

Slow To Speak

Preview

This lesson teaches us how to be slow to speak and quick to listen, and the benefits that come with following this biblical instruction.

Praise

Share times in your life when you were thankful God listened to you. Have you ever had a foot-in-mouth moment that you spoke too quickly?

Parable

Imagine how many conflicts would never materialize if we would just listen and understand a person's concern or complaint. What would happen if we waited to respond until we prayed, asked clarifying questions, and gave thought to someone's criticism? What if, when we responded, we spoke with patience, grace, honesty, and clarity?

Today in our age of instant information, we have quick access to the news. We don't have to wait for the newspaper to come out anymore; we can go right to Twitter or other websites. We can get all the updated information sometimes in seconds or minutes or even in real time. Because of this, it sometimes can be hard to slow down and listen to God.

James 1:19 (NKJV) tells us, "So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath."

Present

James tells us we should be swift to listen, but we also should be slow to speak and slow to get angry. How many times have you blurted out something, only to regret it the moment you said it? Jesus said, "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:36-37, NKJV). It's so easy to rationalize our

outbursts of anger in our sinful reasoning. But Proverbs 29:11 (NLT) says, "Fools vent their anger, but the wise quietly hold it back."

In our world that tends to rage-post on social media, there's not much time to think, just to react. I want to encourage you to think twice before you respond, whether on social media or in person. Here are three encouragements for you in times of frustration or tension: listen, wait, respond.

Listen

A sign of humility is a quickness to listen to somebody. Anyone will listen when they respect the speaker and place greater significance on them than they do on themselves. When we respect someone, we want to hear what they have to say. Philippians 2:3 says when we show signs of humility, we value others above ourselves. Listening to understand someone before we respond is a sign that we're not trying to be "wise in our own eyes," but rather trying to grow in grace. Proverbs 3:6 encourages us not to lean on our own understanding, so let's seek to understand others.

Wait

Paul, in I Corinthians 13:4, teaches us that true love is patient. Waiting before we respond to a concern or a complaint (and being slow to speak) is often a way God calls us to love others—even if they don't expect or want us to. A lot of times our initial impulse is wrong, especially when the criticism is about us. We don't like feeling attacked, judged, or confronted. However, if we take the advice from Proverbs 10:19, we will hold back. This verse instructs us to prudently restrain our lips. To be prudent means to act with or show care and thought for the future. When we're frustrated, we should think more about our future relationship with someone than our initial feeling in the moment. That concern for the future can direct our current conversations.

Respond

A beautiful portrayal of gracious words is found in Proverbs

16:24 (ESV). It says, "Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body." When we speak, it is important that our words lift up those around us and give life. Ephesians 4:29 says that our words can give grace to those who hear them. Now, does this infer that speaking gracefully means we shouldn't ever have conflict with anyone? Absolutely not. Proverbs 27:6 (NKJV) says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." At times, we need to be real with those around us; we need to speak the truth in love to our friends. However, our responses should always be measured, clear, honest, and aimed at relationship restoration and agreement.

Practice

Let's review. We are called to be slow to speak, slow to anger, and quick to listen. This takes practice. We can practice by remembering the three encouragements mentioned above: "listen, wait, respond"—and in that order! Listening is a sign of humility. Waiting gives us time to gather the facts and ask any clarifying questions. Responding with grace helps us throw water (not gasoline) on a fire.

When there is conflict in your life and you genuinely aim to work through a situation, try the phrase "help me understand." When you graciously ask someone to help you understand why they are frustrated, you can get to the bottom of what's really going on. Share a real-life example to which this could apply. What are other "help me understand" phrases you can use to dissolve tension?

Pray

Dear Lord, whatever it takes, make me humble so I can be quick to hear others. I want to grow until I can truly understand those around me. Do whatever it takes to teach me to love so that I am slow to speak in a moment of tension or frustration. Help me to respond with gracious words. More than anything, I want to be like You, Jesus. Help me to be quick to listen and slow to speak according to your Word. We ask all of these things in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Plus

Remember this week to be quick to listen and slow to

respond! When you're on social media and someone says something bad about you, give it twenty-four hours before responding to anything. If a response is necessary, listen (or read), wait, and then respond! You can do this!