

James 1:19¹***Authentic Faith: Quick to Listen, Slow to Speak*****Introduction**

God made us to be relational people. We have a longing to be in relationship—with our spouse, our family, others.

What can help us succeed in our relationships? It is the ability to listen. Your marriage, your relationship with those you care about is built up through the art of listening. To listen is to love and to strengthen the connection.

God's Word comes to us today with the simple message in James 1:19—"My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry."

We need to hear that message because the instinct to talk is often stronger than the instinct to listen.

ILLUSTRATION: When a man is dating a woman, he wants to impress her that he is a gentleman. So he lets the woman do all the talking while he does all the listening.

Not long after their marriage, the man wants to impress upon his wife that he is the head of the house. So he becomes more assertive—he now wants to talk more and listen less to her.

As the marriage goes through the years, both the man and his wife want to protect their own rights at home. So now, the man and woman both want to do all the talking (they even shout and quarrel) ... and the poor neighbours have to do all the listening.

Our selfish nature desires to be heard by others, to defend ourselves, rather than to listen to and to understand others.

Dr. Paul Faulkner, a family life expert in America, once quoted a study which said that 96% of all problems in marriage (and I would add in our other relationships) ultimately go back to problems in the area of communication.

A simple definition of communication is this—it is mutual understanding achieved through mutual listening.

That suggests that the key to good communication is in the ear, not the tongue. Many people think that the more they talk, the more they have communicated. Usually the opposite is true.

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I. Why does listening build up relationships?

1. Listening is a form of love. By listening, we put aside our agenda, and we give our attention to the other. Listening requires selflessness and humility. It is a form of love, and love is good for relationships.
2. Listening shows you care. Listening shows you want to understand what the other person is experiencing, is feeling, and is thinking. When someone close to you senses that you are not really listening to what he or she has to say, that person is rightfully hurt. Not listening gives the message that he or she does not count, is not worth your time. Conversely, listening shows you care which in turn strengthens your relationships.
3. Listening shows you respect the other person for his/her insights. It is hard not to interrupt when we are so sure we are right and the other is wrong. We may be tempted to finish the speaker's thoughts. Yet continual interrupting will hurt your relationships. In Proverbs 18:2, the fool thinks he knows it all and would prefer to do the talking and have others do the listening. The wise person, however, challenges himself/herself to grow in knowledge and understanding. That is done by respecting the other for his/her insights. That respect is shown through listening.

II. Good communication: three basic steps

These are found in James 1:19.

Step 1: Listen More. The verse simply says, "Be quick to listen." The first step to good communication is listening more. As the saying goes, God gave us two ears and one mouth so that we might listen twice as much as we speak.

One common reason we don't hear what the other person is saying is because we are too busy thinking about what we are going to say. You'll know you've been a successful listener when you can put other people's thoughts in your words to their satisfaction.

Step 2: Talk Less. The verse says, "Be slow to speak." It's so easy to kill a conversation AND a relationship with unkind words. How many times have we said something in anger only to regret it a thousand times later?

The command to talk less here probably refers to a tendency to speak when you are angry and frustrated. There's a saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." That's a nice saying BUT it works well only if you have no feelings at all. Words

hurt far more than sticks and stones. The wounds they leave take far longer to heal. Unkind words don't break bones; they break hearts. Talking less enables you to listen more. And listening more opens up the door to good communication.

Step 3: Calm Down. The Bible says, "Slow to become angry." James is not saying don't get angry. That's unrealistic. We're all going to get angry from time to time.

The word translated "anger" actually refers to a deep-seated rage. It doesn't refer to a passing moment of displeasure which is soon gone and forgotten. No, James is speaking of that deep emotion which, when released, is like a volcano erupting. It throws out red-hot lava and brings about great destruction.

Notice the connection. If we are quick to listen, we will be slow to speak. But if we are slow to listen, we will be quick to speak. And quick speaking leads to quick anger. And the angrier we get, the faster we speak and the less we listen.

III. How do we control anger?

1. Judge behaviour, not motives. Our tendency is to ascribe good motives to ourselves and bad motives to the people who make us angry. The truth is, we don't even understand our own motivation most of the time (Jeremiah 17:9). We are not to pass judgment on the motivations of people who hurt us because we are not mind readers. It's much better to say, "I was hurt when you walked out of the room while I was talking," than to say, "You don't care about what I say." The first speaks of an observable behaviour; the second of an unseen motive. If you focus on the first, God can take care of the second.
2. Shoot up an "Arrow Prayer" to the Lord. An arrow prayer is a short prayer uttered in the moment of extreme crisis or provocation. It's hard to pray when you are angry, so don't try to be pious with many words. A simple "Lord, grant me your calm so that I can be refrained from speaking to hurt" can work wonders and keep you from saying something you will regret later.

Conclusion

For those who have known, worked, or lived with each other for many years, it is often assumed that you already understand each other through and through. You think you already know very well each other's weaknesses, failures, hidden fears, etc. But when these relationships become rocky, the tendency is to take the easy out—i.e. we turn around and walk away from each other.

When such times come, we need to exercise authentic faith—to love even when the other is unloving so that we will not walk away, but stay to work things out together. Such an expression of authentic faith is a reflection of God's long-suffering agape love, not man's short-term romantic love.

ILLUSTRATION: A couple who had been married for over 50 years was sitting on the sofa. The wife said, "Dear, do you remember how you used to sit close to me?"

He moved over and sat closer to her.

"Dear," she continued, "do you remember how you used to hold my hand?"

He reached over and held her hand.

"And," she went on, "do you remember how you used to hug me and bite my ear gently?"

Her husband suddenly got up and started to walk out of the room.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

The husband answered, "I am going to put on my dentures."

As years go by, we may not do some things as naturally as like in the earlier years ... because "familiarity breeds contempt". E.g. words of appreciation, kindness, and encouragement are no longer the natural language of agape love and justice after some time. Instead, what becomes natural are the words of abuse and judgment ... because we become very quick to talk and very slow to listen.

Let's seek the Lord to help us grow in authentic faith by way of speaking less on our part so that we can listen more to others in our relationships.