

# **“The Prep before the Practice”**

**James 1:19-21**

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**Dusty Brewer**

Good morning, Canyon Creek. How are we doing today? Who’s going to be taking in some firework displays this week? Who’s going to be setting off their own firework displays this week? Well glad you’re here this morning. It’s good to be with you to take a look at God’s Word together. Glad you’re here with us and ready to dive in!

Let me start by getting a feel for the room. If you would say you love being prepared, raise your hand. Ok, good. If you would say you prefer the “wing it” method, let me see you. Ha! You’re the spontaneous bunch aren’t you? Well, whether you naturally prefer preparation or not, this morning, we are going to talk about the prep before the practice. The prep that takes place before the practice.

Let me explain what I mean. Let’s take an athlete for example. Maybe a football player. In the offseason (in between seasons), what is the football player doing? He’s resting. He’s recovering from a long season. But as the football season approaches, he begins preparing himself for the season. Right? He’s learning the playbook. He’s getting his body in shape. He’s getting into a routine. He’s developing discipline. We have a number of coaches in our church. During the summer, many of them lead speed camps and other opportunities to help their athletes prepare for the upcoming season. There is some very important prep that goes on before putting it into practice.

With that in mind, this morning, we’re going to see what the Bible has to say for us regarding the prep that leads to the practice of living out the Word of God. Again, the prep that leads to the practice of living out the Word of God.

So grab you’re Bibles and go to the book of James in the New Testament. This summer, we are taking a journey through the book of James and we’re a few weeks in so far. James is a fascinating book. It was written by James the brother of Jesus who was also the leader of the church in Jerusalem. The letter was written to encourage these early believers as they endured hard times. The letter is super practical and written about real faith for real life.

Today, we’ll be in Chapter 1, starting in verse 19. Let’s read together...

*<sup>19</sup> My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, <sup>20</sup> because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.*

*<sup>21</sup> Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.*

*<sup>22</sup> Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. <sup>23</sup> Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror <sup>24</sup> and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. <sup>25</sup> But whoever looks intently*

*into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do. James 1:19-25*

This is a great passage. There is a subtitle just before verse 19. In my Bible, that heading says “Listening and Doing”. This passage has two focuses... Verses 19-21 has a focus on the listening and receiving, the “hearing of the Word of God” and verses 22-25 has a focus on the practicing, “doing of the Word of God”. Both focuses are important. One without the other is incomplete. Monty kicked off our James series a few weeks ago by focusing on the latter half of this passage... Being a doer of the Word. That’s the practice... being obedient to the truth we’ve heard. Putting it into practice. Living it out.

For our purposes this morning though, we’re going to spend our time in the first half of this passage. We’re going to look at the prep before the practice in verses 19-21 of James Chapter 1.

## The Prep

Prep is very important. Again, whether you are a natural preparer or not, prep helps to lay the groundwork for what’s to come.

If you’ve ever worked on a home project, you know that the prep is essential. The other day I was helping my friend, Steven lay wood floors in his house. We started in his bedroom. Now before the wood floors can be put in though, there is some very important prep going on. The way must be cleared for this project. Everything must be removed from the room. The old floors have to come out. The floor has to be ready to receive the new wood floors. Again, the way has to be cleared.

Can you imagine installing new wood floors before the way was cleared? It would be very difficult! If the bed and furniture were there. If there were clothes laying all over the floor. If as you install the wood, you simply laid it over the socks, and jeans and shoes that were all over; you just bypassed the bed and dressers. If you took that approach the new floor would be less than ideal... that sounds too positive. It would be terrible!

The point is... there is a clearing the way needed. A prep that is required to make room for the floors. To make space for what’s to come.

## Clearing the WAY

This clearing the way idea is also important when it comes to our walk with Christ. A major part of our prep is clearing the way; providing space for the WORD of TRUTH.

Too often our society of people believe the world revolves around us; around our perspective, our opinions, our viewpoint. The way gets filled with our own ideas of truth. When we set that aside, we clear the way for God’s truth to reside.

As we do that, we are building a foundation. We are developing a correct understanding of God and our relationship to Him. Through this we learn to submit ourselves to the authority of Christ and to His truth.

So, here in this passage in James, he is trying to help us clear the way, to make space, so we might receive and accept God's Word making us more able to do something with it.

So let's walk back through it together. Look at v. 19 again. James starts in this passage with "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this:"

He's basically saying "LISTEN UP!" Listen to Words that are coming out of my mouth...

"Everyone should be quick to listen"

### Quick to LISTEN – Reveals an eagerness to LEARN

James starts the prep process by calling us to be quick to listen. This is an important starting point because being quick to listen reveals something about us. It **REVEALS AN EAGERNESS TO LEARN**. To be a doer of the Word (someone who practices what they've learned in Scripture) requires that we've heard the Word. And to hear the Word of God, we must be willing to receive it, willing to hear it... eager to learn.

The reception of the Word demands a readiness to listen.

My daughter, Finley, is 3 years old. Every day, she'll ask permission to have a snack... EVERY DAY... multiple times a day. Occasionally, when she asks this, if she anticipates a response she doesn't like, do you know what she does? She'll cover her ears. It's actually pretty funny. In her three year old mind, if she doesn't hear a "no", the "no" doesn't exist. I can't tell you how many times I have to say "Finley, listen to my words!" If she doesn't hear it, she believes she's not held accountable by it.

Think about that concept for a minute. If she doesn't hear it, she believes she's not held accountable by it. There's a phrase that's used to describe this in government circles (since I spend a lot of time in government circles)... Plausible Deniability.

**Plausible deniability** is the ability for persons (typically senior officials in a [chain of command](#)) to [deny](#) knowledge of or responsibility for any faulty actions committed by others in the organization

That's a mouthful, but the point is, there is a belief that the less I know, the less accountable I am.

How often do we attempt to plug our ears when it comes to the Truth of Scripture? When it comes to following Christ, we can't bypass the truth of Scripture. There's no way around the accountability. In fact, listen to the Words of Paul in Romans 1...

*For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. **Romans 1:19-20***

We can't sidestep accountability.

A part of the prep for us before the practice is a willingness to listen, to hear the Word of God. To be eager to learn... eager to receive the truth of God.

**Are you... Am I... Are we... quick to listen?**

And then James continues. Another piece of the prep is being slow to speak.

**Slow to SPEAK – Reveals a heart of HUMILITY**

Yes, quick to listen, but also slow to speak. Why do you think that is? Well from a practical standpoint, the more we're talking, the less we're hearing.

Have you ever had a conversation with someone who loves to talk and had trouble getting into the flow of conversation because there was never an opening? It's kind of like trying to turn into traffic. You're sitting at the intersection waiting for an opening in traffic. You see a possible opening, but you hesitate for a split second too long and then the opening is gone. You missed your chance. That's kind of like talking with someone who loves to talk.

I think James encourages us to be slow to speak, because it **reveals a heart of humility**. When we're slow to speak it teaches us to listen rather than speak, to follow rather than lead, to submit rather than take charge. It's not that speaking is wrong or leading is wrong or taking charge is wrong, but when we listen, follow, and submit, we are positioning ourselves humbly before the Lord and humbly before the Word of God.

When we always have the answer or we always have a response, we run the risk of missing the answer or response from the Lord.

When we pray, do we do all the talking? Or is there some humble waiting, listening involved in our prayer time? I heard a good quote at youth camp a week ago: "Listening in prayer is waiting for the next time to talk" A continual conversation involves waiting on the Lord; listening.

A part of clearing the way is humbling ourselves before the Lord.

**Are you... Am I... Are we... slow to speak?**

That's a part of the prep before the practice. Then James continues. Not only should we be quick to listen and slow to speak, but we should also be slow to anger.

## **Slow to ANGER – Reveals the practice of PATIENCE**

Anger can close the mind to God's truth. It can lead to fierce arguments and a fiercely argumentative attitude is not conducive to the humble reception of truth.

Look again at verse 20. We should be slow to anger *"because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires."* **James 1:20**

An angry attitude is not the atmosphere in which righteousness flourishes.

In fact, James later says in Chapter 3

*Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.* **James 3:18**

Think about that. When we sow or plant seeds of peace, we reap a harvest of righteousness. So, we can take these two passages and understand that when we sow or plant seeds of anger in our families, in our workplaces, in our communities, in our church, the harvest that is produced is not what God intends.

So, let me ask the question: What seeds are you planting? In your life? In the life of your kids? In those around you?

Anger, bitterness, impatience, selfishness – these are seeds that when planted in us, in our kids – the harvest leads to a growth of unrighteousness; angry, bitter, impatient, selfish people.

The result according to vs. 20 is that we miss the righteous life that God desires.

Slow to anger **reveals the practice of Patience**. When we are exercising patience, we are demonstrating a willingness to hear; this is prep before the practice.

**Are you... Am I... Are we... slow to anger?**

James then continues in verse 21

*Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent* **James 1:21a**

That phrase “get rid of” comes from a Greek word that is primarily used with taking off garments. It’s the same word used in Hebrews 12:1 that says “throw off everything that hinders”. It’s the idea of casting off the excessive weight, such as unnecessary clothing to make ready for the race of faith.

For example think of Michael Phelps lining up for a race in the swimming pool wearing an astronaut suit. That would actually be pretty funny but not conducive to a race! But no! of course not. Getting rid of the excess weight allows him to be more ready for the race. So, get rid of or throw off suit and swim in your speedo.

James encourages us this morning to get rid of or throw off the excess weight of sin.

He uses the words moral filth.

The dirtiest I’ve ever been was probably last summer at our youth camp and it involved a Mud Pit <show pic> Imagine going swimming in mud; it was actually pretty awesome! But when you get done you are so dirty, covered head to toe... you’re cleaning mud out of places... like... your... ears – for days.

But imagine, if I came out of the mud pit, let the mud dry, let my clothes harden and then attempted to overlook it. What mud?! Day by day, I just put new clothes over the muddy ones and go about my way. How much would that hinder my day to day life? How often do we treat the sin in our lives this way? We overlook it. We cover it up. We go on about our way.

James says to throw off the moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent. They are to be stripped off like dirty clothes (shed) as a part of our preparation.

Now all of this (being quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger, throwing off sin in our lives) is clearing the way. It’s making space. Space for what? Look at the second half of verse 21.

*humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you **James 1:21b***

We must humbly accept the Word of God.

There it is! The highlight of our prep is ACCEPTING THE WORD.

We’re clearing the way to better receive, hear, and accept the Word of God.

## Accepting the WORD

We can’t be a doer of the Word if we’ve not first received the Word. We can’t share if we’ve not heard.

Quickly let me insert a sidenote: James is speaking to those who've already received the truth. He tells his readers to accept the word planted in you. That means they've already received it. He's speaking to early Christians. This is important because if you're in the room this morning and you are not a follower of Christ. I don't want you to hear that you are supposed to clean yourself up before you can approach God. That's the beauty of God's grace and mercy. We approach Him as we are and He welcomes us in, fills us with His Spirit, makes us new, gives us new purpose, and that begins the process of cleaning and shaping.

But for those of us who have received the Truth, we must humbly accept the Word of God planted in us. Again, the Truth of God must be planted in us. It's sowing seeds of truth over and over again. That planting suggests that a harvest should occur; There should be growth in us. There should be development in us.

That Word planted in us "can save you". This truth of God, the Words of Scripture; this is saving truth. We live in a world that tries to convince us that truth is relative. It's what you determine it to be. No, there is a saving truth. It's the truth of Jesus Christ; that's the saving truth. That's the Word that must be accepted, that needs to be planted deeply within us.

Jesus Christ is the source of saving!

## Conclusion

So we clear the way to receive, hear, and accept the Word of God, the Word of Truth.

We receive the Word; we experience salvation through Christ and grow in spiritual understanding through God's Word. And then what? Why prep? Look at verse 22...

*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. **James 1:22***

Those are four powerful words!

We receive the truth to submit to it; we receive truth to follow it; we receive truth to put it into practice.

While prep is important, my fear is that we can live our whole lives prepping to only miss out on the living.

Our world is full of people who think a lot of themselves; our world needs more people who think a lot of Christ; who've cleared the way in their lives for the truth of God; those who've received the Word of God and now practice and live out the Word of God.

Will you... will I... will we... be one of those people?

**Close in prayer**