

How to Get the Most from God's Word - James 1:19-27

Introduction: Whenever we have our Gideon brothers come and tell of the blessings of their ministry of getting God's Word to the masses, I am always thrilled to hear the testimonies of how God has used His word through their ministry. And certainly, the greatest benefit of the Bible is that people's lives are changed. People are saved through God's Word because in God's Word, He reveals how to be saved.

But how can we get the most from God's Word? Surely it contains more than just how to be saved. Surely there is more in this blessed book that can help us lead better lives. So how can we glean from these pages more of the "goody" God intends for us to live by?

You know, some folks like to brag about how much they know about Scripture. They like to impress others with their trivial knowledge of the Bible. But then some simply show their plain ole ignorance of the Bible.

Once, a test of Bible knowledge was given to some high school seniors. Most of them failed the exam completely! For example, some thought Sodom and Gomorrah were lovers. Some thought Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were members of a band called "*The Gospels*." One said that Eve was created from an apple, and that the stories Jesus used in teaching were called parodies. More than 80 percent said that "*Cleanliness is next to godliness*" is in the Bible.

But teenagers are not alone. A Gallup poll conducted some years ago revealed that 60 percent of Americans did not know what "*the Holy Trinity*" was. And 66% couldn't say who delivered the Sermon on the Mount, while 79% couldn't name a single Old Testament prophet. Some are almost as confused as the little boy who wrote on his paper that "*the epistles were the apostles' wives*."

So what have you gained from your reading and study of God's Word? Have you benefited at all from anything you've read or studied? I hope you have because the Bible says that we can be blessed by knowing and practicing God's word. You can benefit from the Bible!

Some say that the Bible is an irrelevant, ancient, and out-of-date book. But it's anything but. The Bible is a very practical book, and everyone can get something from it. But how can you get the most from it? In our few moments tonight, let's look at some practical principles that can guide us in getting the most from God's Word. The first principle is this:

1. Accept the Word (19-21)

In vs. 21, James tells us to "*accept the word planted in you*." In other words, God is offering us the wisdom

of His all knowing character, and we have to cultivate a heart and life that welcomes it. And that kind of life is characterized by an attitude of humility and openness. Such a life must be prepared to receive the word just as soil is prepared to receive the seed.

To adequately prepare our hearts, James gives us three behaviors we need to model. These behaviors will enable us to accept the word and receive the most from it. The first thing is, we need to:

A. Slow down (19). We tend to travel in such a hurry that we miss most of the scenery along the way. James says that we should be quick to listen, but slow to speak and slow to become angry.

You can't be an effective listener if you are doing all the talking. Remember, God gave us two ears and only one mouth for a good reason. Often, we don't hear what someone is saying because we are not listening. We may ask them how they are doing, and we expect them to answer "*fine.*" That is what we are programmed to hear. If they start talking about their problems, we don't have time to listen. Sometimes we are like that with God. We don't take the time to really listen to Him speak. We need to slow down and listen. The next thing we need to do is:

B. Calm down (19). James tells us that we need to be slow to anger because our anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. So we need to calm down.

Have you ever tried to talk to an angry person? You can't do it because it's all one sided. When we are angry, we are looking to get even and sometimes to get ahead. And when we have resentment, or bitterness, and hatred in our hearts, they are barriers to communication. God cannot speak to you when you hold these attitudes in your heart., so we need to calm down so we can hear. Then James says that there are some things we need to:

C. Lay down (21) James tells us to "*get rid of all moral filth and...evil.*" Of course, these are things that will also keep us from from hearing God. We must lay it down throw it out of our lives and leave it alone. Are there things in your life today that you need to lay down? You will never be able to get the most from God's word that you need to until you do.

The next principle is that you must:

2. Apply the Word (22-25)

There are three ways to Apply God's Word to your life. First you have to:

A. Research It (25). In vs. 25, James speaks of the one "*who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom.*" Now he's not talking merely looking at God word. He is talking about studying it, examining it, and investigating it. These are all necessary elements in researching God's Word.

In other words, if we want to get the most from God's Word, we can't just glance at it occasionally, but we have to gaze into it regularly. I glance at the mirror every morning. But I'm not really looking very hard — unless I see something unusual. If I do, then I look a little closer. Then I want to take a good long look. I want to concentrate on what I am looking at. I want to make sure that I see and remember it. We should look at God's word that way. We should dig deeply for the truths that it contains. We should research it. Next, to apply God's word, we need to:

B. Reflect On It (Read 25). James tells us that we not only look intently at the word but we also review and reflect on this word. We are to continue to look into the word and remember what we have heard and read. In other words, meditate on it and memorize it. Unless we have studied God word, we're going to have a hard time making good decisions and wise choices in life. We'll be more susceptible to temptation. Jesus used God's Word to deal with the temptations Satan threw His way in the wilderness. And we must use God word the same way.

David wrote in Psalm 119:11: *"Your word have I hid (treasured) in my heart that I might not sin against you."* Getting the most from God's Word means you've memorized it so you can use it as your defense against the devil. To do that, we must reflect on the word. We must spend time in the word reading, studying, and memorizing it.

One other way we can apply the word is to:

C. Respond To It (Read 22). The word applies to us, and we need to do what it says. That is the basis upon which you will be blessed and receive the benefits of the word. If you're not willing to do the Word, don't expect to be blessed by the Word.

We are good at asking God to bless us, but the reality is, God won't bless us unless we've been obedient to His Word. James tells us that if we think that He will, we have deceived ourselves. He says that if we are not willing to put God's Word into practice we are like someone who glances in the mirror but really never sees what they look like.

Mirrors show us what we really look like. When I look into the mirror, I see a true reflection of myself. I may not want to acknowledge it or believe it, but it's there. You see, I would like to think that I see that guy Elaine married 34 years ago, 125 lbs, lots of hair, full of youthful good looks. But that's not reality. But most mornings I see what I want to see. I see, but I don't really see. And so, I can go away a thinking that I am still that lie, mean, fighting machine that I was at 20.

The Word of God will serve as a mirror to show you the truth about yourself. But it will only do you good if you apply it.

The principle James gives us for getting the most from God's Word is that you must:

3. Act on the Word (26-27)

In these verses, he's talking here of putting the Word of God to practical use. You see, you must not only respond to the word by acknowledging a need to do it, but you must find practical ways to actually do it. How do you do that? First, you have to:

A. Grab Your Tongue (26). That's right! James tells us that our religion is worthless unless we grab our tongue and keep it on a tight rein. He has already told us that we are to be slow to speak. But what he is saying here is different. Here he's saying that we need to control our speech. James knows that if we can learn to control our tongue, we can pretty well control the rest of our behavior as well. James goes on to tell us that if we want to act on the word we will learn to:

B. Give to Others (27). He says that practical religion is to look after orphans and widows in their distress. In other words, living out the word in a practical way will mean that we care about others.

People matter to God. And people should matter to us as well. One of the ways that we act on the Word is to have compassion for people and do something to help them. It doesn't have to be big. You won't be able to support them for life. But don't focus on what you can't do, but rather on what you can do. You can't do everything, but you can do something. And when you do, the Bible says people will see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. Finally, you need to:

C. Guard Your Life (27). One mark of true spirituality is to keep our lives clean. Guard it! Be careful! Watch what you do! Watch what you allow! Don't let anything keep you from having a pure heart and a clean mind.

Conclusion: Are you getting the most from God's Word? Is it doing you any good? What has God said to you today? Are you practicing and doing what it says? I hope God has spoken to your heart about getting the most from His Word tonight. It is, after all, His roadmap for life for you.