

## #161 “Biblical Principles for Healthy Communication”

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Too often we experience a breakdown in communication. Marriages can fall apart because of cruel words spoken in an outburst of anger, business deals can be scrapped because of a failure to disclose information, workers can be fired for failing to understand their responsibilities, children can be emotionally traumatized by parents who never listen, and churches can decay without a pastor who is able to teach the Word. Communication is a significant part of who we are as human beings and as believers. In order for us to be able to maintain healthy relationships, we need to follow God’s principles for healthy communication. If we fail to communicate effectively and properly, the results can be disastrous. Fortunately, if we heed God’s Word, communication can be used for good, deepening and enriching our relationships.

James gives a three-fold exhortation concerning communication. He says in James 1:19, “But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.” **The three points of healthy communication involve being quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.**

Anger never helps communication; it only complicates it and makes it all that more difficult. In fact, letting anger control us when we should be listening or speaking in an understanding way is totally opposed to God’s ways. It is not righteous, but it is destructive. Being slow to anger allows others to feel as if they can share all that they are thinking and feeling. Being slow to anger communicates that a conversation is worth enduring because the relationship is worth saving, preserving, and deepening. It communicates that the other person’s dignity matters, that the relationship matters, and that feelings expressed matter.

Being slow to anger is complemented by being slow to speak. It is easy to interrupt others, thereby communicating to them that their point of view doesn’t really matter. Even if we are sure that our point of view is correct, we should still let others speak what is on their minds. Then, once they feel that they have been heard, the details can be worked out. Cutting a person off is rude, it doesn’t speed up communication, and it is often a sign of arrogance, expressing that our point of view is more important than that of the other person. Being slow to speak also involves measuring our response and thinking through what we say carefully. Too many people just open their mouths, let the words come out, and clean up the mess later. We would be better off thinking through what we will say before we say it. Words should be used wisely and purposefully. This is more of a struggle for some people than others. Some people are naturally quiet, while others are naturally more talkative. The talkative ones need to learn to let others talk and to encourage the quiet ones to speak up. If the quieter ones don’t ever try to open up, it is difficult to know them, help them, and enjoy their company. James doesn’t say that talking is bad or that being more of a quiet person is bad. Neither does he say that everybody should talk exactly the same amount. Being a good communicator is not necessarily found in the volume of the words spoken or the lack thereof but in the ability

to make the words count and to listen well. Good communicators are able to identify when they are talking too much or not enough. They are able to make others feel comfortable, cared about, and as though they are generally interested in them as people. Being slow to speak means controlling what we say, speaking wisely, and making sure others have a chance to say what is on their hearts as well.

Finally, James says that we should be quick to listen. When we get into a conversation, listening needs to be our immediate priority, especially in instances where there is a conflict. Listening is more than just hearing and just spending time with a person. Listening involves really trying to understand others and what they are going through. It is not enough just to be skilled in asking questions, but good listeners ask good questions and pay attention to the responses. How well people listen is highly indicative of how much they care about others. Suppose we spent several hours with some people and shared what was on our hearts only to find out they weren't really moved by what we said or that they had already forgotten what we said. Their failure to listen could be heartbreaking as we come to realize that they don't really care or at least are horrible at showing it. Listening is central to caring, and it is a necessary part of the love that Christians are called to show one another. Good listeners pay strong attention to others when communicating, picking up on what is not being said as well as what is being said. They can learn to see when a person is lying, holding something back, or just needing a shoulder to cry on. Listening well requires our full attention, effort, and care. Being quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger are three principles that can truly revolutionize our ability to communicate. If we want to imitate our Lord and Savior, Who Himself was a perfect communicator, we need to be willing to work on this area of our lives.