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**Just “Do it!”
James 1:19-27**

In Chuck Swindoll’s book “Improving your Serve” he shares this story. “Lets pretend you work for me. In fact, you are my executive assistant in a company that is growing rapidly. I’m the owner and I’m interested in expanding overseas. To pull this off, I make plans to travel abroad and stay there until the new branch office gets established. I make all the arrangements to take my family in the move to Europe for six to eight months, and I leave you in charge of the busy stateside organization. I tell you that I will write you regularly and give you direction and instructions. I leave and you stay. Months pass. A flow of letters are mailed from Europe and received by you the national headquarters. I spell out all my expectations. Finally I return. Soon after my arrival I drive down to the office. I am stunned. Grass and weeds have grown up high. A few windows along the street are broken. I walk into the receptionist’s room and she is doing her nails, chewing gum and listening to her favorite disco station. I look around notice the waste baskets are overflowing, the carpet hasn’t been vacuumed for weeks, and nobody seems concerned that the owner has returned. I ask about your whereabouts and someone in the crowded lounge area points down the hall and yells, “I think he’s down there.” Disturbed, I move in that direction and bump into you as you are finishing a chess game with our sales manager. I ask you to step into my office (which has been temporarily turned into a television room for watching afternoon soap operas).

“What in the world is going on man?

What do you ya’ mean....?”

Well, look at this place! Didn’t you get any of my letters?

“Letters? Oh, yeah sure got every one of them. As a matter of fact...we have had a letter study every Friday night since you left. We have even divided all the personnel into small groups and discussed many of the things you wrote. Some of those things were really interesting. You’ll be pleased to know that a few of us have actually committed to memory some of your sentence and paragraphs. One or two memorized an entire letter. Great stuff in those letters!”

“Okay, Okay...so you got my letters, you studied them and meditated on them, discussed and even memorized them. But WHAT DID YOU DO ABOUT THEM?”

“Do?...Uh...we didn’t do anything about them.”

Quite a ridiculous situation isn’t it. I could think of a number of reasons why it should never happen to a rapidly growing business in America. But it happens constantly in almost every church in America...including ours. When we believe that because we have read the Bible or listened to the sermon on Sunday morning or heard a teacher on the radio or studied God’s word in a LIFE Group or memorized verses from Awana that we have done something... we are totally deluded. Getting God’s Word into our minds is not enough. In fact if that is all that happens then it is lethal to our spirituality. Bible knowledge in the head without living out the truth simply creates egotistical Pharisees. Spiritual maturity is never measured by how much you know...God measures it by how much we live out and apply.

James pulls no punches in the first chapter of his book. He calls the persecuted Jewish believers, those who have been scattered across the known world, to a radical faith that lives it out. That radical faith demands a totally different way of looking at trials and temptations that routinely stomp through our lives. If we are going to have any chance at all to stand strong in the face of trials and temptations, then the influence of the wisdom and goodness of God must be greater than Satan’s shortcuts. We must be able to look pass the shoulder of tough

times and see the very character of God who is in control. We must look beyond the shoulder of a temptation and see clearly a God who is the Giver of every good gift and provided for us what we need. Only then could we possibly experience joy, perseverance in the face of trial and stand strong in the face of temptation.

In James 1:19-27 James challenges us to a faith that lives out the truth from God in some very real and practical ways. James tells us that faith works only if you live out the truth you hear from God. Read with me James 1:19-27 (READ)

The key verb that drives this entire section is the word receive in v.21. "Receive the Word implanted." If we are able to receive God's word and allow it to be planted into our lives where it will be nourished and grow it will mean that we not only put ourselves in a place where we can hear the word, we will live it out and be doers of the Word.

v.22 says that if we are merely hearers of the Word of God and not doers we will delude ourselves. That is dangerous. A self-deluded person can play a practical joke on himself and will still fall for it. One who is self-deluded can lie to himself and believe it. A hearer only of the Word is someone who comes to church on Sunday morning and is actually so deluded that they think they have accomplished something by merely showing up and listening. They are deluded into thinking when they walk out the door that they have accomplished something and can check that off their "things to do" this week list. Wrong. James says that's being deluded. Hearing God's Word is good. Certainly there are a lot of people that don't even bother to hear God's Word, but if you all you do is hear and not do, never live it out, never decide how you are going to put God's truth into practice...then you are deluded. V.24 you are forgetful. V.26 you are deceived.

It is possible to be unfailingly regular in reading your Bible, but to achieve nothing more than to have moved the bookmark forward each day*/. It is possible to memorize an entire book of the Bible and yet it is

not in the committing to memory that brings value. It is when we look intently at the truth of God and decide what specific steps, small though they may seem, how we will begin to live out and act on the truth. Hear it and just Do it. That is the challenge that James brings to the ones who desire to see their faith word.

“Prove yourselves doers of the Word and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in the mirror. For once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.” James compares the Word of God, the Bible to a mirror. In the morning you wake up sleepy eyed and stumble into the bathroom where after a shower you may then dare to look in the mirror. The mirror is blatantly honest. It pulls no punches in revealing the dark lines under the eyes, the wrinkles and pimples, gray hair, lack of hair, wild hair. Now we could throw up our hands and says, “What’s the use....whatever” and then walk away and do nothing about it. But if we are going to have our picture taken that afternoon, most of us realize that we want that more permanent record of our image to look as best as it can. So we will cover and dab and comb and cut and color and scrub so that as best as we can, we can look good.

James is saying that the guy who looks into the mirror and walks away doing nothing about it is just as absurd as the guy who hears the truth of God’s word then does nothing about it. What’s the point of looking if your not going to do anything???

John 8:31 says “If you abide in My Word, then you are truly disciples of mine.” That is what true disciples will do, they will want to hear God’s Word and then will live out the truth and do it. If you have no interest in hearing God’s Word, let alone stepping out in obedience and following God’s Word, then that is giving you evidence that something is wrong inside. Either there are some things in your life that need to be confessed and dealt with that are blocking your hunger for God’s Word or

you really don't belong to Him. I John 2:3-4 "by this we know that we have come to know Him if we keep His commandments. The one who says, "I have come to know Him" and does not keep His commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him."

V.25 "But the one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty (freedom) not having become a forgetful hearer, but an effectual doer, this one shall be blessed in what he does." The one who looks intently at God's perfect law. The one who studies it intentionally. That word to "look intently" is the same word used to describe Peter as he stooped in looking at the empty tomb to see that Jesus was no longer there. This one that puts truth to practice is looking to make sure. Its like the Christians at Berea who searched the scriptures intently to make sure that what Paul preached was of God.

Its interesting that James would refer to the Word of God as the "Law of Liberty" or "Law of Freedom." That almost sounds like an oxymoron to us, two words that are put together that make no sense, kind of like "jumbo Shrimp", death benefit, Work party. Microsoft Works." We think of law as rules, confining and enforcing and the very opposite of freedom and liberty. Some look at the Bible and see only a list of does and don'ts that confine and restrict and keep them from doing what they want. They look and see prison not freedom. Laws can bring freedom. Just ask anyone who drives a car and is glad they are free to drive wherever they want, but are perfectly willing to obey the law and stop at a stop light and glad others obey the Law as well.

Just as traffic laws bring us automotive freedom, God's perfect laws bring us freedom in life when we abide by them. Paul explains in Romans 6:16-18 that we will all be slaves to something. We will all be under the law to something so choose well what you will be a slave to. "Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, (the choices) either slave of sin resulting in death, or slaves to obedience

resulting in righteousness. Thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart...having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness." Later on, Romans 8:15 "For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption, as sons..." We are all going to be slaves of something whether we like it or not. Either we will be slaves to sin resulting in death, or we will be slaves to obeying God resulting in righteousness and freedom. Take your pick. Its not the one who just hears the truth that gains the freedom and benefits of righteousness, it is the one who hears the truth then dares to live it out that gets the benefit and blessing. "The effectual doer will be blessed in all he does."

Do you want to be blessed in all you do? Do I want the things that I do to count and make a difference? Then we must ask ourselves, to what extent am I living out the truth that God has revealed to me? The one who abides in the law of Freedom will experience freedom. The more I live out the truth of God that I know the more I will enjoy His benefits and experience freedom.

What do I need freedom from? I need freedom from my self. I need freedom from sin. I want the freedom to be able walk away and say "No" when destructive temptations comes stomping into my room. I want the freedom to experience joy when trials attempt to suffocate and overwhelm me. I want the freedom to be able to let go of my bitterness and forgive. I want to experience the freedom of being forgiven myself. The freedom knowing that I am unconditionally loved and accepted by Almighty God. The freedom knowing that God is good and in control of my life and its not up to me to try to manipulate it to make it all work out right. Psalms 19:7-8 "The Law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul, the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring

forever. The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether.”

So. What are some practical ways that we can live out God’s truth? James offers us a couple of suggested areas we might want to work on. The reason I believe he mentions these particular sins to work on is that they will block our hearing and doing God’s word.

Back up to v.19 “But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger” Notice this command does not leave anyone out. Who should be quick to listen to God and to other people? Let Pastor’s be quick to listen. But let elders and teachers be quick to listen. Let grade school students and moms, and singers and business owners be quick to listen. Let fathers and grandmothers be quick to listen. Everyone. No exemptions due to position or rank. This is not a passive do nothing sit back and take it in type of listening. This is active listening. This is engaging the ear to understand what the other person or God is trying to say. This means we are not formulating a rebuttal or defense while the other person is speaking words at us. To be quick to hear is to listen first to understand, not quick to judge. Being quick to hear is an active attempt to get into their sandals and understand what their side of the story, their perspective. Why is this important? Because I may have gotten it wrong. My first impression of what happened might have missed it. It takes faith in God to listen like this. It takes faith because in our minds we think if we don’t speak quick and shoot back hard and fast then we might be heard. We might lose the argument. We might be taken advantage of. We might not get things done the way we would like to see them happen. We must believe that God is just, and He will lift truth to the surface eventually whether we ever get to see it or not. That takes faith so that we don’t have to push our agenda.

V.26 says that if anyone thinks himself religious but does not bridle his tongue this persons religion is worthless. Religion is the practice of, the acting out of ones faith. There may be a person who

attends church every Sunday, gives lots of money, prays in public with passion, knows the Bible and can quote doctrine, but if they are habitually dealing with a tongue that gallops away with them, their religious practice, essentially the witness the world sees of them is worthless.

Once while John Wesley was preaching, he noticed a lady in the audience who was known for her crucial attitude kept staring at his new tie. When the meeting ended, she came up to him and said very sharply. "Mr. Wesley, the string on your bow tie are much too long. It's an offence to me." Wesley then asked if any of the ladies present happened to have a pair of scissors in their purse. When the scissors were handed to him he gave them to his critic and asked her to trim the streamers to her liking. After she clipped them off near the collar, he said, "are you sure they're all right now? Yes that much better. "then let me have those shears a moment", said Wesley. "I'm sure you wouldn't mind if I also gave you a bit of correction. I must tell you madam, that your tongue is an offense to me- its too long! Please stick it out...I'd like to take some off!" Is your mouth an offense to your faith keeping you and even others from hearing and doing God's truth.

James says that a faith that works will be slow to speak and slow to anger. Both of those are things we impulsively are quick to react to forgetting that God is good and wise. It doesn't not say we should never speak. It does not say we are never to be angry. Ephesians in fact commands us to "Be angry, and yet do not sin." We ought to be angry at sin and injustice. But when we are quick to be angry we react impulsively and sin often with the words that we speak.

Why do we get angry? We get angry when we've been injured or insulted or treated unfairly. We get angry when we don't get what we want and are especially angered if we have been expecting it. We get angry at wrongs done to us and wrongs done to those we love. Every

Saturday on the soccer field I watch as parents get angered at perceived injustices. "Its just not right".

What happens when that anger is not dealt with God's way? Confessed and forgiven? When the person gets tired of anger and gives up fighting, and it loses its energy and so it then shades into depression. One of the major causes of depression today is anger that is unresolved before God that has shifted into depression. Remember what happened to Jonah. He got very angry at God for saving the people of Nineveh. He got tired of fighting it and sat under a tree. He expected God to fry the whole city and when God didn't, his anger morphed into depression so deep he wanted to die.

V.20 the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. Anger will keep us from hearing God's truth and living it out so that we can walk in righteousness and freedom. Expose the lies that cause us to fear. I can't let go of my anger or bitterness, God will let them off the hook too easily, I will be angry and continue to make them pay. Who is really paying the price? It's us. If I don't speak out and get angry, I or people I love will be trampled on and taken advantage of. The lie that drives sinful anger is "I must take matters into my own hands or justice will not be served." The truth we must believe is that God is just. (Whether or not he allows us to see it) Vengeance is Mine sayeth the Lord, I will repay. It takes a great deal of faith to believe that God will be just. If I want to live a righteous life walking in freedom, I must have a radical faith to believe that God is just even in the face of injury and insult.

v.21 "Putting aside all filthiness and wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted." V.27 says "keep oneself unstained by the world." I can demonstrate my being a doer of the word not only in my conversations with others with self-control. But also in my pursuit of moral purity. We were not saved so that we could continue in sin. Romans 6 says "may it never be" how should we who have died to sin,

still live in it? We are who are believers are no longer who we used to be so by being doers of the Word it means we are going to clean out the moral filth out of our lives. The Greek that word Filthiness is used of wax that has been built up in the ears. Moral filth is a serious barrier to being able to hear God's truth. Perhaps this morning, you are wondering why it is that you have no desire, no hunger or thirst for God's word then it may be that you have some moral filth that is stopping up your ability to hear it. I John 1:9 says "If we confess our sin He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." He will be faithful and just to take His divine cotton swab clean out the filth from our hearts so that we can begin again to hear the truth of His words. Is there something that you know you have in your home, in your life that needs to go because it is keeping you from hearing God's truth and living it out?

It takes humility to deal with it doesn't it? "In humility receive the word implanted." It takes humility to accept God's truth and trust God instead of our own abilities or ideas about the way life should work. It takes humility to rely on God for vindication trusting God's wisdom and goodness and justice not having to worry about "looking out for number one."

James is saying to us that if we intently listen to God's truth, hear and then intentionally make specific steps to be doers of the Word, then we will reject the worlds' value system. We won't become polluted by the world, but live by God's value system and that also includes a heart of compassion. V.27 Pure religion in the sight of God is to care for those who are weak and have been marginalized by our society. Specifically mentions the weakest most vulnerable group back then; the widows and orphans. James does not say the essence of the content of our faith is practical care for the weak. The essence of our faith is Jesus who died and rose again for us, the gospel. But James says the essence of the expression of our faith is seen in the compassion shown to the least of

the world. I think in the evangelical world we have been so concerned with the gospel of being saved by grace, in not wanting to stress good works for salvation, we have totally forgotten that good works are an expression of our salvation. We are not saved by good works, but we are saved so that we can do good works. Jesus cares for the hurting people in the world just like a parent cares for his children. Let me ask you a question parents. How do you feel when someone does something to help any of your kids? When people do things for my kids, I'm so pleased its as if they have done it to help me. Jesus says that when we are moved to help others in need its just as if we were doing it for Him. Matthew 25:40 "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for the least of these brothers of Mine, you did it for Me."

So how have you acted on the truth? You have read God's letters. You have even gotten together in small groups and studied God's letters even memorized parts. But what have you done about them? Act on the truth this week. Take baby steps of obedience and the second you obey God will show you the next step to take. Hold your tongue when you are tempted to blurt out and speak. Listen well to someone not to judge or defend, but to understand. Control your anger...trust that God will be just. Perhaps there is some filth you have hidden in your home somewhere that is a serious barrier to hearing Gods voice. You need to get rid of it this afternoon. Videos, books, magazines, Cd's Perhaps God is telling you to meet a need of someone who is hurting. What is God saying to you. If you cannot hear then something is blocking God's voice. Get rid of it and get ready to listen. And when He speaks, get ready to act...just do it and you will then be blessed. Anticipate God to speak. Hear it. Decide one specific step you will take to act on the truth He reveals. Then just do it.