**Do the Word**



**James 1:22–25**

**Bro Kory Cunningham**

Before I start, I want you to imagine that I own a company and you work for me. In fact, you are like my number one person in the company. I decide to expand the company into a new market. We are going to put an office in Australia, so I am going to move and take my family to Australia for six months to start the new branch. I show up to you one day and I say, “I am going to leave you in charge. You are going to run the company stateside and I am going to go to Australia to make sure we launch this thing well and the company does good. I am not going to leave you alone, don’t worry, I will write to you weekly with instructions on what you need to do to make sure things get done and the company goes forward, and that you will be ok.” I say my goodbyes, I leave, and I leave you in charge of the company.

Months go by. Six months go by and I come back to the states after launching the new branch in Australia. I decide to show up unannounced to the company that I have left you in charge of running. As I pull into the parking lot, I am shocked because all the landscape is going crazy; the yard has not been mowed. There are some broken windows and trash outside the doors. I cannot imagine because it is not how I left things. I walk into the door, I look around in different places, and I see people doing various things. One person is playing Solitaire, someone is watching TV, and some people are in the break room playing Ping-Pong. There is trash in the hallways. I look at the client list and there are no clients on the list, no businesses have been contacted, nothing has been done. You can image how I feel at this point. I have been gone for six months and I have just got back. I come into your office and now I am face to face with you. You greet me with open arms and say, “Welcome home, glad to have you!” I am shocked that you aren’t running from me right now. I say, “What happened?” You say, “Well, what do you mean?” I say, “Did you not get my letters?” You say, “Oh yeah we got all of your letters. In fact, we love your letters. In fact, we loved your letters so much, that every Friday we have a study of your letters. We love them. We study them. You won’t believe this, but some people love your letters so much they have actually started small groups where they discuss your wonderful letters and all the things you told us to do. Guess what, you won’t believe this, but there are a few people in this company that love your letters so much they have memorized them! They memorized whole paragraphs of your letters. One guy has memorized whole letters. He has memorized a few of the letters in entirety. He often stands up and he quotes your letters to us verse by verse, line by line. Oh, we got your letters. We love your letters. We study your letters! We memorize your letters! Our hearts just long for another letter that you send.” Of course, I am standing here, looking at you while you are thinking you have done exactly what I have wanted you to do and the only thing I can say to you is, “Yeah but, you did not do anything my letters said to do. You read them. You memorized them. You talked about them, but you did not do them! The entire point of the letters was to do. I wrote those letters so that you would DO them, not just read them.”

Chuck Swindoll uses that illustration to really point out the problem James gets to in James chapter 1. I think it is a problem that we often struggle with. The problem is we often read the Word and we hear the Word, and we think by hearing and reading we are being faithful. In fact, we are supposed to do the Word, not just read it, not just study it, not just memorize it. We are commanded by God to do the Word. That is what James is going to try to get us to do this morning. It is really simple. Do the Word. That is the whole sermon in a nutshell. DO THE WORD. Let’s see how James tells us and compels us to do the Word.

**Scripture**

***“But be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.”***

We opened up with a problem. I left you in charge of a company and you read, studied, memorized, but you did not do. Perhaps, when some of you were hearing that illustration you thought that is actually how you treat the Bible. You read it. You think about it. You say you love it, but actually, you don’t implement it into your life. You don’t actually do what the Word says.That is what James is getting at. He wants us not to be only a hearer but a doer of the Word. He is going to explain this by giving us a command, an illustration, and then a blessing. We are going to look at James’s pattern. Notice with me in verse 22 he starts out with, “But be doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” He is really straightforward. Be doers of the Word. Don’t just hear it, actually do it. He says,actually, if you are just a hearer you are actually deceived. This word, deception, has come up several times in our study of James. We can be deceived into thinking God is bad when life is bad. Here, James says we can be deceived in thinking hearing the Word is the same as doing the Word.

We have had this thought of the Word, it has been coming up over and over, because in the sermons we have preached we see God formed us through the Word. He birthed us by the Word. We are now first fruits to act in accordance with this Word. Last week, he told us to put off and put on based on the implanted Word. That Word that is in us, we should be putting off sin and putting on righteousness. We have this repetitiveness of the Word. Now, James is pausing and saying…*hold on a second because I don’t want you to miss this. We are talking about the Word, and you might think I mean just come and listen to sermons, just go and read a couple of verses. That is not what I am talking about! I am talking about not just hearing the Word but doing the Word*. James says if you just hear you can be deceived. Here is the truth, every time you hear a sermon, every time you read the Bible, you are in danger of being deceived. Have you ever thought about that? There is danger in hearing a sermon. There is danger in reading your Bible. The danger is that you think because you heard it, because you read it, you are good. You think…oh I heard a sermon about that, I read a verse about that, so that means now you are good to go in that, you have done it. But James is saying don’t be deceived, you actually have to do what the scriptures say.

MacArthur talks about these words, this ‘hearer only.’ He says in the Greek culture it is like somebody going to a concert and listening to a singer. You go to a concert to be entertained. You go to a concert to just hear. You are not taking the singers words and applying them to your life. He says a modern-day illustration would be taking a college class, but you audit the class. You are in the class, you hear the material, but you are not writing a paper, you are not responsible for it, you are not putting together a project, you are just hearing information. Whether you do it or not really doesn’t matter. That is the hearer only. When you go to the Bible as a hearer only, it is like you are going to a concert. You are just listening. You know this is what you should do. You are coming, you are hearing, and you are reading because you should, but you are not reading for the intent of actually going and applying it to your life.

I think what we see in James is really the great Baptist sin, and I can say that because I have been a Baptist all of my life. Baptist typically struggle with this verse because we are really good at hearing the Bible, we are really good at saying we love the Bible, we are really good at cherishing the Bible, but sometimes we forget to actually *do* the Bible. It is more than just hearing and reading. It is more than just going to a small group and studying. It is actually applying into your life what is being told. The command is not just hear the Bible, but do the Bible. Become a Word doer. That is what James wants in your life, that you would be a Word doer and he is going to give us an illustration to help show the problem and help show what we need to do in light of our new command, which is…do the Word. That is our command. Don’t just hear it, actually do it. When you walk out the door, put the Word into your life and have it start changing your life. That is the command.

Let’s look at the illustration James gives to help see the problem that we often face. It is often a problem of forgetfulness. Look at verses 23–24, “For if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.” So, if you are a hearer only, you are like someone who looks at a mirror. For us to get this illustration we have to walk back into the shoes of the people that James was actually writing to. When we think about a mirror, we think about the mirror that has glass and it gives a perfect reflection of ourselves, but that is not the mirror in first century culture. The mirrors that they had in first century culture were polished metal. It would show you a reflection of yourself, but it was very dim, very blurry. You would have to really intently look at it to really see who you were. Few people actually owned mirrors. You did not wash your hands in the morning and brush your teeth looking at a reflection of yourself. You might catch a glimpse of yourself out in culture or when you went to your rich neighbor’s house who could afford to have a polished glass or metal mirror. Another thing we cannot comprehend is there were no pictures back in that day. The people that James was writing to had never seen a photograph of themselves. Only the richest of the rich could get a painting of themselves, so only a few had paintings of themselves. There were no selfies, no phones in their pocket, not social media profiles where they could look at all the time. If you lived in James’s day, the reality is that it was possible you had no idea what you actually look like. You could walk through life having no clue what you actually looked like, so that is context. They understood a mirror was something that you had to actually look at intently to figure out it was you because you may have never seen yourself before. It would take a while to remember and figure out who exactly you were. The illustration works pretty well in James’s day. Ifyou are a hearer only of the Bible, and not a doer of the Bible, you are like a person who walks up to a polished metal thing called a mirror. You look at it, glance at it, and then walk away.Then someone shows you a picture of yourself and you don’t recognize yourself. The problem is you don’t remember yourself because it was just a glance, a look. It wasn’t an intense study. It wasn’t a looking to remember. There was no application. There was no change in your life based on what you saw. You caught a glimpse, you went about your day, and you forgot what you looked like.

What is the point of the mirror illustration? It is a little harder for us to get because we have selfies, we have mirrors, we all know what we look like, so it takes a little bit longer for us to grasp. But the point of the illustration is forgetfulness. If you are a hearer only, not a doer of the Bible, you are a forgetter. You forget what the Bible said. You forget that you are actually supposed to do what it says. You are like a person who looks in the mirror and then forgets what you look like.

 Have you ever had that friend who had something on their face? You try to tell them politely that they have something on their face. Maybe you are out with one of your girlfriends and she has lipstick on her face. You want to be polite, but she has it on her teeth, so you say, “Why don’t you go to the bathroom for a second. Why don’t you go powder your nose?” Your friend leaves and comes back and smiles and the lipstick is still all over her teeth. You are not sure how to say this nicely, so you say, “Why don’t you just go back.” She goes back to the bathroom and comes back again and there is lipstick still all over her teeth. Or maybe you have a friend who has a booger in his nose. Everyone can see it, but he does not see it. You say, “Hey, why don’t you just go to the bathroom and check yourself out for a minute.” He goes, comes back, but it is still there. You are like…*how do I tell him this without being obvious and tell everyone else?* The problem is your friend goes and looks and sees the lipstick, sees the booger, but then immediately turns and thinks…*wait, why did they send me in here? I don’t know, so I am just going to go back out*. You see what is wrong, but immediately you forget and don’t care about it and go on with your life.

That is the picture here. That is what James is trying to say, and that is what many of us do with the Bible. We read it, we hear it, we see it, and we might think for a moment that we need to change, we need to repent, we need to do. We feel a little bit of conviction, but then we turn and walk out and completely forget it. We just go on doing the exact same things we have always done. We don’t do the Word. We don’t apply the Word. We read about honoring everyone, and then we go on social media and then purposefully dishonor other human beings, other image bearers of God. We are called to bear one another’s burdens, yet we completely ignore when the people around us are brokenhearted. We read about being pure and pursuing purity while looking at things that are completely impure. We read about loving our neighbor, yet we completely ignore those who are around us. We read the great commission, but we never try to actually fulfill it in our daily lives by being a witness for the sake of the gospel. We read ‘do not gossip,’ but we cannot wait to go and tell everything we just heard to all of our friends. See, we read it, we hear it, we know it, but we don’t do it. James says that is a problem. He says don’t be a hearer only, be a doer of the Word. He gives an illustration that shows us the problem is we often forget. We hear, we read, and we forget this is actually supposed to impact my life. Like in the company example at the beginning, the letter was supposed to cause me to do things. I cannot just read it; I have to do it.

Now James is going to really lean in and try to get us to become a doer of the Word by showing us that doing the Word actually brings blessing. This is what we are going to lean into on this next set of verses. Look with me in verse 25, it says this, “But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.” Did you hear that? He will be blessed. How? In his doing. It is the doer who will be blessed.

I have a Beachbody app on my phone, yet I don’t have a beach body. There is a reason I don’t have a beach body. There are often times when I click on the app, I scroll through all the workout plans (and there is a ton of workout plans), and I will actually click play and watch the first few minutes of a workout plan. I see the guy doing his thing, telling me to do my thing, and I am watching thinking that looks good…but then I turn it off. I have had this Beachbody app on my phone for over a year now and I still don’t have a beach body, and I am beginning to wonder why. I think the reason is pretty obvious, right. You cannot just push play and expect to have any results when it comes to any sort of a workout plan or workout app or workout program. It is not just pushing play and watching these people workout that is going to get me into tiptop shape. I am not going to get in shape watching these people workout. I cannot just push play, I have to actually get down and do pushups. I have to do what they are doing in order for anything to happen in my actual life.

In the same way, that is what James is trying to say. You can’t just push play, you can’t just read and hear; you have to do what the scriptures say if you want to experience the blessing that God has for you*.* If you want to experience life, abundant life in Christ Jesus, you have to do what the scriptures say. Doing is where we find the blessing, and notice back to what James said in that verse, it is “the one who looks.” That is an important part. The person who is a doer is also a looker. Because there is a ditch that we can fall into, and that is to just forget the Bible and just go live a good life because that is really what God wants. That is very popular. You see it all over our new hip Christian culture––Let’s forget verses, let’s forget what the Bible says, and lets just live in the Spirit (and often that becomes the spirit of the world). We saylet’s just be good people and say it is what Jesus wants us to do. We walk in the Spirit but we leave the Bible behind. That is not what James is telling us to do. He is not saying just go live in the Spirit and be good, but forget the Bible. No, he says the blessing comes from the doer, but the doer first has to look at the Bible. You cannot walk in the Spirit apart from the Word of God. It is the Word AND the Spirit that will cause us to be a doer. Those things cannot be separated.

So what do we see in James’s exhortation for us to be a blessed doer? Notice what he tells us. He says the one who looks “into the perfect law, the law of liberty.” My first question waswhy did James use law here? It seems kind of strange, right? He has been talking about the Word. We are birthed by the Word, we have the implanted Word in us, and he wants us to be a doer of the Word. But then, he says if you want to do the Word, it takes looking at the law. Why would he change law here? Why wouldn’t he just say the one who looks at the Word, the good Word, the perfect Word? Why does he say the law? I think it is because the law brings into our minds those things that God actually told us to do. We are talking about those things that God said do this and don’t do that. He is bringing that law imagery and covenant commands that God gave to His people. If you are going to be blessed, you have to first look at the law, those things that God has said to do in His Word. Notice how he talks about the law. This is extremely important. He does not just say the law; he says the “perfect” law, the “law of liberty.” What is he trying to say there when he says the perfect law, the law of liberty? When he says the perfect law, he is really saying don’t just go to the Old Testament and get some laws and try to obey them. Think about the perfect law. The perfect law means the law that has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. We are not taking commands and trying to obey them, we are seeing how Jesus Christ defines and fulfills the law. And because of what Jesus did on the cross for us, the law is not condemnation to us; the law is freedom for us. He calls it the law of liberty. This law that we now know, the commands––what God tells us to do––it is not condemnation anymore; it is actually liberty now. It is our freedom. James is trying to say be a doer of the Word and know that the Word through Jesus Christ, the perfect Word, the fulfilled Word and fulfilled law, it is a law of liberty. It is a law of grace. It is a law that Jesus Christ empowers us to become doers of.

We think about the law, the Old Testament, or the Word, and Psalm 119:11 says this, “Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD!” We have that same blessing. If you want a blessing, walk in the law. That is what James is saying. If you want a blessing, be a doer of the law. Do the law, walk in the law. How do we see this as a perfect law, as a law of liberty not a law of condemnation? I don’t know about you, but when I see the word, blameless, I get a little fidgety because I know I am not blameless. If I want to be blessed, I have to be blameless. But there is a problem…I am not blameless. So, how do we understand this is a perfect law, as a law of liberty? We understand it through Jesus Christ. How do we see this law through Jesus Christ? The one who is blameless is the one who is in Jesus Christ. In Christ, I am blameless; therefore, I have the blessing; and in Christ, through the Spirit, I can walk in the ways of the law. Do you see how by inserting Jesus into this command, it makes it a blessing that I can actually obey not a condemnation that I fall under? That is what James wants us to see. If we are going to be doers of the Word, we have to do it in Christ.

We are going to think about how we can be doers of the Word, because the command is simple––do the Word. That is what James wants us to do. How are we going to do that? If you are going to do the Word, here is step number one. You have to know that the Bible is undoable apart from Christ. You have to know when you read verses that you cannot obey this verse apart from the grace, goodness, and power of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here is the first lie that we believe when we try to obey the Bible: I can obey the Bible on my own. That is the first lie we believe. I have the power and the ability in myself to obey whatever the Word says. If you believe you can obey the Bible in your own power, it will lead you to two places. It will lead you to either pride or to despair. If you try to obey the Bible in your own power, when you do good you will get prideful. Pride is a sin, so now you have sinned. If you can’t obey what the Bible says, then it leads you to despair, believing you are no good, God does not love you, or you are just an old sinner who cannot obey. Trying to obey in your flesh, in your own power, leads to pride or despair, but if you obey the Bible in Jesus and through Jesus, it leads to happy humbleness. You are humble because you know it is not you, but Christ in you. The only reason you can obey it is because of Christ, and it makes you happy because in Christ you can actually obey. You can do what the scriptures say because Jesus gives you the ability to obey. The blessing is for the one who does, but the only way we can do is through the Lord Jesus. The lie is that you can obey the Bible in yourself. The truth is the Word is undoable apart from Christ. Only in Christ can you do what God tells you to do.

The second lie we believe is this: Jesus saves us from the Bible. That is a lie that we often believe. I will explain how this works out. You read Scripture and you think…*Uh oh, I am in big trouble because I don’t do any of this. I am really opposite of what the Bible tells me to do. But since Jesus died for me I am saved, and now I can just sit all I want. The Bible condemns me, Jesus paid my penalty, now I can ignore the Bible and do whatever I want because Jesus saved me from the requirements of the Bible. Jesus saved me from the Bible and I don’t have to obey the Lord anymore*. That is a lie we believe and it keeps us from obeying the Bible because the truth is Jesus saves us FOR the Bible. Jesus does not save us from the Bible; He saves us FOR the Bible. Jesus saves us so that in Him and through the Spirit, we now can do what the Bible commands us to do. See, in the Bible we find the good words of God and we find the life that God intended human beings to live. Jesus did not save us from this; He saved us so that we can now walk in the scriptures. We can do what the Bible says and live the abundant life Christ has for us. This is why James calls it the law of liberty. He is bringing in the gospel here. It is a law that is obeyed only through the gospel. The good news is at the cross we find both forgiveness for our disobedience AND power for our obedience. At the cross, we find forgiveness for our disobedience, but we also find power for our obedience. It doesn’t just save us from the Bible it compels us to be a doer of the Bible.

So the first thing we saw, if you want to be a doer of the Word, was you must understand that the Bible is undoable apart from Christ. You cannot do it apart from Jesus, that is why you need the gospel. You must be a gospel doer. It is in Christ through the Spirit that you can obey what the scriptures say. Now, the second thing we see if you want to be a doer of God’s Word is you have to believe the Bible is best for your life. If you don’t believe this, you will not become a doer of the Word. You have to believe the Bible is actually best for your life.

Jonathan Pennington is a New Testament scholar who just wrote a brand-new book called, Jesus the Great Philosopher, which I thought was a very odd title. I picked it up and began reading. In this book, he argues that when it comes to the New Testament, the New Testament and the whole Bible does not just picture Jesus as Lord and Savior, it also pictures Jesus as the great philosopher. What does he mean by philosopher? It is not a person who is in academia asking crazy questions that will never be answered. He is talking about philosopher in the ancient sense, of a person who is both living a way and showing a way of life that is actually the good. It is actually the best. What he argues is Jesus, in His life and by His Word, is showing us how to both see the world and be in the world to experience the good God has intended for us. Jesus, as a great philosopher, is showing us what abundant life is –– if you follow His life and His words, you will see the abundant life He has for you. But you have to believe that, take Him at His Word, and apply it to your life.

We love trying to find people and follow. That is why Instagram has people that have jobs just doing Instagram. Why? It is because we find a guru of fashion, fitness, or health, and we follow them and we watch. Here is what they say, here is how they live, so if I do this, I will have the good life, so I am going to be like them and get the good life. We follow, we watch, we participate, and we do what they do in pursuit of the good life. Here is what we need to know, not that that is bad, but that Jesus Christ, both in life and Word, shows us what the good life is, the life that is blessed in the Lord. It is not the life that maybe we would pick –– because this life is those who are persecuted are blessed, those who are last are first –– but it is a life that He both lived and shows. And Jesus says if you will come along with me and if you will, by the Spirit, walk in my Word, you will experience God’s blessing. If you are going to be a doer of the Word, you have to believe that what Jesus actually says is actually best for your life. You have to see Him not as only Savior who saved you from your sins, but see Him as the person who actually knows best for your life. What He says is actually the best thing, so you will take Him at His Word, and when you get to a command or a principle that you cannot obey you realize you cannot obey because you are trying in the flesh right now. So you submit to the Spirit, and by the Spirit, you walk in what Jesus has commanded you to do. It is not just hearing the Word; it is doing the Word that brings the blessing.

I want to give you two questions that you can ask when you read or hear the Bible that might help you become a doer and not just a hearer. Here are the two questions:

1. So what?
2. Now what?

When you hear this sermon, you can ask these questions when you leave. So what? Now what? In other Words, why does that matter? Why does what that guy just said from the Word matter? Why should I be a doer of the Word? So what…why does this matter to my life? You can actually start bringing application from the Scripture into your life. When you read a verse in your morning quiet time, you say to that verse, so what? So why does this matter? Why should I do this? You begin to ask the Lord to reveal to you why you should obey this verse. Why does this text matter? Why does it matter for your life?

Then you ask the question now what? Now what am I going to do? Every time we read the Scripture, we are not just learning information we are supposed to be learning what transformation looks like. We read and we hear, and we are asking so what? Now what? Now what do I actually do? Maybe at the end of this sermon you are thinking…now what? Well, maybe the now what is how can I stop just hearing and start doing? How can I not be like the guy on stage who pushes play on Beachbody and never does a pushup? He is not going to get any better. But am I doing the same thing in my daily reading? Am I doing the same thing in my walk with the Lord? I am pushing play, listening, and reading, but I am not actually doing what the Word says.

There is a difference in being a hearer of the Word and a doer of the Word, and that is what James is trying to press into. Don’t just hear, don’t just listen, don’t just read, actually do what the Word says! How are you going to become a doer? You have to first remember that the Word is undoable apart from Christ. It is in the gospel and by the gospel that you can obey what God has said to do. You cannot obey in yourself; it will only lead to pride or despair. You have to obey in the Lord Jesus Christ, walking in the Spirit, submitting to Him, praying to Him, asking for His grace and mercy to give you the power to do what He has commanded you to do. You can only do the Bible in Jesus Christ. The Bible is undoable apart from Christ, but in Christ you can do ALL things. If you are going to actually do this, you have to actually believe that the Bible is best for your life. The goal of the cross was not to save you from the Bible, to save you from the demands of God, but the cross is here to allow you to DO the demands of God because in the demands of God you find life and liberty and freedom. You read the Bible and you see the glory that is found there. You see the face of the Lord Jesus and you long to be more like Him because being more like Him is where true life is found.

James is going to beg us during this study not to be a hearer only. That is being deceived. Instead, be a doer. Do the Word. How? You do so by knowing it is best for your life. But how do you really do it? It is realizing that the only way to obey is through the obedience of Christ. Without Christ, you cannot. But in Christ, you can. In Christ, you can experience the life God intends for you to experience. Here is the deal. You cannot have the blessing without the pushups. You cannot have the blessing without doing. So don’t just hear, do. And when you do, don’t forget you can only do in Christ.