

Receive the Implanted Word
James 1:21
Tim Becker – December 29, 2019

1. Introduction

I knew that over the Thanksgiving holiday that I'd have all of my children, their spouses, and grandchildren staying in my home. This would be 18 people. I love my family, but I knew that this would be a challenge to an introvert like me. I thought in advance about what loving and obeying God would look like during this time. I asked Brian and George to pray that God would help me love my family well. Seventeen or eighteen stayed in our home from Tue evening until Sunday afternoon. How did I do at obeying God, at loving my family well? There were some bright spots, but there were some missing pieces as well. My attitude on the inside wasn't always as cheerfully giving as I wanted through the mountains of food prep and dishes and noise.

Like me, I know that most of you wish to love and obey God more than you do. And I know that, like me, you don't always do as well as you hope. I know that most of you would admit that your heart's joy in God and your cheerful obedience to him is often less than you wish, less than God would wish. I am fairly sure that you know and believe that God is more satisfying than an afternoon of football or a good dessert or a Nintendo Switch or a day with your favorite person. I know you believe this, but day to day, you, like me, have trouble really living like you believe this.

Would you like see this change in you? Would you like to more closely align what you believe with how you live day to day? If you would, God's word has some help for us this morning. Please open your Bible to James 1.

Please follow along as I read James 1:17-21.

Jas 1:17–21 : ¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸ Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. ¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. ²¹ Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

2. Context in James

Our key verse is 21. But let's start by taking a look at the context here in James. The first thing to realize about this book is that over and over James weaves together doctrine and life. This book contains many crucial truths about God and man. And James spends many

verses making sure we see how those truths apply to how we live. Now let's trace the flow of thought from James 1 v. 17 to v. 21.

James 1:17 says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." The big idea here is that every good and perfect gift that you and I will ever have comes to us from God. You have nothing good that came to you apart from God's giving it to you. God is kind. He always treats you better than you deserve.

The next verse says that one of those good gifts is salvation. Verse 18 says, "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." When James says that God "brought us forth," he means that he brought us from death to life, from dead in our sins to life in Christ, from an enemy of God because of our sins to an adopted son of God because of Christ's giving his life as payment for our sins.

Why did God show such mercy upon sinners? Because of his own will. No one made him do it. No one earned it such that God owed them life. Of his own will he brought us forth.

How did he do it? "By the word of truth." This is a reference to God's word, the Scriptures, the Bible. God brings people from death to life, of his own will, by using his true word, the Bible.

The truths of these 2 verses are precious. How should they be applied? Many ways. But the way James writes of next is in v. 19 and 20, "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God." James is saying that this good precious salvation gift from God to sinners ought to change the way sinners interact with one another. Don't assume that since God has made you born again that your anger is righteous, that your anger is God's anger. So, be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.

Notice that v. 21 starts with "therefore." "Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." James is saying that in light of our unrighteous anger and in light of what he has said about our desire to sin earlier in this chapter, his readers are to do two things. Put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness. And receive with meekness the implanted word.

How would you react if someone sent you a letter telling you to put away all your filthiness and rampant wickedness? These words are so strong, so derogatory. You might react by thinking to yourself, "Who do you think you are?! I've been a Christian for many decades now." Or you might think, "I'm a well-respected member of my community." Or, "I see what goes on around me and know that I'm better than most. All filthiness and rampant wickedness?! Really?! Me?!"

Yes, you. And me. James is writing this letter to Christians. He calls his readers “brothers” 15 times in this letter. James and God are writing these words to you and to me. We can’t put away filthiness and wickedness in our souls if we refuse to see it. God sees it. He’s asking us to see it too. It’s not low self-esteem to see your sins as great. James is asking you to go on the hunt for them and to put them away just as surely as you change dirty clothes, only this is far more important than clothes.

3. Implanted Word

Now let’s look at the second half of v. 21. This is where we will spend most of our focus in this message. James tells us to “receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” What is this implanted word that we are to receive?

The first important clue is that the implanted word is the means by which God saves our souls. This implanted word, that is to be received, is vital to our salvation.

We can learn more about the meaning of this implanted word by taking a look at 1 Peter 1:23. “Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;” When God’s word is planted in a person, it is like a seed that won’t perish. This seed so works in a person that they become born again. God’s word that is living and abiding creates new life from God. The implanted word in James 1:21 is the living and abiding word of God in 1 Pet 1:23 that makes a person born again.

Another place we can go to learn about the meaning of this implanted word is to the OT prophet Jeremiah. The prophet Jeremiah foretells that someday God will make a new covenant with his people. The old covenant was God’s law; think ten commandments plus more. God’s people were entirely unable to keep the old covenant. Jeremiah ch. 31 says that the new covenant is that God will put his law within his people, writing it on their hearts and minds. Once his law was written on tablets of stone. Now God promises to write it within his people. The implanted word in James 1:21 is God’s law written, implanted, on the heart and mind as described in Jeremiah 31.

One more text is helpful to see just what is meant by the implanted word that we are to receive. Another OT prophet, Ezekiel, adds to what God promises with the new covenant. God says in Ezekiel ch. 36 that he will cleanse his people from their sins, remove their proud disobedient hearts and put his Spirit within them. Furthermore, he will cause his people to walk in his statutes and to be careful to obey his rules. The implanted word in James 1:21 is God’s Spirit causing God’s people to obey God’s laws as described in Ezekiel 36.

So, what is this implanted word that James says we are to receive with meekness? The implanted word is the word of God that God uses to make a person born again and to save their souls from God’s judgment. Let’s notice four things here.

First, God implants this word. You don't implant this saving word in yourself.

Second, it is implanted not at the time of physical birth, but at time of spiritual birth.

Third, this word surely includes the good news of the gospel: God is holy and just, man is sinful and worthy of God's judgment, Jesus died on the cross to pay the judgment penalty owed by men for their sins, and those who repent and trust in Jesus will indeed be forgiven for their sins and be given eternal life with God.

Fourth, this implanted word is the work of the Holy Spirit. And the two go together such that when the word is implanted in a person, the Holy Spirit is implanted as well.

4. Receive

Next, what does it mean to receive this implanted word? We might think that it means to receive the gift of salvation that God has offered. This is not what James means. Here are three reasons.

First, remember that this book is largely written to Christians. I already told you that James repeatedly refers to his readers as brothers. So, the command to receive the implanted word is not given to unbelievers, but to believers. Believers don't need to receive the gift of salvation because they already have.

Second, James seems to assume that the implanting of the word in his readers has already happened. He doesn't say to receive the word so that it will be implanted, but to receive the implanted word, the word that is already implanted in you. This is confirmed by v. 18, "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth." The bringing forth, the bringing out of death to life has already taken place in James' readers.

Third, look where James' argument goes next. Verse 22, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." Receiving God's implanted word involves hearing it and doing it.

So, what do we know so far? When God causes a person to be born again, he implants his word in a person. This is what makes them born again. God's word produces what his word requires, that is, repentance of sins and faith in God.

James is calling us to do something with the saving word that God has implanted in us. He is calling us to receive it. There is a way to receive the implanted word even as you already have it in you. How so?

The key is to remember that this implanted word is not merely an abstract idea, a vague force from God. The implanted word is God's word. And God gave us his word in a

book. You will never receive God's implanted word without receiving his word in his book, the Bible. Receiving God's implanted word is not receiving a Bible and putting it on your shelf. It is not to have an app on your phone. Receiving God's implanted word is to hear, submit to, and obey God's Spirit speaking God's word as you take in the words of the Bible. You might do this by listening to the words of the Bible being read or by reading the words yourself.

Note that this receiving that James is commanding is ongoing. It's not a once and done action. And this ongoing receiving of the implanted word is able to save your souls. This means that it is able to keep your faith in God alive and enduring so that at the day of judgment you won't be found lacking. Those who are saved in the day of judgment won't be without sins, but they will have with many evidences of faith in their lives. And because of this faith in God, he will forgive their sins and accept them into life eternal with him.

If you are on the Medford Raiders men's varsity basketball team, how important to your winning is your receiving the coach's words? Your coach is there to teach you how to play the game so as to win. He gives you instruction. I'm guessing, lots of instruction. Does he ever repeat himself? Surely. On purpose? You bet. Why? Because you need to hear his words over and over in order to get them in your head. Coach Brown is trying to change your thinking, to renew your mind. You will play better basketball if you let your thinking be changed by him. Hearing Coach Brown's instruction is not a once and done action. You need to receive his words over and over throughout the season. Then your thinking will match his and you'll instinctively play better ball.

When we think about basketball, this makes sense to us. So, why are we so wrong-headed when it comes to our walk with God? We somehow think that we can have our minds changed, renewed, by God's word just by reading it once, or a few times, or in a minute or two a few days a week. You surely won't be a strong basketball player this way. And all the more, you surely won't keep strong faith in God this way.

College and professional athletes don't just listen to the coach. Listening is more than sounds striking the ears. They take notes in their own notebooks. They study those notes on their own. All because they have a goal in mind: to be an asset to their team and great at their craft.

When was the last time you took notes as you read the Bible or heard it taught? When was the last time you studied those notes on your own? Friends, surely being a faithful and fruitful follower of Christ is more important than playing a sport. Just as for the athlete, studying God's word is essential to living it out. You will never do God's word without your head and heart being saturated with it. And to have your head and heart saturated with the good milk of God's word, you must read it and study it, again and again, all life long. If you profess to follow Christ and you have not given his word the time and focus that it is worthy of, would you tell God right now that you repent of this?

5. With Meekness

Your attitude when you receive God's implanted word affects how much you will gain. This is why James tells us to receive the word with meekness.

Imagine you are sitting down to read the Scriptures. What does receiving God's word with non-meekness look like. Impatience. You read the first paragraph and don't see anything that relates to your worries or your concerns. You think, "Why am I reading this? I have a lot to do. I don't have time to learn things that don't help me." And so, you quit right there. Impatience, not meekness.

Or pride. When you read God's word telling you to put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness, you just can't believe he is talking to you. You are quite sure you are better than God is giving you credit for. Pride, not meekness.

Friends, receiving the implanted word with meekness means receiving it humbly, that is, your assumption is that God knows better than you do what you need to flourish. Receiving the implanted word with meekness means receiving it patiently, that is, you are willing to give time to your God as he instructs you, even when you feel too busy with other responsibilities. Receiving the implanted word with meekness means receiving it eagerly, that is, you so trust that God has something good for you that you lean in with a confidence and a desire for him to help you as you read. Receiving the implanted word with meekness means receiving God's word obediently; you aren't sitting back judging for yourself if it is right and good, but you are submitting to his words and obeying them.

In order to receive God's implanted word with meekness, you need faith in God. Faith believes that God is worthy of your trust and that his words are good for you and worthy of your attention.

If you've read the Bible on your own over the past few months, ask yourself, did I receive it with meekness?

6. Practical Help

My aim up to now has been to help you see that the word of God that saves you is to be eagerly and meekly received in order to give your faith endurance and vitality to the end. And my aim has been to motivate you to regularly receive that word more than you have in the past by reading the Bible on your own. Now I want to give you some practical help to do that.

Imagine that I was a freshman player on the Raider basketball team and that I told you that my desire was to significantly improve my game in 2020. Imagine that you asked me how I was going to work on that and that I told you that I would just play it by ear, doing

what felt right day by day, week by week, throughout the year. How high would you rate my chance of accomplishing my goal? Not high, right? Why not? Because I didn't have a plan. And I didn't have a drive to actually carry out any steps that were inconvenient. If I would only work on my basketball training when it felt right, chances are that many other interests would pull me away most all the time: watching videos, hanging out with friends, working, school work. Chances are, I wouldn't spend all that much time training to improve my game.

Without a plan, a desire remains merely a wish. A wish without a willingness to pay a cost for it isn't very likely to come true.

So, if you are going to receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your soul, you are going to have to be willing to pay a cost. Just as it would be inconvenient for me to do what it takes to improve my basketball game, so it will be inconvenient for you to take in the word of God with all the help God has for you in that.

You can make room in your schedule for this just as you might make room for guitar practice if you wanted to learn to play the guitar or exercise if you wanted to feel better or watching movies or reading books or investing in a relationship. All of us make room in our schedule for things that matter to us. Even when we think we have no room, we find the room for the things that are important to us. Won't you make room for regular Bible reading in 2020?

At the Welcome Center, I've provided copies of three different Bible reading plans to help you. If you have not read much Bible before, then the 5x5x5 plan is what I would recommend for you. This plan leads you to read through the entire NT in 5 minutes per day, 5 days per week, in 1 year.

The second plan I've provided is the M'Cheyne reading plan. This plan directs you to read 4 parts of the Bible each day, about 4 chapters per day, each day of the year, such that you read through the NT and Psalms twice in a year and the rest of the Bible once. Pastor Brian has often used this plan for himself.

The third plan is the Kingdom reading plan. I've used this one for the past several years. This plan reads through 4 parts of the Bible each day, 25 days each month. This allows a few catch-up days at the end of the month for when you get behind in your plan. The plan leads you to read through the Bible in a year with the Psalms read twice. This plan takes me about 20-30 minutes per day of reading.

As I said, paper copies of all 3 plans are available at the Welcome Center.

If you are not used to reading the Bible every day, then I would recommend that you give yourself a modest plan. Don't start with something so ambitious that you quit in discouragement after 2 or 3 weeks. Using the plan I read, I often recommend that people start by reading 2 of the columns this year and then the other 2 next year. This way you

will read through the entire Bible in 2 years, which is something most Christians have never done in their entire lives.

If you have another plan to follow, please feel free to use that. If you search the Internet for Bible reading plans, you'll find many to choose from. Also, you can find apps for your device that do the same thing. The important step is to make a plan to read God's word in 2020, to receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your soul.

I urge you to take the first step today of picking a plan that works for you.

7. Personal Testimony

For the first many years of my Christian life I read some Bible, but not much. I was happy to have read a chapter a day. But I didn't do that every day. At that pace, I had never read the entire Bible.

During a conference at our church, Renee picked up the challenge of reading through the entire Bible in a year. She completed it in a year and was hooked. She began to see connections from one section of the Bible to another that she had missed all her years before. As she continued the plan the next few years, she was much changed by God through it. She found that she knew and remembered the Bible more than she ever had. A couple years after Renee began reading in this way, I joined her. Renee and I have read through the Bible in a year for many years now. God has so used it in my life to increase my knowing him and my confidence, trust, faith in him.

On most days, no fireworks of insight or stunning application to my life occur to me. But the Spirit of God uses the consistent receiving of God's word to change me. Like a growing plant, the change is imperceptible day to day, but year to year the change is unmistakable.

Through my reading, the Spirit keeps my faith in God living and vital, he increases my awe and fear and worship of God, and he helps me trust God, trusting that he is good and right and able. Would you like these things in your life? Then join me in a plan to meekly receive the implanted word which is able to save your soul.

8. Conclusion

In closing, please turn with me to Psalm 1 in your bibles. Please follow along as I read. Look for what characterizes the man who is blessed by God.

Ps 1:1–6 : ¹ Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; ² but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. ³ He is like a tree planted by

streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. ⁴ The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. ⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; ⁶ for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Notice that the man blessed by God is the one who turns away from sins and turns toward God's word. On God's word "he delights" and "he meditates day and night." You must be reading God's word to delight in it. And you must be reading God's word to more closely align what you believe with how you live day to day.

The Bible would consider it inconceivable to be a person who repents of their sins and delights in God's word, but doesn't read it. I know that this describes many of you. So, I'm lovingly calling you to change this in 2020. Please pick a reading plan for the new year.

God's word is finer than gold and sweeter than honey. God's word keeps God's people in the faith until the judgment day. And on that day, you will rejoice that you spent all those hours meditating on God's word. From that vantage point, you will see the time spent as a bargain of delight.