

DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

FEB 2024 | JAMES 1:22-24

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not 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.

JAMES 1:22-24

DOERS OF THE WORD

New Year's resolutions are often sprinkled with intentions to spend more time in regular Bible reading and praying. One recent survey promoting The Bible App showed that someone who reads the Bible four or more times a week is:

- 59% less likely to view pornography
- 74% less likely to gamble
- 407% more likely to memorize Scripture
- 228% more likely to share their faith with others
- 231% more likely to disciple others
- 30% less likely to struggle with loneliness.

There is great value in simply reading the Bible. However, there are many witnesses who will testify that it is hard to do and sometimes even depressing. The Pharisees of Jesus' day read the Scripture regularly and memorized much of it, yet they stand as history's most adamant resistance to Jesus, who is the very theme of the Bible. Jesus told them that they searched the Scriptures to find life, but would not come to Him who is life (see John 5:39). Those looking for something other than Jesus, the living Word, will be disappointed when they open their Bibles. The Scripture makes promises of itself that are worth believing and claiming. We would do well to learn how to read it in such a way as to experience such grand promises:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17, ESV

However, to do this we must first acknowledge that the reality revealed in the Bible is not intuitive to our natural minds. Such knowledge must be revealed to us by the Spirit of God. Truth as revealed by the Spirit engulfs the whole person, not just the mind:

We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived" the things God has prepared for those who love him—these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.

1 Corinthians 2:6-10, NIV

The human mind tends to think in an evolutionary pattern. We observe what is happening and interpret the past and predict the future on the basis of a repeatable

pattern. It is the scientific method. If something is not testable by rational and logical standards, we tend to reject it as myth. Such a limitation on truth is the tool of the scoffer:

Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

2 Peter 3:3-7, NIV

Here Peter is pointing out that reality is not limited to observable patterns that the human mind can conceive, but that God has repeatedly surprised His creatures by intervening in history to carry out His plan, which is far better than the human mind can imagine. Think of the flood. Everything was going along as usual when God told Noah about new things - a flood, rain, an ark. What must Noah have thought? Later God tells Abram and Sarah that they will have a child after child-bearing years. Not possible? It happened. After 400 years in Egypt doing the same thing every day,

it was a surprise that God told Moses they were leaving. And they did. A young Jewish girl of around 13 years was told by an angel that she would become pregnant without sex with a man. Really? After the normal proceedings of an unjust trial, the normal verdict, the resulting crucifixion, Jesus arose from the dead. Unprecedented! Things in God's reality are not limited to what looks like normal.

If we read Scripture with natural eyes only, we shall never see the reality that restores all that sin destroyed. We shall come away with degrees of condemnation, confinement, and conformity. But the Epistle of James helps us:

Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. 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. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not 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. 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. If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

James 1:18-27, ESV

James describes reading the Scripture as a man looking at himself in a mirror. But he goes away forgetting what he saw. For a long time I didn't really like this text. I saw myself looking at the Scripture and seeing all my flaws (like when I look each morning before shaving and cleaning up), then picturing how I went out and didn't diligently try hard enough to clean up what I had seen. Looking into the mirror was not a joyful view. But, then I saw that it was the perfect law of liberty I was looking into, and the image I saw was myself as God sees me in Christ. Instead of my imperfections, I can see His perfections.

In reading Scriptures with this view, I see a man loved unconditionally. I cannot do anything to be loved more, nor can I do anything to be loved less. I am as loved as Jesus the Son is loved by the Father. As I go away from the mirror, I act accordingly. Being loved like that frees me from trying to win affection and gain applause. Being loved like that I can and must love like that. My actions began

to change because I am free to do that which my heart wants to do - love others.

In reading Scriptures with this view, I see a man fully known. Jesus knows every detail of my life. He knows the dark places, the shadows. The places of shame and failure. He knows my thoughts, yet He loves me as His own. I go away free from trying to make a name for myself. I don't need a resume to affirm myself. The only One who matters, knows me and has guaranteed to forever identify me as His.

In reading Scriptures with this view, I see a man that is eternally forgiven. All my sinful acts and thoughts are forgiven. All of them. The past ones, the future ones...I am not on probation. He has taken me to the judgment and declared me justified. And more, He has already told me about it so I don't need to worry about judgment as it approaches, and I can live as one freed from all debt owed to God's justice.

In reading Scriptures with this view, I see a man who is supernaturally empowered. I have been restored to fully human status with the assignment to carry out the mission God had in mind before creation. The world is the field where I partner with God in bringing eternal life to dead people, light to people in darkness, and liberty to those in bondage. I have been inducted into the family of God whose pleasure is doing what the Father likes. I can't help but expect Him to intervene when I pray. I care about the structures of society that are either promoting the flourishing of God's grace or suppressing the cherished

creatures of God's heart. I care about the poor, the orphan, the widow, the single mom, the fatherless boy, the addict, the sick, and every other member of society who needs the light I carry and the love with which I am loved. If I go away remembering what I saw in the mirror, I will act accordingly.

Sadly, many times we read the scripture as a reflection of our weakness, and we feel condemned by our own failure, confined by moral rules, and conformed by religious regulations designed to suppress our desires and stymie our dreams. Resolutions to read more Scripture seldom pan out if that is what we see. But, when we look into the text of the Bible with eyes opened by the grace of God, we see Jesus standing in our place of examination, smiling and telling us to go and live like who we are in Him. Because we are loved by Him, we love. As we channel love, we affect every institution in society. We are truly firstfruits of the new creation. We are people of the resurrection. We expect to be surprised by the Lord who rules over all and has saved us to the uttermost.



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