

Before You Hit Send
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We are in a sermon series entitled Relationships: A Mess Worth Making. We've been looking at ways to clean up the messes we make in relationships – but today I'm going to talk about how to prevent making messes in the first place.

The title of my sermon is Before You Hit Send! What I'm going to teach you today is what you should do before you hit the send button on that email responding to someone who wronged you. Before you make that phone call. Before you respond to a Facebook post. Before you tweet.

If you learn these three biblical principles today – it can change your relationships or save your job. If we all learned them – it could help heal racial division. Our nation would be way better off if our President did these three things before he hits send on his Twitter account! The three principles are found in James 1:19-20:

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

The book of James was written 2000 years ago - yet it is amazingly relevant today. James 1:19-20 teaches us how to respond when the heat is on, the pressure is building and you're about to lose it. These verses seem simple, but putting them into practice is a challenge.

Throughout this book – James shows how to put faith to work because as he said in James 2:26:

Faith without works is dead.

James shows us what a mature Christian looks like and he spends a lot of time talking about how we should control what we say. James 3:2-10 says:

We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

James shows us how mature believers are in control of their emotions and in control of what they say. If we are going to be mature believers who don't make messes in our relationships – we need to do these three things.

1- Be Quick to Hear

Experts say that 87% of relationship problems are because of inability to communicate. This stands to reason since communication is the bridge for relationships.

With communication we come to know and understand each other.

With communication we can work through any other problems.

Without communication problems are not resolved – in fact they become worse!

That's why we need to learn the skill of communication.

There has never been a good relationship without good communication!

There has never been a bad relationship that didn't get that way – at least in part – due to something that was said.

Someone said that God gave you two ears and one mouth so you can listen twice as much as you talk – but most of us talk twice as much as we listen. When the Bible says to hear – it doesn't mean to just hear the words. It literally means “to understand.” Your first responsibility in communication is to listen with the goal of understanding.

The goal is not to get your point across. Your goal is not to win an argument. Your goal is mutual understanding.

Unfortunately, what we see modeled on TV is very poor communication. Most political talk shows are made of up two or more people talking, but not listening. They don't want to understand each other – they just want to make their own point. Much of the time they argue, talk over one another and call each other names. It's juvenile. Whatever happened to civil discourse where conversation is intended to help us understand each other?

Communication is a process of sharing thoughts and feelings with someone in such a way that they understand you and you understand them. We often think we understand what someone is saying, but often what we heard is not what they mean at all. So, instead of assuming we know what other people mean by what they say, we need to work hard on understanding each other. That requires listening!

It's one thing to hear someone's voice; it's another thing to understand the meaning of what they said. For instance, when I hear someone speak another language, I hear their voice, but I do not understand the meaning of the words.

And even when it comes to English, I can understand the words someone is saying and not necessarily understand their meaning.

Take communicating with my wife for example. There have been many times when my wife and I have had conversations where she will say, “You’re not hearing me.” My response is always, “Yes I am; here’s what you said.”

And I repeat to her exactly what I heard.

But she will say, “That’s what I said, but that’s not what I meant.”

And I will say, “But that’s what you said.”

But she will say, “Well, you heard me wrong.”

That goes all over me and makes me want to quit trying. But God said in His word that husbands must live with their wives in an understanding way. And if God said it – it must be possible!

So, I’ve had to learn that the issue is more than the words she says – it’s understanding her heart in the matter. And it’s not until we become concerned about the other person’s interests, ideas and feelings - and not just our own, that we begin making strides towards understanding each other.

Listening communicates caring and respect. Listening shows that we are willing to learn from the other person. We are too quick to share our ideas, opinions and beliefs, sometimes with only a limited knowledge of the subject.

This is especially true when it comes to racial issues. There’s too way much talking and not enough listening. Don’t be so quick to think you understand where other people are coming from. Instead of instantly disagreeing with someone else – we should take the time to listen until we understand their thoughts, concerns and hurts.

This is a paradox – but the way we become better communicators is by becoming better listeners. I’m encouraging you to listen more than you talk. The word “listen” contains the same letters as the word “silent.” So, work on seeking first to understand, then to be understood. This skill is developed by being quick to hear and slow to speak! Proverbs 18:13 says:

He who answers before listening — that is his folly and his shame.

Wisdom begins when we listen more and talk less.

Do this and you will be on your way to becoming a great communicator.

Do you pay attention when people speak or are you just waiting for an opportunity to say what you want to say?

Do you leave room for the other person to speak or do you never even drop a comma?

I remember a man who was thinking about joining our church years ago. He wanted an appointment with me so he could ask me questions and learn about our heart and vision.

When we got together – he never dropped a comma. He just spoke nonstop about himself and past experiences in churches. Needless to say – he gained zero understanding of me or our church. But I gained a lot of understanding about him. It's better to be quick to hear.

2- **Be Slow to Speak**

This means we should think before we speak. We should make sure that we are not just reacting to what the other person said. Proverbs 15:28 says:

The heart of the godly thinks carefully before speaking; the mouth of the wicked overflows with evil words.

Think carefully before you hit send! And when you do speak – do what Ephesians 4:15 says:

Speak the truth in love...

Before you hit send – ask yourself:

- Is this true?
- Is the way I'm saying it loving and kind?
If you can't be kind – be quiet!
- Will this help the person I'm talking to?

Ephesians 4:29 says:

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

- Is this really the time to say it?

Timing is huge! This is usually where I blow it with my wife. Proverbs 29:20 says:

Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

Wow! That describes me all too often. And normally I'm just trying to help. But I usually say something dumb like: "What you need to do is..." "That's not biblical..."

Now there's a time to help somebody understand what to do, but don't jump too quickly into dispensing advice. Unsolicited advice is usually received as criticism!

We need to realize the power of our words! Proverbs 18:21 says:

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

The words you speak minister either life or death.
 Praise results in life. Putdowns result in death.
 Compliments minister life. Criticism ministers death.
 Gratitude ministers life. Grumbling ministers death.

That's why we need to do what the Bible says in Proverbs 21:23 -

If you want to stay out of trouble, be careful what you say.

If you want to stay out of trouble at home and at work, think before you hit send!
 And it helps to ask for God's help! Psalm 141:3 says:

Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips.

I've said many times that President Trump would be much better off if he never said anything! Then I found this verse that confirmed it. Proverbs 17:27-28 says:

A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered. Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.

Listen – once words are spoken, you can't take them back! Social media encourages quick feedback. Someone says something we don't like so without thinking it through, we post an angry reply, a clever comeback or a mean-spirited comment. Sometimes we are so eager to post our comments that we hit Send before we've even thought it through.

Here's a simple piece of advice when you are tempted to do that: Before you hit send: Wait. Think about it. You can delete a foolish comment, but you can't erase it from the Internet. Once you post it, the record floats in cyberspace forever.

When James says "Be slow to speak," he is thinking about our tendency to speak when we are angry and frustrated. I'm sure you've heard it said: Speak when you are angry and you'll make the best speech you'll ever regret. How true it is.

When I was a child, people used to say "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." That's a nice, brave saying, but it's not true. In fact, words hurt far more than sticks and stones, and the wounds they leave take far longer to heal. Unkind words don't break bones; they break hearts. That's why we should:

3- Be Slow to Anger

It helps to see the way different Bible translations say this:

James 1:19-20 in the Amplified Version says:

Let every man be quick to hear (a ready listener), slow to speak, slow to take offense and to get angry. For man's anger does not promote the righteousness God requires.

The Good News Version says:

Human anger does not achieve God's righteous purpose.

The New King James Version says:

The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

There are way too many times when I am very slow to hear, quick to speak and quick to anger. But I've learned the hard way that what James said is true – my anger does not bring about the blessings God desires in my life!

My anger will never bring about good results.

My anger will never accomplish God's purpose.

My anger will only make a bigger mess to clean up!

What will help us to be slow to anger? Being quick to hear and slow to speak will help immensely. It's hard to be quick-tempered and quick to listen at the same time.

If I am a quick tempered person then it shows that I am not willing to listen.

If I'm quick tempered then I will also be quick to speak. Conversely, quick speaking leads to quick anger. Interestingly, if we were quick to hear and slow to speak we would automatically be slow to anger. Practicing one often takes care of the other.

We also need to be aware of God's word which says in Proverbs 14:17

A quick-tempered man does foolish things.

Proverbs 14:29 says:

People with understanding control their anger; a hot temper shows great foolishness.

People who fly into a rage always make a bad landing. And these consequences are not just for us but also for those who are on the receiving end of our anger. People who are quick to fly off the handle are all around us. We see it in road rage incidents where somebody shoots someone because they cut them off in traffic. People are getting out of control!

I've heard people say we should count to ten before we respond. Some people need to count to a million!

Please understand that James is not saying that all anger is wrong. There is a time and a place for anger. But always remember Ephesians 4:26-

When you are angry, do not sin.

Always remember that anger is under your control. Sometimes we blame others by saying, "You made me mad." But that's a cop-out. Anger is an emotion we control. Here's the proof.

Have you ever had an argument with your spouse and the phone rang right in the middle of the argument? You were raising your voice and getting red in the face and then, "Hello, how are you? I'm so glad you called. Goodbye." You hang the phone up and go at it again. That's because anger is an emotion you can control. But notice the progression.

If we are quick to hear, we will be slow to speak. But if we are slow to hear, we will doubtless be quick to speak. The angrier we get, the faster we speak, and the less we hear. Proverbs 16:32 says:

He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

Solomon says it is better to control your temper than to "take a city." We use that military imagery all the time in Christian circles. We talk about taking our cities for Christ and winning America back to God. But what good is it if:
 "I took my city for Christ, but my wife left me."
 "I took my city for God, but my children no longer follow Jesus."

I know all of this is difficult – in fact, it's impossible in our own strength. The key to all of this is heart change! Jesus said in Matthew 12:34:

Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.

Our communication problems are not just word problems – they are heart problems! That's why we need Jesus living in our hearts! Thank God that Jesus died for our sins! But thank God that Jesus is living in us and Colossians 1:27 says:

Christ in you is the hope of glory!

This isn't just hope for glory one day in heaven – as great as that is! This actually means sharing in His glory now. And one of the meanings of glory is the outshining of God's character. That means since Christ is in us – His glory shines through us now!

So when we are slow to hear – Jesus in us gives us patience.
 When we are quick to get angry – Jesus in us is our peace!

When we are about to go off on somebody – Jesus in us is our restraint!

When we are sinful – Jesus in us is righteousness!

When we are foolish – Jesus in us is our wisdom!

When we are hateful – Jesus in us is love!

When we are hurt by others – Jesus in us is our healer!

When we are weak – Jesus in us is our power!

Unlimited power.

Power to do abundantly more than we can ask or think!

And by His grace and power in us – we can be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger! In Jesus' name!