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 HCC Sermon
 James 1:19-27

INTRODUCTION

1. Image: Years ago, I had the chance to attend the Urbana Mission Conference to hear David Platt.
 2. Need: Many of us hear God's word but experience little conviction.
 3. Sub: How should we hear God's word?
 4. Text: James 1:19-27
 5. Preview: We'll look at three ways to hear God's word.
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- I. Hear God's word to learn (1:19-21)
 - A. Anger hinders us from learning from God's word (1:19-21a)
 1. Anger deafens our ears to God's word (1:19)
 - a. When we hear this verse, we think that James encourages people to listen all kinds of things.
 - b. There should be an eagerness to hear what God's word has to say.
 - c. Why would someone be angry and want to speak up when they hear the word of God?
 - i. Imagine the husband.
 - ii. Imagine the child.
 - iii. Imagine unforgiveness.
 2. Anger stunts Christlikeness (1:20)
 - a. An angry person wants to protect themselves constructive criticism because they don't find any fault in themselves.
 - b. This type of behavior does not produce the righteousness of God.
 3. Deal with the cause of anger if you want to hear God's word (1:21a)
 - a. Husband angry at wife.
 - b. Child angry at parent
 - c. Employee angry at Employer.
 - B. Humility helps us to learn from God's word (1:21b)
 1. Meekness is synonymous with humility.
 2. "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts." (Jer 31:33)
 3. It saves your soul.
 - II. Hear God's word to obey (1:22-25)
 - A. A person fools themselves if they think hearing God's word is enough (1:22)
 1. Knowing God's word is not enough.
 2. "Obedience is the mother of true knowledge of God." (John Calvin)
 - B. A person who only hears God's word receives no benefit (1:23-24).
 1. James uses the metaphor of a mirror to describe the word of God.
 2. A mirror tends to give you a reflection of your face, so that you may be able to fix something.
 3. The word of God works in the same way.

4. We listen to God's word but we do nothing.
- C. A person who hears and obeys God's word receives reward (1:25)
 1. James describes the word of God with the word: law.
 2. When we think of laws, we often times find them restrictive.
 3. We appreciate certain laws.
 4. God's law gives us freedom.
 5. To receive blessing, you must not only know what the law says, you need to do it.
- III. Hear God's word to change (1:26-27)
 - A. Hearing God's word changes you (1:26-27)
 1. It changes the way you speak (1:26)
 2. It changes the way you act toward the marginalized (1:27a)
 - a. James describes God as Father because David describes him as father to the orphan and protector of the widow (Ps 68:5).
 - b. Think about those who need help in our communities.
 - i. Immigrant or refugee.
 - ii. New student at school.
 - iii. Child who lost a parent to illness.
 - iv. Child who has divorced parents.
 - v. African American community.
 3. It changes the way you interact with the world (1:27b)
 - B. Embrace the change that hearing God's word brings.

CONCLUSION

1. Summary: Hear God's word to learn, obey, and change.
2. Closing Image: Stuart Townsend writes this in the first verse of his song: Speak O Lord.

MANUSCRIPT

Years ago, I had the chance to attend Urbana mission conference to hear David Platt for the first time. I had read his book: Radical and was excited to hear what he had to share from God's word that night. As David Platt began his message, I thought to myself: this message sounds... familiar. I found myself anticipating what he would say next because a lot of his message was from a chapter in his book: Radical. Although I had heard it before, I still found the message encouraging. But my response differed from the students, who were with me. When I asked the students what they thought about the message, they shared: "It was so powerful. It makes me want to go on short-term missions. God really moved tonight." I heard the same word of God preached, but I didn't experience the same conviction.

Many of us hear God's word but experience little conviction. We log onto our computers to go through the worship guide. We listen to the sermon. After the sermon, we go to do the next thing on the schedule. We log into our small group's zoom meeting. We discuss the sermon. But feel no leading to do anything to change our lives. We read our Bibles in the morning. We check off the box of things to do. We don't pause to ask: What might God be saying to me? What word does he want me to hear? **Many of us hear God's word but experience little conviction.**

How should we hear God's word? When we read our Bibles, listen to it preached, discuss it in our small groups, how do we hear God? How do we hear God speak? **How should we hear God's word?**

James answers this question in his letter to a dispersed church. Since the church was dispersed, they had a hard time integrating into their new communities. They left their homes

with little and had a hard time starting a new life. The wealthy took advantage of them by employing them and paying low wages. People scorned them for their faith. It was difficult for them to find places to gather. During this time of trial and testing, James encourages them to count it all joy and to persevere. But when you go through a trial for a long time, it becomes difficult to hold on to faith. You may feel tempted to think: "God abandoned me. This means that I have to take things into my own hands." James reminds them to not give into temptation when their trials continue. God used these trials to produce maturity within them. Instead, they should remember the word of God, which saved them. If they need wisdom, they need to ask God for it and pay attention to God's word. James encourages his readers in this section beginning in chapter 1, verse 19 to hear God's word. Let's turn our attention there. James, chapter 1, verse 19. James, chapter 1, verse 19.

In this section of James's letter, we'll learn three ways to hear God's word. Three ways to hear God's word.

First, **Hear God's word to learn.** James address the attitude of the listener. If one is to hear the word of God, then he needs to be teachable. He has to have a desire to learn. **Hear God's word to learn.**

What prevents us from learning God's word? What makes us unteachable? Anger. **Anger hinders us from learning from God's word.** How does anger hinder us from learning God's word?

Anger deafens our ears to God's word. Verse 19 says: "*Know this, my beloved brothers, let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.*" When we hear this verse, we think that James encourages people to listen to all sorts of things. Listen to your dad when

he gives you financial advice. Listen to your wife when she says that the toilet is clogged. Listen to your teachers when they assign you homework. While it is good to listen to all these things, that's not what James is saying. If you recall, verse 18 says: *"Of his own will, he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures."* The this in "know this" refers to word of God.

People should be quick to hear the word of God. There should be an eagerness to listen to what God's word has to say. James warns that when the word of God is spoken, taught, or read one should be slow to speak and slow to anger.

Why would someone be angry and want to speak up when they hear the word of God?

Imagine a husband who hears the word of God: *"Husband, love your wives as Christ love the church,"* then he says to himself: "Wait. If you knew my wife, then you would know how unlovable she is. Every time the weekend comes, she gives me a list of things to do mow the lawn, clean the toilets, and organize the garage. When I sit down to relax for the evening, she interrupts by asking me to take out the trash. She never appreciates how much I do and the hours I work." He begins to feel angry that God would even suggest that he should love his wife.

Imagine the child who hears the word of God: *"Children, obey your parents in the Lord."* The child may think: "But you don't know my parents. They're so demanding. They actually ask me to help out with the chores. Susan's parents never ask her to clean, vacuum the house, or do the laundry. Susan's parents take her to Disneyworld. My parents have not taken me to Disneyworld once." A child would feel angry at God's audacity to instruct them to obey their parents.

Imagine a person in conflict. He may be quick to say: "This doesn't apply to me. If God knew my situation, then he would give me a pass. God says forgive one another. Ha! If God knew what this person did to me, God wouldn't forgive him either." When we are quick to speak and quick to anger, we fail to hear God's word. **Anger deafens our ears to God's word.**

Anger also does something else. **Anger stunts Christlikeness.** Verse 20 says: *"the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God."*

An angry person wants to protect themselves from type of constructive criticism because they don't find any fault in themselves. They're always right while everyone is wrong. Undergirding all of this is a sense of pride. Unless everyone thinks my way even God, they're not worth my time.

This type of behavior does not produce the righteousness of God. Such a person does not do what God requires. When we do what God requires: love God and others, we become more Christlike. God produces that righteousness in us. But if we fail to love God and others, it produces fleshly behavior.

What do we need to do with such anger? **Deal with the cause of anger if you want to hear God's word.** The first half of verse 21 says: *"Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness"* You need to take off the filthiness and rampant wickedness associated with your unaddressed anger. What is the source of your anger? What is causing your self-centeredness. Confess it to God.

"Father, I feel angry at my wife because she demands so much of me. Forgive me for not realizing that she needs my help to care for our family at home as well as at work. Give me a heart to serve" "God, I feel angry at my parents because I feel like I deserve to relax. Help me

find that my rest comes ultimately from you.” “Father, it’s difficult for me to forgive this person. Help me to see that you have forgiven me of much and I should do likewise.” Think about what is causing your anger or your frustration and confess it to God.

There is one thing that helps us to learn from God’s word: humility. **Humility helps us to learn from God’s word.** For the entirety of verse 21 says: *“Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”*

We need to cultivate meekness which is synonymous to humility. Often, we associate meekness with weakness. But meekness describes a sense of control. A dog is considered meek, when it obeys its owner. The owner says: Sit. The dog sits. The owner says: roll over. The dog rolls over. The owner says: “Play dead.” The dog plays dead. Do we hear God’s word with a similar attitude? Do we hear it with meekness? Do we hear it with humility?

James writes: *“receive with meekness the implanted word.”* What is the implanted word? James is probably drawing from the writings of Jeremiah, chapter 31, verse 33: *“I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.”* For when we placed our faith in Christ, God installed within each of us a different operating system via the gospel that has a disposition toward God’s truth. When we hear God’s word, we pay attention.

What happens when we receive God’s word in this way? It saves our soul. But you may be thinking: “Wait a minute. I’m already a believer. God has already saved me through the blood of Christ.” But James isn’t thinking about your eternal salvation. He’s thinking about your current struggle. For God will help you with your trial, so that you will become mature as God plans. When a husband receives help from God to love his wife, he will become a husband that

God desires. When a child receives help from God to obey his parents, he will become a testimony of God's power. If you learn to forgive someone, then you testify to the forgiveness that you have received in Christ. It cultivates further trust in God.

What is the second way to hear God's word? **Hear God's word to obey.** Plan to do what God says. When we hear God's word, we should have an intent to heed its instructions. **Hear God's word to obey.**

A person fools themselves if they think hearing God's word is enough. Verse 22 says: *"But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."* Now it's not saying that you shouldn't know God's word. For we all could say that we could know more of God's word. But knowing God's word is not enough.

If someone says that he knows that Jesus Christ died on the cross for the sins of man and rose again from the dead but does not believe it, then we would say that the person is not a believer. For knowledge of the gospel must be accompanied by the action of faith and repentance if a person is to have a reconciled relationship with God. John Calvin has said:

"Obedience is the mother of true knowledge of God".

A person who only hears God's word receives no benefit. James uses the metaphor of a mirror to describe the word of God. Verse 23 says: *"For if anyone is a hearer of the word and no 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."*

A mirror tends to give you a reflection of your face, so that you can be able to fix something. For a lady, she could use the mirror to help touch up her make up. For a guy, the mirror helps you to see if there is place that you may have missed shaving. The purpose of the

mirror is to you to detect areas that needs adjusting. If we see a problem and don't fix it, then we have to step out the door and deal with the consequences.

The word of God works in the same way. It serves as spotlight to shed light in areas of our lives that need God's help to fix. Maybe you read in the Bible in the morning: "But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetous must not even be named among you as is proper among the saints" (Eph 5:3) You sense God saying: "You need to fight for sexual purity." You have an argument with your husband before you log onto zoom call to meet with your accountability sisters. One of them shares that God had convicted them through a word: "A gentle word turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Prov 15:1). You sense: "You probably should talk to your husband after this chat." But you decide he doesn't deserve an apology. You decide not to talk to him.

We listen to God's word. But we do nothing. We don't fight for sexual purity. We don't reconcile with our spouse. If we fail to actually do what God says, then we receive no benefit. We won't receive his help to live a life of sexual purity. We won't be able to have a reconciled relationship with our husbands that exhibits grace. There is no benefit because you fail to recognize your sinfulness and your need for God's help. You forget that you are a sinner saved by grace that still needs God's help.

What happens when a person who hears and obeys God's word? **A person who hears and obeys God's word receives reward.** Look with me at verse 25: *"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."*

James describes the word of God with the word: law. Why does he do that? James isn't referring to the Mosaic law because there's no reference to the sacrificial system in the letter. It's more likely he's referring to the law of Moses now interpreted in light of Christ's death and resurrection. For Jesus himself said that he fulfilled the law (Matt 5:17). This law now leads to liberty.

When we think of laws, we often times find them restrictive. They interfere with our freedom. For instance, you make a wrong turn. Now you need to make a U-turn. You reach a stop light. There's a big sign: No U-turns. Now you have to await until the next intersection to make a U-turn. If we don't complete our taxes by April 15, then we have to pay interest on our taxes we owe the government. Boba shops prevent you from bringing in drinks from other shops. Laws seem restrictive.

But that's not always the case. We appreciate rules where people have to drive in their lanes and obey the traffic laws. This allows us to go from point A to point B. The game of volleyball has rules that make it exciting. There can only be a certain number of people on each team. The ball when served has to be served in a designated area. It takes three touches to return the ball. It gives players an opportunity to enjoy the game.

God's law gives us freedom. It provides us certain boundaries in which we are to operate. God's law are not suggestions. It's not advice. It's not optional. It's mandatory. It's required. But the law is perfect. The God who gave it to us knows what we should do in every situation.

To receive the freedom and the blessing, you must not only know what the law says you need to do it. If you hear and do the law, then you will receive a blessing. What is the blessing?

If you recall in verse 12, it says: *“Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised him.”* It is another reference to the crown of life that one will receive if they persevere. This wreath demonstrates to everyone that you had persevered. The blessing is the reward that people will acknowledge that you have lived faithfully before the Lord. But more importantly, you have lived a life pleasing to God. That is a blessing.

The last way to hear God’s word is this. **Hear God’s word to change.** Listen to God’s word and by obeying it allow it to change you. For God uses his word to transform us to be more like him with every act of obedience. **Hear God’s word to change.**

Hearing God’s word changes you in three ways. First, **it changes the way you speak.** Verse 26 says: *“If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart this person’s religion is worthless.”* James use the word: religion typically associated with the worship of gods. Christians worship God by obeying him. For God desires not sacrifice but obedience (1 Sam 15:22). When our trials cause us to sin, God reminds us to not use our words to blame him or others.

Second, **it changes the way that you act toward the marginalized.** The first half of verse 27 says: *“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father, is this to visit orphans and widows in their affliction.”* James describes God as Father because David describes him as the Father of the fatherless and protector of widows (Psalm 68:5). The phrase: *“visit orphans and widows”* serves as idiom for the marginalized and downtrodden. James probably thought about how the dispersion of his brothers in sisters in Christ resulted in some being in worse conditions than others. Hence, he wrote these words so that they would look out for one another. For

later he teaches about the importance to look out for the poor in their midst. But for us we can expand the marginalized to think about those who need help in our communities. One could care for new immigrants or refugees. Help them figure out how to use refrigerator because some come from countries don't use a refrigerator. Help them with their application for a license. If you see a new student at school, then help them figure out how to get to class. Teach them how to access their homework online. Sit with them during lunch. It could be stepping up to provide spiritual leadership for a child who lost a parent to illness. Maybe they don't have a father or mother at home due to a divorce. Think about how we might listen to our African American brothers and sisters in Christ to see how we can help as our nation wrestles with the racial tensions in our country.

Lastly, **Hearing God's word changes the way you interact with the world.** The last half of verse 27 says: *"to keep oneself unstained from the world."* There are many ways in which the teachings of the world differ from the teachings of God. Let us talk about one example. The world teaches that someone else is to blame for our problems. We need to find who to point our finger to. The reason why I'm not doing well in this class is because the teacher is not doing his or her job. The reason why I'm not advancing my career is because my employer favors other people. The reason why none of my dating relationships have not worked out is because the people I date have too many expectations. Hearing God's word reminds us that shortcoming isn't someone else's fault. The challenges we face are a result of us living in a world affected by the curse of sin. And in the world, I consider myself as being partially responsible for my problems. Maybe, I should have asked a question when I did not understand a concept in class. Maybe there are areas in my work that I need to improve. Maybe the reason for my singleness is due

to my directness and lack of empathy. If we hear God's word and do it, then it will guard us against the influences of the world.

How do we hear God's word? **Hear God's word to learn. Hear God's word to obey.**

Hear God's word to change.

Stuart Townsend writes this in the first verse of his song: Speak O Lord. Speak, O Lord, as we come to you. To receive the food of your holy word. Take your truth, plant it deep in us; shape and fashion us in your likeness, that the light of Christ might be seen today in our acts of love and our deeds of faith. May this be our desire and our prayer.