

James 1:19-27 ~ Listening and Doing ~ Leader's Guide

1. What is the wisdom expressed in Verse 1:19? (Proverbs 10:19, 10:32, 12:18, 13:3, 15:31-32)

The verse is very clear in saying that you should first listen before speaking or becoming angry. The mention of anger suggests that James is talking about situations where there might be conflict or a difference of opinion. Many Proverbs mention the virtue of listening before speaking for several different reasons (see Proverbs 10:19, 10:32, 12:18, 13:3, 15:31-32) but probably the most important one is that when you are speaking you are not listening, not only to other people but also not to the Lord. Proverbs 10:19 – When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.

Proverbs 12:18 – Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Proverbs 13:3 – He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin.

2. What are some characteristics of a wise person who you know?

Wisdom is characterized by many things: purpose, integrity, discernment, reverence for God (or, as is sometimes said, fear of the Lord), diligence, heeding correction (learning from mistakes), humility, kindness, prudence, righteousness, understanding, and fairness. This is not a complete list; there are many other characteristics (see Proverbs).

3. In verse 1:19 is James saying that anger is wrong?

Not necessarily. There are several instances when Jesus became angry (at the money lenders in the temple, for example - Matthew 21:12-13) as did Paul (at fortune telling by the slave girl - Acts 16:16-18). There are sometimes good reasons to get angry, but James is counseling us to consider these reasons carefully and not to 'fly off the handle' as that kind of anger 'does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.'

4a. What does anger lead us into? (Proverbs 14:17a, 29:22, Psalm 37:8, Colossians 3:21)

Anger can lead to sin and evil. For example, in anger we may speak and act too quickly with little regard for the consequences. It takes a long time to build up a relationship with another person or to establish a good reputation but a single angry word can tear it down in just a few seconds. What you say when you are angry cannot easily be turned around—just saying "I'm sorry" doesn't reestablish a friendship or rebuild a reputation. Sometimes, by listening and hearing the other person's point of view, we can see other ways to defuse a bad situation.

Proverbs 14:17a – A quick-tempered man does foolish things,

Proverbs 29:22 – An angry man stirs up dissension, and a hot-tempered one commits many sins.

Psalm 37:8 – Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil.

Colossians 3:21 – Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become

discouraged.

4b. How does that resonate with you personally?

You might want to share with the group a time when you got very angry and ventilated it. Generally, ventilation only reinforces anger and makes a bad situation worse. It accomplishes nothing positive in either person.

5. What is the command in verse 1:21?

Get rid of immorality and evil. Accept God's love, direction, and commands.

6. How do we shed "moral filth and evil" (NIV)? (See 1 John 1:9)

It is impossible to live a perfect, sinless life by ourselves, no matter how hard we try. So we must confess our sins and weaknesses to God, ask for His forgiveness, and trust in Him to forgive us and take our sins away.

1 John 1:9 – If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

7a. In verses 1:21, 22 and 23, James refers to the "word." To what does that refer? (James 1:18, Jeremiah 31:33-34)

We frequently think of the 'word' as referring to the Bible. But remember, the New Testament was not written when James was writing his letter, however James was, in fact, familiar with the prophecies of Jeremiah. From James' reference to moral filth, we can see that he is using 'word' to refer to the declaration of the Lord in Jeremiah 31:33-34 where He says, "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.... No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me." This is elaborated upon in Hebrews 8:8-12 where the author explains that while the written law of Moses was useful, it didn't have the power to transform people's inner attitudes. Something more was needed. God would have to change His people from the inside out, putting the law into their hearts through His Holy Spirit. So in these verses, James is actually referring to the 'word' as the Holy Spirit which he calls in verse 18 the 'word of truth' or God's message to us.

In different translations of the Bible, James (verse 1:18) speaks of 'first fruits' (NIV) or 'special people' (CEV). The original Greek text says, 'the first of his creatures.' The law of Moses taught that the first born of all animals were special and belonged to the Lord. So James is saying that because we are special to God and belong to Him, He has placed the word of truth (or Holy Spirit) in each of us.

7b. How are we to react to that 'word' and what are we to do with it?

James admonishes us to accept, listen to, and obey this word (the Holy Spirit) which God planted in us.

8. What does being a doer of the word prove about us? (Acts 26:20)

In Acts, Luke records Paul's words to the Gentiles, "Stop sinning and turn to God! Then prove what you have done by the way you live." (CEV) So being a doer proves that you are a believer.

9. Why does James use such a preposterous analogy in verses 1:23-24?

He is trying to make a point in the strongest way possible. He is saying, in effect, that after God chose us as His special people and placed the Holy Spirit in each of us that only a moron would turn away and not accept and follow God's directions.

10. What is the 'law' that James refers to in verse 1:25 and why is it perfect?

Don't confuse this with the law of Moses. It is the law as referred to in Jeremiah 31:33-34, "the law in their hearts." What James is speaking of is God's perfect plan to bless us and give us eternal life if we simply believe in Him and continue to obey the Holy Spirit who lives in each one of us.

11. How does obedience provide freedom? (Isaiah 55:7-9, Luke 6:46-49)

Isaiah says that if we forsake our sinful thoughts and actions, the Lord will have mercy on us. Luke (and Matthew 7:24-27) record Jesus as saying that the person who does not do what he says is like a man who builds his house on sand and has it washed away in a heavy big storm. Conversely, the man who is obedient and puts the words of the Lord into action has built a strong foundation and is free from worrying about his house washing away.

Isaiah 55:7-9 – ⁷ Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. ⁸ "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. ⁹ "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

12. What is the difference between knowing and doing God's will?

God does not want us to simply read the Bible, go to Bible studies, discuss the meaning of passages with others, and listen to sermons. As the Bible says in several places, even demons recognize the power of God and know His will, but they do not do His will, which is what He asks of us.

13. What freedom or blessing does doing God's will provide? (Romans 8:2)

Romans 8:2 – "The Holy Spirit will give you the life that comes from Christ Jesus and will set you free from sin and death." (CEV)

14. What does the world think that the word 'religion' means? When someone is described as 'religious' on the street or in a movie, what is meant?

‘Religion’ is often used as a term of mockery. It is often applied to someone who is impractical or someone who does not pursue worldly goals. Rarely is the word religion used by authors or screen writers in a positive way. Most often a ‘religious’ person is portrayed either as a Catholic priest or some geeky fool. For example, in a best-selling novel, Patricia Cornwell has this typical dialog:

“I assume they are religious.”

“Oh, yeah. Broad River is one of those fundamentalist places. The kids start the day singing ‘Sin Shall Not Have Dominion Over Me.’ ”

“No kidding?”

15. In 1:26-27, what does James say is the key characteristic of religious behavior?

James says that keeping a tight rein on one's tongue is vital. Without doing that, he says, everything else you do is worthless. Interestingly, he is saying that what you do not say is more important than what you do say. In other words, the potential for your words to hurt is greater than the potential for your words to help. Help, he goes on to say, is better shown by your actions than your words.

16. If we do not control our tongue, who are we fooling?

We're certainly not fooling God. Are we fooling the person we're talking to? Probably not. The only person that you might be fooling is yourself. And if you start lying to yourself, you might as well not have any religion or faith at all—you're just going to be polluted by worldly values.

17. How do we know that someone is a believer? (Titus 3:8, 1 Peter 1:13-16)

By what he does, not what he says. By attempting to be holy in all you do. By asking yourself and following the answer to the question, “what would Jesus do?” By setting an example.

Titus 3:8 – This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

1 Peter 1:13-16 – ¹³Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. ¹⁴As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

18. What does James say is the ‘religion’ that God accepts?

1) look after others who are needy and 2) keep yourself from being polluted by worldly values.