

Part 1: Quick to Listen

NOTE: The following content is a raw transcript and has not been edited for grammar, punctuation, or word usage.

So, in case you have to leave early, or you tune out early, or you lose electricity, or the Internet, I just wanna go ahead and just give you the bottom line for these next four weeks because we're gonna be talking about you and your big mouth for the next four weeks 'cause there's a lot to talk about. And again, the cool thing about this series is if you're a Christian, there's something to take away, if you're not a Christian there's takeaway 'cause it's so practical, it's so applicable. But I wanna go ahead and just give you bottom line, the bottom line in terms of the big idea and the big application. And I would like for you to repeat after me. I'll say it first, and then you say it after me, "Quick to listen, slow to speak. Quick to listen, slow to speak".

And now we're gonna go back to middle school camp and I'm gonna ask you to do hand motions. We're gonna put hand motions with this. So I'd like for all of you... I know, it's silly. Even if you're watching at home or if you're driving just maybe one hand, keep one hand on the wheel, alright, both eyes on the road. Just put your fist together like this in your lap or just hold your fist, and when we say, quick to listen, we're gonna open those hands real quick, like quick to listen. Okay? So, here we go, ready? Quick to listen, slow to speak. Keep those hands open. Ready? One more time, ball 'em. Now, ready? Quick to listen, slow to speak.

Now, why do we do that? Because when you're in conflict or having an argument, you're having a difficult conversation with somebody, you know what happens? You don't recognize this, we don't realize this but it just happens. Our hands, they do this, they close up. And when they close up, it means our minds are shutting down, and our ears are shutting down, and our heart is shutting down. We're just kinda closing up. And the reason in conflict, especially verbal conflict or an argument or we're listening to somebody and we're just building up all this stuff on the inside, the reason that happens, the reason we close up is because... And this is the interesting thing about all conflict, is because we want exactly what the person we're having the conflict with, wants. Both parties want the very same thing, both parties want to be heard. I wanna be heard and more than heard, I wanna be understood. I want you to be quick to listen to me and I want you to be slow to speak, but you want me to be quick to listen and slow to speak because you wanna be heard and understood, I wanna be heard and understood.

It's like we're saying, "Look, we may not ever agree, but you've gotta listen to me. We might not ever agree on how to parent, we may never agree on this decision at work, we may never agree on what I should major in, we may never agree on whether he's right for me or she's right for me. We may never agree, but come on, at least listen to me. And if you have to say something, if you're gonna interrupt, if you have to interject, if you have to say something then say something that lets me know you heard me. Even if it's a grunt, even if it's a uh-huh, or an "ah". If sound is going to come out of your mouth, I don't want you to argue with me, I want to know that you've heard me after all. See, I can't really hear you till I feel like you've heard me and you can't really hear me until you feel like to some extent, I've heard you."

Now, if you grew up in church, you may recognize that I didn't make this up, I actually stole this, I plagiarized this from a very famous person, his name is James and James had an even more famous brother whose name was Jesus. James, the brother of Jesus. Again, can you even imagine growing up with Jesus as your big brother? But he did. And James... This is cool, he doesn't show up in the story of Jesus, he shows up after the story of Jesus because James thought his brother was crazy. Of course, he did. I mean, if your brother claimed to be the Son of God, you're like, "Uh-huh, you're not the son of God. You're the son of Joseph, but you're not the son."

So anyway, after the resurrection, 'cause that's pretty convincing, when you stand with your mother, and you watch your brother crucified, and then a few days later you have breakfast with him on the beach, you're convinced. It's like, "Okay, I can't explain it." So James emerges in the 1st century as, get this, the leader of the church in Jerusalem like where all this stuff happened.

Laughter

Andy Sitting

Andy at/addressing plasma

What's on the plasma

James was such an incredible man, his nickname was 'Just.' J-U-S-T. He was known as James the Just, and he was stoned to death because of jealousy and because of what was going on between the church and Judaism back in the 1st century. But before James the Just went on to his just reward and saw his brother... Again, imagine that reunion, "You're back. Oh, that's amazing." I mean, we can't even imagine this stuff. Before he did that, he wrote a letter to the church, and in the letter he talks about how important it is for us relationally to learn to listen and to learn to speak at the right time and to say the right thing.

So here's what he says, and the opening line, if you're a woman, I'm telling you, I cannot exaggerate what we're about to discover. In the 1st century, women, and just really in any environment, in any culture, had little to no rights, they couldn't testify in court, they were property, fathers decided who their daughters were gonna marry based on how it helped them politically or financially. So women just had no rights. James, the brother of Jesus, who has been impacted by the fact that Jesus elevated the status and the dignity of everybody opens the letter like this, he says, "My dear brothers and sisters, because you're on equal footing, times have changed, God has done something new in the world." Wow!

"My dear brothers and sisters, take note... " that is, sit up straight and if you're taking notes, take note of this. We're like, "Alright, James, what you got?" He says, "Everyone... " So who are you talking to? Everyone. Everyone, and here's our line, "Everyone should be quick to listen," which doesn't make any sense. How do you listen quickly? I mean, you hear but how do you speed up your hearing? And the reason he uses two words that really don't go together is because he's trying to make a very important point, that's what communicators do. So here's his point: Your first priority, number one thing in sequence, the most important thing relationally you can do, be quick to listen. Listen quickly. Make it first. Quickly before you do anything else, listen. Which is, let's be honest, exactly what we want other people to do for us.

So essentially, James is saying, "This is just more of that thing that Jesus taught you, you are to do for others as your Father through Christ has done for you, you're to do for others what you want others to do for you." You want others to listen to you? Yeah. You wanna be understood? Yeah. Then be quick to listen. And then here's our other statement, and slow to speak. Literally, the idea is, be late. When it comes to your words, wait and be late. And I would add to it. And if you have to say something, be curious. Be curious. Ask a question when the person that you're having conflict with is just going on and on and on and on and you gotta say something, be curious, ask a question. You say, "Well, if I ask a question, they're just gonna keep on talking. That's gonna send them down another rabbit trail, it's just gonna go on and on and on and on." Well, I would say this to you, okay? Ask three questions. Just keep providing more rabbit trails and more on-ramps to them talking. Why? Because you, your responsibility, your responsibility is to be quick to listen and slow to speak, and the longer they speak the quicker you are to listen, and the quicker you are to listen, the quicker I am to listen, the more I learn.

Now, if you're a parent or whoever wanna be a parent and those of you who are parents like our kids are on their 20s, so I've been through all the different seasons. I'm telling you, how much would I have given if I could have convinced my kids to be curious and to ask questions when I'm going on and on and on and on. And in fact, if you're a high school student and you're watching or listening to this, if you want to freak your parents out when they're giving you that dad-talk or that mom-talk, you just say, "Dad, Dad, I don't quite see it your way but I really want to, so can you just say it a different way so I can understand?" Boom! They're gone! They're gonna pass. Why? Because nobody does that. Because we argue, argue, argue. But if you can learn, if you can hit pause, if you can be curious, and if you can ask questions, you're quick to listen, quick to listen, quick to listen and slow to speak everything changes.

Now, I'll flip it around and say this, I'll tell you, my worst parenting moments was when I was quick to speak and slow to listen. And all of you with any kind of authority you're tempted to do this where it's like, "Okay, I've got the wisdom bucket, and I've got the experience bucket, and I got the age bucket, and I've got the insight bucket. And you don't even have frontal lobe development yet [laughter] so you stop talking now and I'm gonna pour all my wisdom and all my experience. Hey, where're you going? Hey, why won't my kids talk to me? Why don't they wanna hang out with me?" It's because you are driving them away.

Now parents, you need to know this. Husbands, you need to know this. Wives, you need to know this. You can right the person you love right out the door. You can right the person you love most right out of the relationship. You can right

Laughter

Andy Sitting

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What's on the plasma

your all-star, rock-star employee right out of the company. You can be right, and right, and right, and right, and right, and you will right them right out of the relationship. Because, "I wanna be understood, I don't wanna be lectured. And I'm willing to be open to your ideas if I think for a moment you may even partially understand what it is I'm trying to communicate to you." So we know this is important. We've been on both sides. You've seen your kid's eyes just glaze over and you walk away from the conversation going, "I don't understand. I know I'm right. I know I'm giving them

good advice. I know I'm giving them wise counsel. Why is it that we just can't communicate?" And James would say, "You, idiot! Because you're not quick to listen, you're quick to speak." You wanna enhance the relationship? Quick to listen, slow to speak. Quick to listen, slow to speak.

Now, if you do that, if you get those two ideas then what he says next comes easy. Here's what he says next, "Everybody needs to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry." Now, slow to become angry is both a result and a decision. If you are quick to listen and slow to speak, you are less likely to be angry and it is easier to guard against your anger if you've decided upfront, "I'm gonna ask questions and I'm going to be curious." Now, anger in this context... And we all express anger differently. Some of you blow up, you just let loose, you're like a volcano. Others of us, we just get in a bad mood. That's me, I just go inward and get in a bad mood, and just sulk around and try to get Sandra to say, "What's wrong? What's wrong?" so I can say, "Nothin'. Nothin'."

[laughter]

That's how I get in control. Nothing's wrong. She's like, "Oh, I know something's wrong." I'm like, "Nothing's wrong." This is how I get in control. We all go one way or the other. We blow up or we go inside. But the point is, he's saying, "Look, that's so bad for your relationships." And one of the ways to bypass blowing up or just becoming passive-aggressive or just being sulky, moody, and trying to get in control that way he says is you've gotta understand where the other person is coming from. Quick to listen, slow to speak. But anger, in the context of what he's talking about, is really more anger like this. It's drawing hasty, misinformed, relationally destructive conclusions. That is, jumping to hastily and misinformed and relationally destructive conclusions. So, here's his formula, it's kind of a formula: "The longer you listen, the more you learn, the less angry you'll be." The longer you listen, the more you'll learn, the less angry you'll become.

Now, here's why this works. And what I'm about to tell you now, this is just common sense. If you're taking notes, you're not gonna need to write this down. This is like, "Really? You're wasting our time telling us this." This is one of those things that's so obvious but every once in a while, we need to be reminded of what's obvious, so we can keep it front and center, so we catch ourselves when we begin to depart from what we shouldn't depart from because it's so obvious, nobody should have to tell us. And here it is, "Everything, everything, everything that everyone does make sense to them." That is deep. Isn't that deep? I got like it grown down here on the front like, "Whoa! Yeah." Everything. This is worth getting up and listening to. Everything that everyone does makes perfect sense to them. It gets worse. [laughter] Everything that everyone says makes sense to them as well.

When you hear yourself saying or when you catch yourself thinking, "I don't know why they would do that. I don't know why they would say that. I don't know why they would believe that. Who needs an education?" Like, if you had. I don't know. [laughter] I don't know. I don't know why anybody would do that? Or, who has the problem? Well, I don't know. Well, I think maybe you need to have some learning to do. Oh, I'd just rather be critical. "Can you believe that? Why would anybody do that? Why would anybody believe that? Why would anybody say that?" Well, guess what? Newsflash. They all have perfectly good reasons for what they do, what they say, what they believe just like you have a perfectly good reason. Everything everybody does makes perfect sense to them.

Now, some of you from my generation, you may have grown up and read Steven Covey's book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, or you may be in your 20s and have read it. It's such a fabulous book, it's just so principle-centered. but the fifth habit of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Steven Covey basically says the same thing. Here's the way he says that I thought this might be helpful. He says this, "Seek first to understand then to be understood." Ta-da! There it is. Seek first to understand, that means I have to ask questions, it means I need to listen, listen, listen, listen, listen, listen, listen, listen, listen. And then only when I understand do I seek to be understood.

The way I try to do this, and I don't get this perfect, as a parent, I just so struggled with this. I decided I'm not gonna criticize anything I don't understand, I'm not gonna criticize any idea I don't understand, and I'm not gonna criticize anybody if I don't know their story. And once I decided that, I became a better learner of people and a better understander of ideas because if somebody holds an idea, a persuasion or opinion, it makes sense to them and if it doesn't make sense to me, who am I to criticize something I don't even understand?

And the thing is, when we're in conversation, when we're in conflict, when we're just listening to reply rather than understand, we don't learn anything. And if you're not learning anything, it's gonna be hard to make the relationship any better because, you know this, we all have a frame of reference, we all have a frame, we all have a filter. And every word you speak to me comes right through my filter. My age, where I went to school, how I was brought up, everything, all my filter, and I hear your words through my filter and chances are, I'm not gonna understand you correctly. So, I am a fool to judge you and I'm a fool to criticize you until I understand you, which requires more listening than speaking. Quick to listen, quick to listen, quick to listen, quick to listen, quick to listen, slow to speak.

Now, if we stop right there, that's pretty good, ain't it?

But James isn't finished because James is the brother of Jesus. Oh, my goodness! He's seen a resurrected brother, he's like, "Whoa, whoa! This is way bigger than you all get along out there. That's not what this is. Stop and cut it out, you all listen. This isn't bad. This isn't just self-help. This is way bigger than that." He says there's a divine agenda attached to this. And he continues, he says this, "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry because," and he says, "Now I'm gonna tell you why." Now, we think we know why. We think, "Oh, I know why we should do this, because if I'm calmer, I'll be more convincing." [laughter] If I'm calmer and I go, "Oh, yeah, that is so helpful. I'll just kinda reel him in, reel him in, I got you. And then they're gonna see the world the way I do. I know what this is. This is a ploy. This is something that we're leveraging to get our way." James is going, "No." Okay, no, that's not what this is about.

Let me explain to you, James would say, why this is a big deal. He says everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry because, tell us why James, because human anger... You would assume human anger is when I don't get my way. I mean, that's why you get angry and why you get frustrated. For years, I would see this counselor named Steve, he was great. I would say, "Steve, I'm so frustrated." He'd say, "No, you're angry." I'm like, "No, I'm not angry, I'm just frustrated." He's like, "What's the difference?" I'm like, "Well, it just sounds better, you know?" So like, I'm just frustrated, he says, "No, you're angry." James' point is, look, human anger, and we all know what human anger which is that frustration. Sometimes we blow up, sometimes we internalize. He says, human anger that results from talking all the time and not listening very much, human anger does not produce or does not result in or does not cultivate, does not produce the righteousness that God desires." I was like, "What?" He goes, "Yeah." See, there's three agendas here. Andy, there's your agenda, there's his agenda 'cause you're going back and forth, and then there's God's agenda.

And as long as you're trying to be right and convince him you're right, that's your agenda, that's your rightness, that's how your rightness connects to your words and that other person is trying to be right and God has an agenda as well. My anger, my anger not getting my way and trying to convince you and convict you and control you and persuade you, my anger produces the rightness or the righteousness that I desire. And that's what the word righteousness means. It just simply means rightness. And do you know what my rightness is? My rightness is simply this: I know I know I'm right. That's my rightness, my righteousness. That my anger produces my rightness. I know I'm right, I want you to know I'm right and I want everybody to know I'm right. And my anger and my frustration and my persuasion skills produce my rightness, my righteousness.

And James says, "That's not the righteousness or the rightness that God is after. That's not the right right." And this is what it draws us into, and this is so big, we're gonna come back to this in a couple of weeks. He says this, he says, "Let's be honest, folks. You wanna be right at each other. God wants you to be right with one another." Big difference. You wanna be right at one another, I wanna convince you that I'm right and I want you to finally throw up your hands and say, "You're right." But let's be honest, for those of you who are in relationships, when you win an argument do you

really win anything?

No.

No! You win the argument it's like, I won the argument. Where is she? I don't know, she left but I won, I won the argument. Yes, you won the argument, you lost the relationship. Oh, yeah. Again, parents, you can right your kids right out the door. And James is saying "Come on," 'cause he's talking primarily to Christians. He's going, "Christians, come on, come on, come on. That's not what God wants. God isn't on your side or the other side. God doesn't take sides. He doesn't want you to be right at each other, he wants you to be right with one another." And now he draws us in to Jesus' great commandment. Jesus gave one command, instead of the 10 commandments, he gave the one commandment that was the overarching ethic for all of Christian behavior, and that is, "As I have loved you, you are to love one another." And the interesting thing is this, when you read the New Testament, Jesus did not come to be right. That would have taken about 30 minutes. He shows up, he gets everybody together and says, "I'm right. Any questions?" And then he could do all of his zingers and his snappy answers to stupid questions, and all that stuff he did with the Pharisees and Sadducees where he made 'em all just kinda left them spinning in the wind 'cause they tried to track.

I mean, if Jesus just came to be right, it would not have ended with him being crucified. Jesus didn't come to be right, and he says to you as a Jesus follower and he says to me as a Jesus follower, and Andy, your goal and your mission in life isn't to be right either. You're to embrace the mission of your Savior. He did not come to be right. He came to reconcile us to God and to one another. So he says to me, and he says to you, quit being right at each other and you figure out how to get right with one another. How do we do that, James? I already told you, quick to listen, slow to speak, quick to listen, slow to speak. If the two of you, he would say, aren't right, it doesn't matter who's right. You don't win a relational argument. You don't win a fight in a marriage. There is no winner if things aren't right between you. In fact, being right, can actually make things worse. Quick to listen, slow to speak. Then he continues, 'cause he's still not done, this is so rich, he says, "Therefore, therefore, therefore, now that we know what the goal is, now we know what the application is, let's just take this one step further because there's something else you need to do if this is gonna work." He says, "Therefore, get rid of, get rid of all moral filth."

Now, this little phrase right here, get rid of, in Greek is the word that you would use for taking off a jacket or taking off a coat. Hey, come on in, take off your coat, relax, take off your jacket, relax. You know, take that off. He says, "Come on." He says, "You're walking around with the 'I'm right jacket.' You're walking around with an 'I'm right coat.' It says right here, I'm right or I'm right or just inside, I'm right. You're right. So your whole goal in life and relationships, if you're not careful, is just to prove to everybody that you're okay, you're cool, you got it goin' on and that you're right. He says, "Okay, you gotta take that thing off. You gotta take that thing off." And the reason he says moral filth, I mean this just sounds so big and nasty and dirty and here's why, and you know this: Self-rightness. The Bible term is self-righteousness but that sounds so Bible so let's just bring it into our world. Self-rightness. I've always gotta be right quickly becomes a moral issue.

And James says, "Come on, you're gonna follow Jesus, you're gonna be reconciled to God and to each other, you gotta take that off." He said, "And there's something else you gotta take off too," and the evil, and the evil that is so prevalent, the word evil here, maybe in this context, a better word might be the word malice. We don't use that word much, malice. Malice is a desire to harm. Malice is a desire to get even. Malice is a desire to get back or to pay somebody back. He said, "And that's what epitomizes your culture." He says when it dawns on us. He says when it dawns on, you're in the middle of that argument with a husband or with your son, or your daughter, your parents, or what, it's kinda escalating he says, when you realize, 'Okay, there I go again, I got on my convinced, convict, control I'm right jacket,' he says you just gotta hit pause and go, "Okay, I'm just takin' that thing off because I know where this leads and it never leads to anything good because even if I win, the relationship loses."

And he says, "Let me give you an alternative. Take that thing off and here's what I want you to put on." This is so powerful and, I love this, and humbly, here's a word that hasn't been a part of the conversation yet but it's the key, "and humbly accept the word implanted in you." He says, "I want you to take off the 'I always gotta be right' and I want you to put on humility." And humility says WE are more important than ME. You are important, more important than me. And we reconcile and keepin' us on the same page. Being right with you is more important to me than getting my way,

that's humility. He said, "I want you to receive." And then he kinda uses a little code word for New Testament stuff, "I want you to receive the word implanted in you." He says, "Look, you're a Christian, aren't you?" He's saying to this group, "You're Jesus' followers, aren't you?" Yeah. He says, "Well, you already know how this works. You've already embraced the big picture, you've got the context, you've got the frame that God sent his son into the world to die for you. He put you ahead of himself and now he's asked you to do that for others, right?" "Yeah." "Well, then, do that." "Oh, okay, I don't know how." "I've told you how. Be quick to listen and slow to speak."

He's saying, "Step back into this basic, basic truth that you embraced when you first became a follower of Jesus." And then he ends it with this, he says that which has the power to save you, not save you eternally, we're not talking about eternal life. Save you now, save your marriage, save your relationship, save your job, save your relationship with your son or your daughter, save you from regretful words, save you from having to apologize again, save you from acting out in anger, maybe saving you from divorce or perhaps prison. But the keyword is the word "accept". He says, "You've gotta step back into what you've known from day one as a Christian. You've gotta accept it, you have to embrace it because doing this not knowing this," and he talks about that later in his letter too. "Doing this is what makes all the difference."

So, here's what James, the brother of Jesus, who was martyred in the year 63 because he believed his brother was his Lord. I can't get over that. Here's what he says, he says this, "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, and if you're quick to listen and you're slow to speak then you will be slow to become angry." Why James? Why should we do this? He says, "Because it's bigger than just getting along." Because human anger, that anger of 'I've gotta be right and prove to you I'm right and always win all the conversations and the arguments' that kind of anger doesn't produce the righteousness, the rightness that God desires because God desires for you to be right with each other, not at each other. Therefore, get rid of all that moral filth and the evil that's so prevalent in your culture and humbly accept, step back into the basic truths that got you on this journey to begin with, because that has the power to save you right now." Wow!

So, one more time. Get your hands out. Some of you are like, "This is not for me." Yes, it is, I know 'cause it's you and your big mouth and me and my big mouth. Ready? Quick to listen, slow to speak. One more time. Ready? Quick to listen, slow to speak. James says, "Look, don't settle, don't settle for being right. Make sure you make things right and you keep things right." And we're gonna pick it up there, right there next week.

MeAndMyBigMouth-Pt1

Laughter

Andy Sitting

Andy at/addressing plasma

What's on the plasma