

Small Group Guide

FAITH WORKS: FAITH OBEYS

The Church at Brook Hills, Dr. David Platt

August 23, 2009

James 1:19-25

This guide is designed to help you facilitate discussion with your Small Group. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering and owning the truths of God's Word. There may be questions you do not want to use, and there may be instances when you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on their relationship with God. Your role is to facilitate this experience, not complete the discussion guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool rather than a rigid teaching task list.

Connect . . .

Use one or both of the following options to introduce the discussion time to follow.

Option 1

Ask group members to share things they do in front of the mirror. Examples include brushing their teeth, shaving, putting on makeup, drying or brushing their hair. Discuss: **How would these tasks have a different result if your mirror were taken away after you looked into it? How would the result be even more different if you never looked into the mirror?**

Explain that today's lesson will explore how God's Word is a mirror to our lives and how we benefit from looking intently into it daily.

Option 2

Discuss this question: **Is a society more free with laws or without laws?** After a few ideas have been given, make sure your group sees that some laws are always necessary to insure that people respect other's freedom. Explain that today's message will explore how obedience to God's perfect law is the only way to live a truly free life.

Review the Message . . .

The author of James is likely Jesus' half brother, who was a known leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15 and 21). The book was written predominantly to Jewish Christians who were likely once associated with the church in Jerusalem. These believers had been scattered during a time of persecution, which is why James starts with the theme of trials and suffering. He then offers explanation of why listening and doing are inextricably linked to faith in the midst of suffering.

Ask a volunteer to read James 1:19-25.

FAITH OBEYS

James 1:19-25

THE JOURNEY OF OBEDIENCE...

How do we respond to God's Word?

1. Receive the Word humbly.

Discussion . . .

- Read James 1:19-21. What should be our goal when we approach the Word of God? (*To hear what God has to say. Emphasize that we should approach the Word to hear truth instead of telling God what we think He, or we, should do.*)
- How does verse 21 tell us we come before God with receptive hearts? (*By ridding ourselves of moral filth.*)
- How does coming to God through His Word help in that sanctification process?
- Read Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:24-27.
- How do these verses, especially Jeremiah 31: 33 and Ezekiel 36:27, connect to James 1:21? (*The Word is planted in you because of the new heart and Spirit of God that God gives believers.*)
- How does the truth that believers have new hearts with God's law written on them encourage believers?
- How do these verses indicate the inside-out transformation changes believers' lives?

Application . . .

- What practical steps can you take before listening to or reading God's Word to make sure you receive it with humility?
- Why is it so difficult to quiet our minds when coming to the Word? How do you overcome that difficulty?
- What's the difference between receiving the Word humbly and receiving the Word proudly? How have you experienced both ways of receiving it, and what were the results?
- How does having a new heart with God's law written on it (Jer. 31:31-34) and the Spirit of God within you enable you to live out James 1:19-21?

2. Remember the Word constantly.

Discussion . . .

- Read James 1:22-25. According to verse 25, what is the indicator of when someone has listened to the Word and obeyed it?

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- Explain that in verse 24, James used a deliberately ridiculous analogy of looking in the mirror and then forgetting your own image. Why do you think people are able to remember their outward image more easily than their inward image? Obviously, our inward image should be of greater importance than our outer image, so why do people typically spend more minutes in a day on outward grooming than inward soul preparation? How can you overcome this challenge?
- Point out that in verse 25, the phrase translated “looks intently” implies gazing on something with penetrating absorption. Why does James link that kind of study of God’s Word with freedom?
- Read Deuteronomy 6:4-12. What do these verses say we should do with God’s Word?
- Read Deuteronomy 8:10-18. How do these verses challenge you to memorize God’s Word? What do these verses warn can happen to you if you don’t know His Word?

Application . . .

- Reviewing the time you spend listening to and reading God’s Word, how would you describe your ability to “look intently” at God’s Word as opposed to simply looking at it?
- Do ever read or listen to God’s Word only to forget what it said a few hours later? Why do you think that happens? How can meditating on God’s Word, reviewing God’s Word, or memorizing it, help you to apply it?
- On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate your ability to memorize Scripture? (*Don’t require your group to share that aloud if they would be uncomfortable.*) How do you feel about any Scripture you’ve memorized recently?
- What specific activities steal time you could devote to God’s Word? (*Examples include sleep, television or movies, reading other books or publications, hobbies, time on the phone or the Internet.*) Are these activities wrong? (*Probably not*) What does the time they consume say about what you value?

3. Obey the Word wholeheartedly.

Discussion . . .

- Dr. Platt said, “It’s damning to listen to God’s Word day by day and not obey it. To accept Jesus is to obey Jesus.” How do some people convince themselves and others that it’s enough to just accept Jesus without obeying His Word?
- Read Matthew 7:21-23. How do Jesus’ words support what James is saying about the importance of obeying God’s Word?
- Read Matthew 7:24-27. How did Jesus compare obeying God’s Word to using rock and sand for the foundation of your life? How is this teaching like James’ teaching?
- True or false: You can consistently listen to God’s Word and completely miss the point. (*True.*) Why is this true based on James 1?

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- Why is a willing heart not enough when it comes to obedience?
- Read Psalm 119:32. How does this verse describe the “perfect law that gives freedom” in James 1:25? Do you believe it’s easy or difficult for believers to live in this freedom? Why?
- Why is God’s grace fundamental for maintaining a life that’s obedient but not bound in legalism? How do these verses support that? John 15:14, 1 John 2:3-6, and John 14:21. (*We obey out of love for Jesus and in response to His salvation.*)

Application . . .

If you have not created the list suggested at the conclusion of the message, complete the following before continuing: (1) Pray, asking God where you are listening to Him but not obeying. Write them down. (2) What action steps can you take to obey in these areas?

- If you were in the worship service, look back at the list you created in response to the question, “What has God been telling you to do according to His Word?” While keeping the details personal, how is God challenging you to obey Him?
- In the context of a covenant community of believers, what practical steps can we take to encourage each other to obey God’s Word after we hear it?
- Based on the list you made, where in God’s Word are these areas of obedience addressed? Allow volunteers to share some of their struggles, and as a group, suggest verses to memorize to help with those struggles.