery for hell. That was amazing, Dad. We didn’t know this.”

“And then we looked at the New Testament. First we did Old Testament Hebrew word studies on rubbish, and then we did New Testament Greek word studies on rubbish, Dad, with all of our friends. We had a small group, and we found that the language of rubbish is used in the New Testament. Like, did you know in Philippians, Paul says that all religion is like rubbish. That was shocking to us. So, we started a website. We’ve actually launched a ministry where we’re trying to educate people about the theology of rubbish.”

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So, James’ frustration is, he’s got a bunch of religious people, he’s pastoring a big church in Jerusalem, he’s a grown man, he’s been doing it a while, he’s been teaching these people, and they have a lot of knowledge. They know a lot, but they’re not doing a lot. And he’s very frustrated because his big brother Jesus wasn’t like that. Jesus didn’t just shut himself up in some academic institution and just study all day. He didn’t even work as a pastor. He worked a job as a carpenter, he started a ministry, he fed people, he healed people, he taught people, he prayed for people, he served people, he rebuked people, he encouraged people, he went to the cross, he died. Jesus got stuff done. Yes, he did study, and he got stuff done.

Christianity is following in the footsteps of Christ. That’s why two of our vision statements say “Live like Jesus” and “love without measure”. James says “Know the word, do the word.” And look at our other two vision statements, “learn our faith” and “Lead to make a difference.”

And be careful some people when getting excited about serving God can unconsciously communicate that knowing the word of God is bad and doing the word of God is good, it’s that knowing the word of God without doing the word of God is bad, doing the word of God without growing in your knowledge of the word of God is bad, and what is good is both knowing and doing the word of God, like two pedals on the bike are good.

And that is what James says.

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<sup>22</sup> But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. <sup>23</sup> For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. <sup>24</sup> You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. <sup>25</sup> But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.

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James 1:19-25

I was walking down memory lane with someone a while back and I was reminiscing about the amount of time I spent on my bike as a kid. In my day, my bike was the equivalent of computer games, it could take me places I had never been before. We lived down on the Matua peninsula, it wasn't as developed as it is now and there were many places for young boys to explore and ride bikes.

I really loved to be on my bike, it made me feel free and independent. I'd go to the shop, go to the beach, go to the park, go to soccer practice, go hang out with my friends, we created race tracks and jumps, it was great fun. With a bike you could go almost anywhere, as long as you were committed to pedalling.

My bike wasn't the flashiest in town, it was an old Raleigh Twenty, a hand me down from my brothers, I wanted a chopper with a flag, but no such luck. I needed to maintain the old bike and that was part of the fun in some ways. At one stage I had trouble with my pedals, one of them broke, so I was left with a bike with only one pedal. I was still determined to ride it until I got a new pedal. Have you ever tried riding a bike with one pedal? It's not easy, it's not easy to make progress, the whole rhythm thing doesn't work, especially up hill, which is virtually impossible, you don't make much progress at all. The balance of two pedals is vital to riding a bike. Keep that image in your mind.

We have been going through James in a series called Faith in Action and today we look at James 1:19–27. Here's what I want you to think about as we go through this whole section of Scripture: The Christian life is like the balance of two pedals on a bike. Know the Word, Do the Word. Know the Word, Do the Word.

### Know the Word, Do the Word

Some of you are know-the-word people. You read books, you've got footnotes in your bible, you underline, you memorise, you debate, study, meditate, you're totally nerdy.

You will know Acts 17:11 off by heart

*And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul's message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth.*

Right now you are probably double-checking everything I'm saying on the Internet to see if it's true. Know the word, know the word, know the word.

And some of you are do-the-word people. Real practical, real faithful, real consistent. You are not so keen on the books because you did that at school, and

swore never to look at another book! You love to serve, to help, to get out there and walk the talk, and make a difference.

Know the word, do the word, know the word, do the word. Remember those pedals of the bike that keep it moving forward. When I came across this illustration I thought, that is a good illustration—keep it in your mind for the rest of the sermon. Actually for the rest of the sermon series, actually the rest of your life. James is going to teach us that we need to know the word of God and do the word of God.

### James learned this from his big brother

James learned this from his big brother Jesus. If you weren't here a few weeks ago, James, the author of this letter, is a pastor at this point but growing up, his big brother was Jesus Christ.

They would have sat together in the synagogue, their equivalent of church every week, hearing the lesson, talking or maybe arguing, about it on the way home. "Jesus, what did you think about what the rabbi said? "James, what did you think? "What are we going to do? "What does this mean?"

These are guys who probably shared a bedroom together growing up. They would have sat at the dinner table, praying, talking, with the rest of the family. They went to school together. So James watched his big brother Jesus grow to know the word of God and then do the word of God.

He even heard Jesus say this very thing. In Luke 11:28. Jesus said, "*But even more blessed are all who hear the word of God and put it into practice.*"

So, from Jesus' actions, how he lived his life, and his words, the things that he taught, James learned what to do with the bible, God's word, the most important book written in the history of the world. This is the word of God.

This is so incredibly important because we live in a world that is filled with words about God: philosophy, religion, speculation of various sorts and kinds. Some of it is truthful, and helpful, and much of it is not. This is not a word about God. This is the word of God, and so it is vital for us to determine, "What do we do with this?" What do we do with this word of God? And following in Jesus' example and instruction, James says, "Know it and do it." And so we start at James 1:19, where he begins with his urging that we "know the word".

### Know that you are God's beloved

"*Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters.*" That's the Christians, brothers and sisters in Christ. They're much loved. They have an inheritance. They carry the family name and legacy.

*James 1:19-27*

*19 Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. 20 Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires. 21 So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls.*

He starts with this: “Understands this. Know this!” He’s trying to grab our attention. He’s trying to grab our mind and to open it up to receive an amazing truth from God. Know this, listen to this, because we as the church sometimes want to rush to the “things to do and not do”, we can rush right to the “to-do list”. And he’s saying, “Don’t do that, just yet. “We’ll get to what you should do and not do, but first, there’s something you need to know.”

He says, “Know this, my dear brothers and sisters, my beloved.” It all starts with the love of God. Receive this. Sit in it for a moment. “You are God’s beloved. Brothers and sisters, if you’re a Christian, you are God’s beloved.

See, my wife is here. She’s my beloved. God loves you like that. My kids are my beloved, I love them to bits. God loves you like that. God loves you, the Bible says, like a husband loves his wife, like a father loves his kids. God loves you. This establishes our identity, and out of our identity comes our activity. Before he tells us what to do, he tells us who you are. It’s very important to get that right. The result is that when we obey God, when we do what God tells us to do, we’re not working to gain the love of God, we are working because of the love of God.

This is the difference between Christianity and all other religions. Christianity begins with the love of God. God can’t love you anymore, and no matter what you do, God won’t love you any less. This changes our obedience.

So, James starts with, “My dear brothers and Sisters, know this.” You are loved. His love is a gift.

Then he speaks of a second gift that God wants to give us and we need to receive, and it’s the word of God (verse 21). So, it’s the love of God and the word of God. He starts with these two gifts.

### **The Word that saves**

He talks of the word of God, “*humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls.*”

Now, I am not much of a gardener, but I do dabble and bit. The whole concept is pretty amazing, being able to take seeds, and even more amazing take just a cutting, place them in the ground, and then with a bit of water, a bit of nourishment, and a bit of time, they’ll spring to life, and something beautiful will come into existence,

something fruitful will happen? God is like a gardener. God wants to take his word, and he wants to plant it in our soul so that there could be life and fruit that proceeds out of our relationship with him. And so what he’s telling us is that the word of God has power of life within it.

So God says, “Know this: My love is a gift. “My word is a gift. “We’re going to do something together that is wonderful, and your life is going to change.”

### **Ways to hinder growth**

But James says be aware of things that with trip you up, that will stop you growing. *You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.*

- Being quick to listen is something to develop. A bad listener is often a person who’s distracted, there’s so much going on in their mind, they’re so frazzled and frantic that they’re not listening.

Chances are most of us have been accused of not listening!” Some of us have got information, we’ve got truth—maybe even God’s word—we just don’t listen to it. Either we don’t hear it, or we don’t ponder it, we don’t consider it, we don’t receive it, we don’t plant it.

What we don’t need is more information, we need more receptivity.

- Slow to speak - One commentator I read said don’t be a chatter box, well I don’t think it is about how much chatter we do, it’s more the connection between the quick to listen and the slow to get angry, the best way of achieving both of these is to think before you speak, listen before you speak, control your emotions before you speak, be slow to speak.
- The third hindrance James says is some of us have short fuse, quick to anger. He is not saying anger is wrong, but engage the brain, listen, and make sure you have yourself under control, he goes on to say...

*“21 So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives”?*

How much? All. All. He’s saying, “Don’t segment your life, surrender all your life. “Don’t clean up part of your life and allow filth and evil in another part of your life.”

- The fourth hindrance is compromise. The compromiser is the person who is inconsistent, and we might call them hypocritical. These are people who will not submit their whole life to the Lord. Instead, they will segment their life to the Lord. “And this part, I’m going to keep that in order. “And this part, well, I kind of enjoy that.

And so the first thing James is saying is, “You need to know the word of God.” I want you to think about: how well do you know the word of God and what might be hindering this great gift of God being planted in your life to cause beauty and fruitfulness?

And James transitions from “Know the word” to “Do the word,” because it’s not just enough to know the word. We have to do the word, otherwise we end up like this story.

### **Did You Take The Rubbish Out?**

I’ll give you story, a parable, not a bible parable, a today parable. Imagine a dad who gets up early in the morning before the kids go to school and he realizes, “Bother, it’s rubbish day, the bins in the house are all full, the bin in the kitchen is overflowing. I don’t have time so I need my kids to deal with it all and take the rubbish out.”

So, dad goes back in, writes a note and he starts, “I love you guys. You’re the best kids in the world. I wouldn’t trade you for anybody, “It is rubbish day. The bins are full and they stink. I need you kids to take all the rubbish out of the house and take it to the big Wheelie Bin, drag it out to the curb because the rubbish truck is coming today. I really need you to do this before you go to school. Love, Dad.” PS I’ll give you a hug when I get home.”

Kids get up, read the letter, go to school, and come home. Dad comes home from work, there’s no wheelie bin out on the curb. Drives up, bin is overflowing. Goes in the house, still the smell, rubbish everywhere. Nobody cleaned out anything.

Family meeting—“Hey kids, sit on the couch. We got to talk about this. Did you kids get my letter?”

“Yeah Dad, it was amazing. The prose was fantastic. “The imagery was astounding, and the punctuation was perfect. “All the verbs were in the right tense. “Dad, you are a very good writer, and we really got the heart behind the letter because you were so loving toward us.

“So yeah, Dad, we took it very seriously. So much so we skipped school. We spent the whole day studying the letter. We never really thought about rubbish like this. We started researching how other nations dispose of their rubbish, and it got us into other fields of study—carbon footprint, recycling. It really got us thinking how we could study rubbish removal in a gospel-centred way. So actually, Dad, we brought some friends over. We’ve spent the whole day going through the Scriptures, examining this issue of rubbish because we, frankly, overlooked it until your note. And what we found is that this is a theme in the whole Bible. Dad, we found in the Old Testament that they would take their rubbish outside of the city. And that rubbish was, like, symbolic of sin, and it needs to be away, a long way away. Dad, we learned that they would take it to a place called Gehenna, and they would set it on fire to burn it, and that that was imagery for hell. That was amazing, Dad. We didn’t know this.”

“And then we looked at the New Testament. First we did Old Testament Hebrew word studies on rubbish, and then we did New Testament Greek word studies on rubbish, Dad, with all of our friends. We had a small group, and we found that the language of rubbish is used in the New Testament. Like, did you know in Philippians, Paul says that all religion is like rubbish. That was shocking to us. So, we started a website. We’ve actually launched a ministry where we’re trying to educate people about the theology of rubbish.”

Dad’s question is, “But did you take the rubbish out?” “oh, sorry Dad. “We were too busy doing word studies in small groups on rubbish.”

I’m sure you get the point. We can turn Christianity into an academic exercise instead of a lifestyle, into something that we study rather than someone we become. We can use the Bible for information instead of transformation.

### **Be Doers, Not Hearers Only**

Now, am I saying that study’s bad? No definitely not. I’m not saying that studying is bad. I’m saying that study alone is bad.

So, James’ frustration is, he’s got a bunch of religious people, he’s pastoring a big church in Jerusalem, he’s a grown man, he’s been doing it a while, he’s been teaching these people, and they have a lot of knowledge. They know a lot, but they’re not doing a lot. And he’s very frustrated because his big brother Jesus wasn’t like that. Jesus didn’t just shut himself up in some academic institution and just study all day. He didn’t even work as a pastor. He worked a job as a carpenter, he started a ministry, he fed people, he healed people, he taught people, he prayed for people, he served people, he rebuked people, he encouraged people, he went to the cross, he died. Jesus got stuff done. Yes, he did study, and he got stuff done.

Christianity is following in the footsteps of Christ. That’s why two of our vision statements say “Live like Jesus” and “love without measure”. James says “Know the word, do the word.” And look at our other two vision statements, “learn our faith” and “Lead to make a difference.”

And be careful some people when getting excited about serving God can unconsciously communicate that knowing the word of God is bad and doing the word of God is good, it’s that knowing the word of God without doing the word of God is bad, doing the word of God without growing in your knowledge of the word of God is bad, and what is good is both knowing and doing the word of God, like two pedals on the bike are good.

And that is what James says.

*James 1:22–25,*

<sup>22</sup> But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. <sup>23</sup> For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. <sup>24</sup> You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. <sup>25</sup> But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.