

# How to let the Bible bless you

Message for Sunday, January 26, 2020  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** James 1:21-25

## Children's Message:

I brought with me some of the cookbooks I have at home. This one—*Good Housekeeping Illustrated Cookbook*—covers just about every kind of food. This one—*Muffins*—covers just one type of food, but does it in great detail. It's interesting to browse through the books and see all the wonderful foods I can make. Each item has a recipe that tells me all the ingredients I need—like eggs, flour, and so on—and then gives step by step instructions on how to put it all together. Many of them have photographs of what it will look like when I'm done. I get hungry just looking at the pictures.

You probably think I'm a great cook, with all that information. But I'm not. Jane, my wife, does most of the cooking in our home.

To be a good cook, it's not enough for me to just read the book and look at the pictures. I have to actually *do* what it says!

The Bible is like a cookbook. The Bible has instructions—*the recipe*—for how to live in God's way. It's not enough to just read the Bible, or to look at the pictures [I'm using an illustrated children's Bible]. I must obey what it says.

Lord, thank-you for the Bible. It helps us to learn about you and about how to live. But most important of all, help us to do what it says! Amen.

**Message** “How to let the Bible bless you”

## 1) Live what God teaches us in the Bible

Last week, we read an earlier passage in this letter from James, and we read how important it is to listen: both listening to other people, and listening to God. I trust you've all had a good week practising listening. Great! When you listen, you are showing that you care about the other person, or that you care about God.

But today we see that's not enough.

James 1:22, Today's English Version:  
Do not deceive yourselves by just listening to his word; instead, put it into practice.

It's not enough to listen to or read the Bible. That's a good thing to do! But we must live it out. If we don't, James says we deceive ourselves. In plain words, we are living a lie.

Chuck Swindoll tells a wonderful story about this passage.<sup>1</sup>

To make the value of obedience just as practical as possible, let's play 'Let's Pretend.' Let's pretend that you work for me. In fact, you are my executive assistant in a company that is growing rapidly. I'm the owner and I'm interested in expanding overseas. To pull this off, I make plans to travel abroad and stay there until a new branch office gets established.

I make all the arrangements to take my family and move to Europe for six to eight months. And I leave you in charge of the busy stateside organization. I tell you that I will write you regularly and give you directions and instructions. I leave and you stay. Months pass. A flow of letters are mailed from Europe and received by you at the national headquarters. I spell out all my expectations. Finally, I return.

Soon after my arrival, I drive down to the office and I am stunned. Grass and weeds have grown up high. A few windows along the street are broken. I walk into the Receptionist's room. She is doing her nails, chewing gum and listening to her favorite disco station. I look around and notice the wastebaskets are overflowing. The carpet hasn't been vacuumed for weeks, and nobody seems concerned that the owner has returned. I asked about your whereabouts and someone in the crowded lounge area points down the hall and yells, “I think he's down there.”

Disturbed, I move in that direction and bump into you as you are finishing a chess game with our sales manager. I ask you to step into my office, which has been temporarily turned into a television room for watching afternoon soap operas. “What in the world is going on, man?”

<sup>1</sup> Chuck Swindoll, *Improving Your Serve*, pages 170-171.

“What do you mean, Chuck?”

“Well, look at this place! Didn’t you get any of my letters?”

“Letters? Oh yes! Sure! I got every one of them. As a matter of fact, Chuck, we have had a letter study every Friday night since you left. We have even divided the personnel into small groups to discuss many of the things you wrote. Some of the things were really interesting. You will be pleased to know that a few of us have actually committed to memory some of your sentences and paragraphs. One or two memorized an entire letter or two. Great stuff in those letters.”

“OK. You got my letters. You studied them and meditated on them; discussed and even memorized them. But what did you do about them?”

“Do? We didn’t do anything about them.”

We need to live God’s way, not just learn it.

Any golfers here? With the warm winter we’re having, you may be itching to get back out on the golf course. Picture this: it’s a beautiful day to be outdoors, and you’re teeing off on the first hole. You get in the proper stance to address the ball. You grip the handle of the club firmly. You do the waggle to make sure your position is correct. You pull the club back, bring it around fast, hit the ball—and stop. Your swing ends at your toes. How far is that ball going to fly? *Fly*? More like dribble a few yards ahead. The follow through is just as important as the downswing.

Well, with the Bible, the key is to follow through on what you read. As Nike says, “Just do it.”

## 2) Repent of all sin

CEOs of corporations hate the regulations for all the reports they have to file with the government. They went to get on with running the business, but instead there’s this mountain of paperwork required. In the United State, I’m thinking in particular of the Sarbanes–Oxley Act of 2002. Canada has similar laws.

But we need to remember why these laws were put in place. Back in 2001, Bernie Ebbers was CEO of WorldCom, and Ken Lay was the CEO of Enron.

Both of them were active members of their churches, and both opened meetings of the Board of Directors with prayer. All the while they were cooking the books to cover up fraud. When the truth came out, tens of thousands of employees lost their jobs and their pensions, and shareholders saw their dollars turn into pennies.

I guess they skipped over this passage in the letter from James.

James 1:21, Today’s English Version:

So get rid of every filthy habit and all wicked conduct. Submit to God and accept the word that he plants in your hearts, which is able to save you.

Of course, none of us can boast about our pure and holy lives. All of us have sinned. What secrets are you hiding, hoping that no one discovers the real you? Wouldn’t it be so much better if you could be free of those chains, that slavery to bad habits? You can be.

“Submit to God” James says. In other words, place God at the centre of your life. Yes, even more important than family! Why? Because only God is absolutely trustworthy. You base your life on something else or someone else, and sooner or later you’ll be disappointed or heartbroken.

## 3) Study God’s word

James 1:25, Today’s English Version:

But if you look closely into the perfect law that sets people free, and keep on paying attention to it and do not simply listen and then forget it, but put it into practice — you will be blessed by God in what you do.

How can following God’s perfect law set you free from your bad habits? Jesus talked about this: everyone has something that dominates their life, something which is their “god.” Maybe it’s money, or pornography, or the internet, or pride, or the real true God. But there’s room for only one.

Matthew 6:24, New Living Translation:

“No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve both God and money.”

So when you decide that you’re going to wholeheartedly follow God’s law, you’re saying in

effect, “God, I want to serve you. I want you to be my God, and I will belong to you.”

Now how will you know what God’s law is, unless you read it? That’s why it’s important to have a habit of reading the Bible. But not just speed-reading. Go back and look at that verse 25: “look closely,”... “pay attention to it.”

Here’s one method for studying the Bible: pretend you’re an investigative reporter. Take any passage in the Bible. Start asking the 5 Ws of reporting: Who, What, Where, When, Why. Who wrote it? Whom are they writing to? What’s it about? Where did it happen? When did it happen? Why did they write this? What are the circumstances? You may find that your answers lead you on to something else in the Bible.

You see how digging into the Bible is what makes it interesting? When I suggest a daily reading period, that doesn’t have to mean reading in a straight line from Genesis to Revelation. You may want to study a certain topic or question.

There are tools which will help you in your Bible study.

- A *concordance* is an index to the Bible. It’s a list of the words used in the Bible, and where to find them. Say you want to find the parable of the Good Samaritan. Look up “Samaritan” in the concordance, and it will tell you.
- A *subject index* lists the major topics which the Bible covers. Say you want to learn what the Bible says about how to raise children. Look it up, and it will point you to those verses, even if the words “raising children” aren’t in the Bible. Together with a concordance, these are valuable tools.
- A *commentary* are someone’s notes you read along with the Bible. It gives background information, explains details, and generally helps you make sense of things.

You can buy a “study Bible” which has all these tools right in the Bible. It’s a very worthwhile investment which will be valuable for years to come.

Here’s where to find one: [www.booksforchrist.com](http://www.booksforchrist.com).

At the end you come to the most important question of all when reading the Bible: “What does this mean for me today?”

We need a regular habit of reading the Bible and letting it speak to us. It will guide us in truth, correct us when we go off course, remind us of God’s wonderful promises of help and strength and mercy. The key is to follow through on what we read: remember the golf swing?

### Next Steps:

- Pray: Put God first in your life. Ask him to help you get rid of the trash that corrupts your life.
- Read the Bible. Pray over it: “What is God saying to me today through this passage?”
- Follow through. Live the principles and truths you find in the Bible.