

Cultivating a Heart for God's Word Part 3 – Be a Faithful Doer

Epistle of James

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to James 1, continuing a series from the last nine verses of James 1:19-27. We've titled the series and so today's message, we've entitled the series "Cultivating a Heart for God's Word," and we see that that's what James is doing in this last section of this first chapter of his epistle. Verses 19 to 27, he is trying to help us, help his readers and in turn help us, to develop a heart that responds to the word of God, that bears fruit. The parable of the sower that was read earlier in the service from Luke 8, we want our hearts to produce fruit, righteousness, and that's what the true believer should experience. So James is exhorting those Jewish believers to whom he writes and us in turn, to cultivate our hearts for the word of God.

We've seen that in verses 19 and 20, he encouraged us in cultivating our hearts for the word of God, we need to be quick to listen, or we need to be a disciplined listener. We said there are basically three imperatives that are pivotal in this section, these nine verses, and the first imperative governs verses 19 and 20. Essentially we summarized that imperative as "be a disciplined listener." If you want a heart that is cultivated for the word of God just like soil preparation, you know, the more that I try to do things in life, you see that certain things that preparation goes a long way. If you're painting, surface preparation. If you don't prepare the surface well, your painting is not going to last very long or it's not going to work. Soil preparation, if your soil is not prepared, it's not going to receive the seed. So we need to prepare the surface for whatever we are going to bring to it if we want it to bring about results, lasting results. So James is saying take that mindset to your heart. Prepare your hearts to receive the word of God, and in verses 19 and 20, he says the first thing is to be a diligent listener, a disciplined listener. Be a disciplined listener. Don't be quick to speak but rather be quick to listen. Then in verse 21 we looked at last time, he says a second commitment he encourages us to make in cultivating our hearts for the word of God is to be a humble learner; to receive the word of God with meekness or humility; to be ready to learn from others who teach us. And today, the third commitment, the theme of today's message, the imperative that dominates verses 22 to 25 is be a faithful doer. Be a faithful doer so that if you are a disciplined listener and a humble learner and a faithful doer, your heart is ready to receive the word of God and will bear more fruit. So today the theme is be a faithful doer so that you can cultivate your heart to receive the word of God.

I'm going to read verses 19 to 27 and we're going to be focusing on verses 22 to 25.

19 This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. 22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. 23 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 a mirror; 24 for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. 25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. 26 If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. 27 Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Let's pray together.

Father, we ask that you might work in our hearts that which is pleasing to you, that you might even now through your word till up the soil of our hearts and make our hearts good soil to receive your word throughout our days as long as we are in this body, to receive your word and to bear fruit of righteousness for the glory of so great a Savior. We pray in his name. Amen.

Cultivating a heart for God's word: be a faithful doer. So when we come to the word, we need to come to the word with a mindset not just to listen, not just to learn humbly, but we need to come to the word with a mindset to be a doer. We are going to gather our thoughts around four points. The first is the clear command in verse 22, the imperative, "prove yourselves doers of the word." Literally, become a doer of the word. In fact, the present tense Greek verb there, "prove yourselves doers," would be translated "continue becoming; keep on becoming a doer of the word." So it's the idea of continually when you come to the word, always be about doing it. Not just hearing it.

It's so important for mankind in general but I think particularly those of us in the West, Western mindset, the Greek mind versus the Hebrew mind. Sometimes you will hear this discussed, that the Hebrew mind to hear was to obey. In fact, that was a synonym for obedience, "I heard." It means, "I obeyed." But in the Greek mindset, it was hear, think about, philosophize, turn it around, and then go on to something else. Don't do it. In fact, it's interesting when Paul preaches in Athens, remember his sermon on Mars Hill, one of the things that Luke the author of Acts says about it was that Paul went up to the Areopagus to share his thoughts because he had been talking about the Gospel and somebody said, "Hey, we'd like to hear you on this," in Luke comments that those at the

Areopagus, they liked to do nothing more than to sit around and listen to all the new ideas out there. It was the Greek philosophical mindset, "Hey, cool ideas, let's hear them. We don't intend to do anything with them, we just want to hear them." Well, we can have that mindset to always be learning and never coming to a knowledge of the truth, like Paul talks about in 2 Timothy 3 about those foolish women, always learning.

So this verse would call us to even be cautious about continually listening and listening and listening and listening to the word and not doing it. In our day, that's something that we really need to think about. You can listen to sermons all the time, every day, 24 hours a day because you can do it online and there are so many wonderful resources, and praise God for that and we need to be listening to the word. So let's not say don't be listening, but what it says is don't be mere listeners. Make sure that you're taking time to do that which you're listening to. And sometimes we can listen and listen and listen and not do. James is warning us against that. He says, "Do not be merely hearers of the word." The command, "prove yourselves doers of the word and not merely hearers who delude themselves."

Jesus in the passage that Jess read earlier, the emphasis on doing. You know, the soil, the good soil produces fruit. In fact, right after the section he read, Jesus is in a place and his mother and brothers come to see him. This is immediately after the passage Jess read earlier from Luke 8, and they say, "Your mother and brothers are here," and he says this, "Who are my mother and brothers but the one who hears the word of God and does it?" Not just hears it but does it. That's what we are called to do. We are called to to be doers of the word, those who obey what we hear.

He told a parable in Matthew 7:24-27, he likened the man who hears the word of God and does it to a man who built his house upon a rock and when the storms came, that house stood. But he likens the one who hears the word of God and does not do it to a man who built his house upon sand. Isn't it interesting, you hear the word but the difference is not whether you heard it, it's whether you do it. And to hear it and to hear good messages, to read good books, solid books, to even recognize that they are solid is not enough. We must become doers of the word and this is James's great burden for us, God's burden through James for you and me today. So that clear command is to be a doer and not merely a hearer. It doesn't mean don't hear but it means when you hear, labor to do.

So that's the clear command. The second point this morning after a clear command, the second point is the folly of forgetfulness. There is a sense in which the flow of thought is he starts off with what; that first point was what he wants us to do. He wants us to be a doer of the word. That's the what. Then he tells you why. The second point though I have called it the folly of forgetfulness, it's a reason why you should do what I just told you to do. Then he's going to come back and our third point we are going to see, he's going to answer the question how. How do you do what I told you to do. And then the fourth point is going to be why you should do what I told you to do and how I told you to do it. So it's really kind of like you could say the four points are: what, why, how, why. But I'm not calling them that, I'm just giving you that as a little thing to help you as we go through it.

The second point is the folly of forgetfulness which is one of the whys. He says, he basically says, "prove yourself doers of the word because it is foolishness to hear and not do," and he ridicules it so that we would ridicule this kind of mindset in ourselves. He says, "Listen, this is what it would be like to be a hearer of the word and not a doer," and he uses this simile, "he is like a man," the one who is a hearer and not a doer is like a man, "who looks at his natural face in a mirror and once he has looked at himself and gone away, has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was."

Now, it's interesting when he says he has looked at himself, it's not a passing glance. The word for "looked at himself" is a word which speaks of "to know," and it's actually the Greek word for "mind" with an intensifying preposition on the front of it which means "to observe; to consider; to contemplate." So it's not like you just walk by a mirror. You know, have you had that experience in the morning, you walk by a mirror and you're in a hurry and you sort of think everything's okay and then you get out and you found out everything wasn't okay. Your spouse tells you or your wife, usually women don't have this problem, it's us, guys, who miss something, right? "You need to do something with that hair," or whatever. So we pass by quickly. This isn't in view here. This means someone who looked at the mirror and took in what the mirror was telling them, they just didn't do anything about it. He said, "How ridiculous to look at it, the looking glass," and of course the image in the looking glass is the word of God, you go to the word of God, the law of God, you see in the law of God yourself, you see the problems that you have that need to be corrected, but you do nothing about it.

It would be like I mentioned if my wife said to me, "You have something in your teeth." And you've had this experience, it's something right here and so you try to do something and, no, you haven't gotten it yet. You're thinking, "I surely have gotten it now," and you decide, "Well, I'd better go and look in a mirror so I can take care of whatever it is." So you go to the nearest bathroom, you go to a mirror and you try to figure it out and you say, "Oh yeah, that's it. It's right there." It's a piece of lettuce. Isn't that gross, something green too? One of the worst things, right? It could happen to any of us but, still, it's just one of those things we'd rather not happen. If you see someone with green in their mouth, love them enough to tell them, "You need to..." Right? But if you tell someone they have something in their mouth, they can't get it quickly, they go to the bathroom and they come out looking exactly like they did when they went in, that's insanity. That is what it's like to be a hearer of the word and not a doer. It is that ridiculous. God wants us to be appalled at the ease with which we can do that so that we will hate it and want to be doers.

Completely ridiculous and not only that, he makes clear that if being a hearer only is a pattern of life, there is a real problem. When he says, verse 22, "but prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves." That last clause there is a warning that if we are hearers only and there is not life change happening, that is the mark of someone who is deluding themselves to thinking they are saved when they are really not; that the word when it has come into the heart in a saving way will bear fruit. Now, the fruit may, as Matthew records the parable of the sower some 30, some 60, some 100, there can be variations and there can be things that hinder in a believer the

development of fruit, one of which is James is dealing with people who are professing believers and he realizes believers have a tendency to allow themselves not to be doers and so he is exhorting that. But he's saying when he says a hearer who delude themselves, he's saying a person who is perpetually hearing and not doing is evidencing a delusion. If they have somehow interacted with the Gospel, intellectually accepted it but not in their hearts, and so he is saying to us, "Watch out. Be careful to be doers of the word."

So a clear command, our first point, what he wants us to do. The second point, why, the folly of forgetfulness, verses 23 and 24. Then he comes in verse 25 to some precise instructions, really unpacking the clear command that he gave earlier: prove yourself doers of the word. Verse 25 unpacks for us the clear instructions. How do you become a doer of the word? He has been contrasting and what he has done is he said he's contrasted the person of the folly of forgetfulness, the person who looks at the word, hears it but then forgets before he does anything about it. In verse 25, he contrasts that with the faithful doer who looks intently at the law and then becomes an effectual doer.

There are really three things, three key participles in this passage that illustrate how to do this, how to become a faithful doer. The first is, I am reading the NASB, the "one who looks intently at the perfect law." It begins by looking intently. This, again, is a verb which implies focus. Now, I said earlier that the person who forgets starts off pretty well. He listened, he looked, he saw, he contemplated in verse 23, he looks at his face in the mirror, once he has looked at himself both those verbs were implied knowledge, that real sense of understanding, but here he uses a different word which has the idea of that real understanding with maybe a little more to it. In fact, the word "looks intently" comes from a compound Greek verb which means "to stoop down; to bend over." You know, you're looking at something and you contemplate it and you bend over to look at it. This is the idea. He looks intently at the law, the perfect law. So he's saying the first thing we need to do in hearing and being a faithful doer, a hearer that does, is we need to look intently. We have to give attention to the word.

The second thing and this is where the departure happens between the doer and the hearer is in the second participle, "who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty and abides by it." The key word is "abides." That's the second participle here in the text. I think the NASB has chosen an unfortunate word. It's not quite as clear. "Abides by it" sounds like "obeys," doesn't it? The way we say, you know, "There is a rule and I abide by it." But the idea really in the Greek would be better communicated by "continues," which is what the NIV translates it, or "perseveres" like the ESV translates it. The meaning of this particular Greek word isn't like to necessarily fulfill something, it is to remain because the next verb is going to tell us about doing it, okay? This is about you have given attention to the word, you looked intently, you stooped over, you hear it, you're giving attention to it, now the next thing is you remain there. The verb actually means, it means "to remain beside something." Here is instruction of the word and you stay there and you keep looking at it. This is what marks the true believer.

This is exactly what Jesus said in John 8:31, "If you continue in My word, then truly are you My disciples." It is the act of continuing and remaining that demonstrates the

truthfulness of someone's profession. Then he goes on to say, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." But the idea is continuing in the word and I think there in John as John is unpacking for us the glory of our Savior, this idea of continuing comes just a chapter and a half after where Jesus was preaching in John 6 and he said, "You must eat My flesh and drink My blood. If you're not going to do that, you are not able to be My disciple," and he was trying to talk about the violence of the crucifixion and how offensive really what God has to do for us to save us, how wicked we are, that it took this kind of thing. And it says that when Jesus said that, he had many disciples but many of those disciples went away. This is a hard teaching, they said. And it says, "many of them no longer walked with Him." So he gives that teaching, people depart, and Jesus looks, remember he looks at the 12 and he says, "Will you also leave Me?" And Peter said, "Lord, where should we go? Where would we go? You have the words of eternal life." You see, Peter was demonstrating a heart that continues. "I'm not sure why You said what You said, it's hard, it's painful, but there is nowhere else to go."

That's the mark of the believer and so the believer, you see, what's happening here, the word of God, James is showing and he says, "the law, the perfect law, the law of liberty." The law is like a looking glass, you come to the Scriptures, now I think he means the whole Bible but he also means, he's telling us that part of the way that God has revealed himself in Scripture is to give us his law, his requirements for us: the 10 Commandments and all the other teachings of the word, even the New Testament is filled also with things which we also should be doing. "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church." That's law, in a sense. That's what you are called to do. "Wives, submit to your husbands as unto the Lord." That's law. "Love your enemies." That's, in a sense, law. You're supposed to do this.

So God shows you his standard. That's what law is, and when God's standard comes up against our sinful hearts, what does it do? It exposes the ugliness. It exposes the wickedness and that's painful. It shows me how far short I come of what God has created me to be. It shows me how offensive my sinfulness is to a holy God. And it's natural for a sinner to want to run from that but the believer who is going to bear fruit, who is learning to be not a forgetful hearer but a faithful doer, remains under it. He remains beside it. He says to the Lord, "Keep showing me. Keep showing me the wickedness, the sinfulness."

And what happens is that remaining there, because it's not just the law that we have in the Scriptures, it's that we have the Gospel. The law, God gave the law to drive us to Christ, Galatians 3:24. He says that we were kept in custody, he uses this image, Paul uses the image in Galatians 3 that the reason God gave the law, the 10 Commandments to us as sinners, was to show us how much we needed a Savior, and the image he uses is of the Greek or the Roman teacher who would take the burden of instructing a young man, actually a boy who is growing into a man, and he would be his, sort of his taskmaster, his instructor. He would just sort of almost like own him. I mean, the guy may be a wealthy young man who has been given to this teacher and this guy is supposed to teach him how to be a man. Aristotle was this for Alexander the Great. So he teaches him, he brings him up to the point where now he is ready to release him as a man.

He says that's what the law was, the law was your paidagogai, it was your instructor to hold you, to hold all of us and to press the demands on us of what it means to be a follower of God and to keep pressing those things on us, painfully so, unrelentingly so, until it drove us to Christ. That's the purpose of the law. The law exposes my sin and shows me my hopelessness and chases me to the cross.

So James is saying that the believer looks intently into the perfect law, the law which gives liberty. He has already seeing the Gospel in it, you see? The law which convicts and exposes and shows me my ugliness is the law of liberty because it's the law that will set me free by sending me to Christ who has fulfilled the law and who enables me now to walk in righteousness. So look intently and abide by that. That is, you continue in it. You allow, you don't run from it. You stay there, "Lord, help me. Help me see the ugliness of my sin." And you see, abiding in it, it brings about true repentance. Go from remorse to real repentance, godly sorrow.

Then the third point of this how to do it, the third instruction that we see in verse 25, we are still in the third major point which is the precise instructions, you look intently, that's the first subpoint on number 3; secondly, you abide by it; and the third subpoint is "not having become" is the verb there and he says it emphatically, "not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer." So you look intently, you abide by it, and you become not a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer. You actually start doing it. You do the work. In fact, the phrase translated "effectual doer" literally in the Greek says, "but a doer of the work." So not having become a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work. So what God has shown you that you need to do now, you don't just hear and see how bad you are, you've gone to Christ but you don't just see that you are forgiven, now you actually do what he says to do.

Paul, remember we talked about Ephesians 4 last time, you put off and you put on. You put off the old man, you are renewed in the spirit of your mind by the word, and you put on the new man, Ephesians 4:22 to 32. Read that passage, it shows you how to do it and it talks about putting off lying, you see what a liar you are, "Look at me, here I am may be prone to exaggerate." That's a way of lying, isn't it? I remember years ago the Lord convicted me of saying things like, "I tried to call you. I should have called. I thought about calling," but I never really tried. And back in the old days you could get away with that. Busy signals, all that stuff. Remember those things? Busy signal? But now people know, "Well, no record of you calling me." Well, that's a good thing. It helps us to put off that lying. But it can be even before that happened thankfully that, "Hey, why did you say that?" Thinking about doing it isn't doing it. You say, "I thought about calling. I should have. I didn't, I'm sorry." Well, you see, putting it off is realizing that you need to stop lying but you carry it all the way through and saying speaking the truth. "You know, I really wish I had called but I haven't called you. How are you doing?" Go all the way to putting on. That's what he's saying this last point is. Look intently, look at the perfect law, the law of liberty, look at it, stoop down, consider it, it starts to hurt, remain in it, remain beside it until God gives you the grace and draws you to Christ to see his forgiveness, seeing his power now to walk in the truth. Become an effectual doer. I'm going to explain

a little more about how to do that in a moment because we're going to come to application at the end of point 4.

So we've seen the first three points: a clear command of what he wants us to do; the second point, the folly of forgetfulness, why we ought to do it, we don't want to be fools; thirdly, how to do it, the precise instructions, look intently, abide by it and become a doer; fourthly, the joy of obedience. He comes back to why again. At the end of verse 25, he gives the why positively. Before he said why negatively. You want to be a doer because a forgetful hearer, look how ridiculous that is. That's the negative side of why. Now it's the positive side. He said, "this man will be blessed in what he does." The one who is a doer of the work will be blessed in what he does. That's the joy of obedience.

The word "blessed, makarios," the same word as verse 12, "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial." The idea, this is a word that is found again and again in the Beatitudes. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are the meek. Right? What does that mean? Oh how happy are the poor in spirit. Oh how happy are the meek. So the idea is oh how happy is the man who does the word. Oh how happy is he. The joy of obedience. He's saying, "Listen, when you become a doer of the word, you will experience the joy, the great joy of obedience." Now, that's counterintuitive in a fallen world. Now, the believer that has been born again is beginning to understand more and more that there is joy in obedience but you are unlearning all the lies that we were born into as children of our father, the devil, before we come to Christ. We believed his lie that God is not good, that his law is evil.

The reason that there is joy in obedience is because of the nature of the law which James has told us. You look intently at the law, look what he says, it's the perfect law. It is the perfect law. God's law is perfect. It is exactly as it ought to be. It is complete. In fact, the word for "perfect" in the Old Testament is the word for "peace." The way that you have peace is abiding in the law. You obey.

Then he says, he's not able to just say the perfect law. James says, "one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty," the one that gives freedom. The one who looks intently, who stoops down to look at the perfect law, the one I'm talking about is the law that gives freedom. Oh how happy is the man who does that. Oh how happy is the person who learns how to abide under the word until it has done its work and then you walk in obedience.

This is something that we have to continue to meditate on. This is the truth. The truth is that the best thing in the world that any person can do is obey the word of God. The most delightful thing. Now, it's counterintuitive because your flesh doesn't want to. Your old man which was conceived in iniquity, brought forth in sin, as a believer if you've been born again, if you've come to Christ, if you've understood the Gospel that Jesus died to pay for your sins and you have repented and placed your faith in him, you've been born again, you have a new heart but you still have it with its old nature clinging to you. Your brain, your memories, former ways of thinking are still there and you have to die to those. You have to put them to death daily.

And one of the things that we have in our minds is that obedience is not really good. That's essentially what Satan said in the garden. That is the lie. Remember what he said? "Has God said that you shall not eat from any tree of the garden?" God had said that you can't eat from one tree but Satan, and Satan knew that, but he planted in Eve's mind that God would not let you eat from any of those trees. "He said you can't eat from any of those trees, didn't he? That's what he's like. He's the kind of God that will put you in this beautiful garden and not let you eat from any single tree in the garden, right?" No. Eve says, "No, no, he just said we can't eat from that one tree." But you see, Satan had already planted that doubt of God's character, what he's like. Why had God told him that? "Well, God said that the day that we eat of it, we will die." Satan said, "You shall surely not die." God said you surely shall die, Satan said you shall surely not die, "for God knows that in the day that you eat of it you will become like God, knowing good and evil." Satan says God is holding out on you. God wants to keep you down. His commandments are not for your good, they are to hamper your enjoyment of life, to hamper your self-realization to keep you from being all that you want to be or could be.

And that's how we see in sin every commandment of God. We think that he's keeping us. This is what the sin nature is and thinks, that he's keeping that which we need from us; that satisfaction happens in going outside of the parameters of God. Like the cattle that leans up against the fence because he wants to eat that which is outside the fence. That's better. And the reality is that is insanity and you have to convince yourself of that because it's true, that the best place in the world is to be within the boundaries of God's commandments. The happiest place in the world is to be obedient to the Lord. Do you know why? Because he is good and his law is a reflection of his character and the most wonderful thing is to be in fellowship with him and his character is absolutely wonderful. Everything that he says is right and good and best. So when you are tempted to think that it's better out there outside the boundaries of his commandments, realize that that is a lie. And you'll find out if you go outside those commandments exactly what Eve found out, that it was a lie Satan told her.

I mean, think about the goodness of God. If you think about this because we have these lies in us and the world tells us, you know, "God is a cosmic killjoy. He's trying to keep you from doing all that you want to do. And people should follow their hearts and all of that. They should give themselves to sexual pleasure. They should be whatever they want to be, even down to the gender decisions," and all this nonsense. And God is restricting people by telling them these commandments. "I made you a man, be a man. I made you a woman, be a woman. I made you a man, that means you are with one woman for life if you're going to have a marital relationship. That's it." We think in our sin nature that God is holding out on us and the world is telling us that but it's exactly the opposite.

Think about in the garden there was one commandment. This is the nature of God. The whole world was open and available. There was one fence. Think about that. The fence was like maybe this big around, I mean the spiritual fence of the commandment, right? I don't know how big that tree was but say it was a peach tree, it wouldn't be a peach tree because peaches are too good to be... Well, it would have been a good fruit. You know

what I'm saying. So it's a fruit tree. There it is and God says anything in the world is yours to enjoy, only don't enjoy that one thing. That's the heart of God. You see the liberality, the generosity of God and they doubt his goodness. So they cross over that stupid fence and they go and they eat of that fruit and it kills them and now they need commandments around everything. But the same God that gives the 10 Commandments and all the commandments in the Old Testament is the God who gave the one commandment in the garden. He's still good and everything that he forbids needs to be forbidden for your good. It is for your best. It is out of his love and it is a reflection of his holy character and the most wonderful thing in the world is to be in his presence enjoying his fellowship.

This is why the psalmist, you read Psalm 119, "I want to run in the way of Your commandments. Lord, enlarge my heart. I meditate on Your precepts. I cling to Your testimonies." The psalmist, you read the love that he has for the word of God. This is where life is because the word of God is given to keep me in the boundaries of joy and freedom, delight. That's what James is saying in James 1, that the law is the perfect law of liberty, that if you learn to look into it and remain there, you won't be a forgetful hearer, you will be an effectual doer and you will be the happiest person alive.

Isn't it wonderful how you've seen this? Those of you that have been walking with the Lord long enough to know you've had some battles with sin and, listen, you've got to be careful because once you think you stand, be careful lest you fall. But you had battles with certain sins that you've been able to make major progress in and now you know that what God was saying about his word is best. You know it experientially. "Yes, I know that's right! I've seen it. I have to share that with other young people who are struggling with those things." The comfort that you have received from the Lord.

Obedience is the way of blessing. Now look, how do you do it? I want to talk about that for just a couple of minutes because I think that this idea of remaining in it is so important. You know, looks intently, back to the instructions for a moment for application. Remember, the precise instruction: you look intently, you abide by it and you become a doer. You look at the word. You're reading the word, you hear the word preached, you have another believer come to you and say in conversation, "Hey, I think this is maybe something you need to work on." They're basically saying, "You've got something in your teeth." What do you do with that?

Well, you hear the word preached, you read something, you read the Scriptures and you are struck with something, you think it relates to you, remain under it. How do you remain under it? One of the things that we need to understand and we've lost today is the biblical practice of meditation. Now, please understand that's a loaded word. Essentially biblical Christian meditation is different than meditation in the world. Most of the meditation, the Eastern meditation, you empty your mind and this is the way you can actually test it, Christian meditation, you fill your mind. You don't empty it. That's nonsense. That's ridiculous. Emptying your mind and letting your sin nature go wild, yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Fill your mind with the truth.

I mentioned Psalm 119, six different times you have the psalmist say he meditates and the word that's used there, the Hebrew word means "to talk; to reason; to consider," and it's like the idea is you're talking to yourself the Scriptures. Another key word in Psalm 19 is the idea of low kind of like growling, an animal purring. The word "meditate" is you're kind of talking low to yourself. You take the Scriptures and you speak them to yourself. You're thinking about it, "Be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger. Quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger. Be quick to listen. What does that mean?" In fact, in the New Testament one of the words that's used I think for "meditate," it's not usually translated meditation but I think the idea is in Philippians 4:9 when he says, "dwell on these things," the word is *logizomai* which means to "logically reason out." So it's taking the truth of Scripture, and so meditation is taking the truth of the Bible and thinking on it. Looking into it and staying with it and thinking about it and reasoning about it and applying it to my life. "What does this mean? What would this look like?" And the more that you remain in it, it still hurts as you're doing it because you're seeing, "Man, I'm so quick to anger. I'm so quick to speak. The Bible says be quick to listen. How do I think about this today? How have I failed this today? So when this happens again, what will that look like?" So you think it through and you meditate on the Scripture and you keep applying it to your mind until it begins to be implanted and it brings forth that fruit which is saving your soul which he talked about in verse 21.

This book, "God's Battle Plan for the Mind: The Puritan Practice of Biblical Meditation," by David W. Saxton, we had some of these ordered. Ruth has already got some in the bookstore. You know, all of our books in the resource center we just sell at cost so there is no commercial here for anything other than to be a blessing. But this book is actually an interesting book. He goes back to the Puritans and says the Puritans were constantly encouraging their people to meditate on the Scriptures; to turn these things over and to apply them.

I'm going to read you a couple of things from this book. He says, John Ball, one of the Puritans said this, "The neglect of this duty," the duty of Christian meditation, "The neglect of this duty is the very cause why many Christians enjoy not the tenth part of those privileges that God has provided for them in their pilgrimage." You're living on 10 percent or less of what God has for you because you're not meditating.

Another Puritan writes, "Little meditating makes lean Christians of little life, little strength, little growth and of little usefulness to others." Little meditation means you have little strength, little growth, little life, little usefulness.

Thomas Watson says, "Meditation is the palate of the soul whereby we taste the goodness of God. It is the eye of the soul whereby we view the beauties of holiness. It's the key to the wine cellar, to the banqueting house, to the garden of spices that lets us into him whom our soul loves." It is taking the word and continuing to turn it over in your mind so the way he's saying, when you hear a sermon, when you have a Bible study, when you yourself read the word at home, take something from that to meditate on and to do and to keep thinking on it and how it applies so that it becomes your life. It changes you.

What is that going to look like? Let's talk about that for a second. Be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger. You realize that this verse is something God has put on your heart and so you are thinking about it, you're meditating on it, you write it down. That's a pretty easy one to memorize, isn't it? That's always good so you have it memorized but you're thinking about it and something happens where you jump to conclusions, you say a harsh word, so you're not quick to listen. "The reason I reacted is I didn't listen to what was going on. I assumed. That's a bad thing to do, isn't it, to assume? I want to ask a question so I should have asked questions. Being quick to listen means ask questions so next time I'm in that situation, I need to go back and apologize now but the next time I'm in that situation, I'm going to ask a question. I'm going to stop and even just count to three or something and think for a moment and pray. Lord, what's going on here? What are you trying to teach me?" And in doing that, in thinking about that, the Lord starts showing you when you start meditating on something, he starts showing you how you are messing up all over the place. This is one of the things about remaining in it. The more you think about it, the more you see, "Oh my goodness, I'm doing this all over the place. Keep clinging to the Scripture."

What is that doing? It's showing me and this is really the key, it's showing me how ugly my heart is so that I'll run to Christ. What does that look like? I'm not quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger. "Lord, look at me. I'm seeing it here, I'm seeing it when I'm driving in traffic, presuming this guy needs to drive differently and coaching him from my car. He can't hear me; I feel better but that's ridiculous. That's sinful. That's ungodly. That's judgmental. That's wicked. Who am I to judge him? I don't know what's going on in his life. Lord, I need a Savior. I need the blood of Christ to wash me and cleanse me. Thank you that you don't deal with me as my behavior and my performance, you deal with me on the basis of Jesus' perfect performance so that you are not rejecting me now because of my sin today. You love me because of Jesus." But you don't stop there. That's wonderful. You glory in Christ but, "Not only are you my righteousness standing, Lord Jesus, you are my righteousness in living. I can become more like you. You were meek. You asked questions. I can be like you. Live your life through me. I'm trusting in you. I'm looking to you. Holy Spirit, fill me."

You see, that's what true meditation is. I run to Christ, I run to the cross, I celebrate my forgiveness and then I look to him to draw on his power for righteousness but all the while, it's the word, it's the word that is driving the process. Real practical obedience and when that happens, then we are being transformed by the renewing of our minds and over time people will look at us and say, "Wow, look at the difference there." How awesome that is and then we get to tell them that's the difference that Jesus is making. That's the difference that his precious word, the perfect law of liberty, and then we get to experience the joy. You know, I said earlier it feels good to say something about a driver, it feels a whole lot better to walk in holiness as you drive your car. A whole lot better to pray for that person, to be understanding knowing that, "Hey, I sometimes do that when I'm not thinking anyway. Lord, thank you. I want to run in the way of your commandments. Make me like Christ."

Let's pray together.

Father, we rejoice in the glory of your Gospel, the fact that you are a God who is completely wonderfully good in every way. You are delightful, Lord. Help us to be people who believe that more and more and more and who delight to do your will. We know that we need grace, so many areas where we struggle, so many areas we are blind to and areas where you begin to expose our sin. It's our tendency in our fallen old man to want to not abide under your word, not to remain there. Help us be diligent, Lord, to stay and to allow your word to do its work, to do its surgery on us because your word as it does its surgery is going to lead us closer to Christ and so the pain will be swallowed up in the joy of seeing his beauty and his goodness and will always result in more and more blessing, more and more joy when you get finished with the work. Lord, thank you most of all for the fact that we will continue this work until we come home. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.