

**JAMES 5 – Wisdom about Anger**  
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We are continuing our Bible study on the book of James. The theme of our study is Wisdom for Everyday Life. Today I am preaching a message called Wisdom about Anger. Our text is James 1:19-20.

*My dear brothers, take note of this: 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.*

These verses give three biblical principles that can change your relationships or save your job or your marriage. If we all learned them – it could help heal racial division, political division, and every other kind of division.

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. Before you answer in a conversation.

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.

James shows us that mature believers are in control of their emotions and in control of what they say. They are not out of control – instead they are controlled by the Spirit.

As Christians, we should be filled with the Spirit, not filled with anger.

As Christians, we should be led by the Spirit, not led by emotions.

As Christians, we should be controlled by God, not controlled by anger.

To become slow to anger – you must become swift to hear and slow to speak. That's because anger usually happens when we are self-centered rather than others centered. So, to deal with anger requires us to die to ourselves and James says that two ways to do that are being quick to hear and slow to speak. If we are going to be mature believers – 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!

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 hear 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 at 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 love, 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.

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 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? James teaches us 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 speak! And when you do speak - do what Ephesians 4:15 says:

*Speak the truth in love...*

Before you say something - 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? 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..." Or "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.*

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.*

Do you want to be thought of as wise? Then stop talking so much! Proverbs 19:9 says:

*A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense.*

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.*

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 talking 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. That's why we should:

### **3- Be Slow to Become Angry**

It helps to see the way different Bible translations translate verse 20:

Good News - *Human anger does not achieve God's righteous purpose.*  
NKJV - *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!

Here's some more biblical wisdom about anger. But before I read this Scripture – I want you to know that there was so much to say about the topic of anger that I will continue this message next week. Ephesians 4:26-27 says:

*When you are angry, do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.*

I see several truths here.

- 1- It's possible to be angry and not sin
- 2- We can control our anger
- 3- If we don't control our anger, it gives the devil a place in our lives

Christians sometimes think that all anger is sinful. But it can't be – there are many Bible verses about God getting angry. We know Jesus got angry – remember when he drove the money changers out of the temple? If God gets angry – anger in itself is not wrong. If Jesus gets angry – anger in itself it not wrong. That's why Ephesians 4:26 says:

*When you are angry, do not sin.*

We need to distinguish between the feeling of anger and our response to anger. First, we must understand what anger is. The dictionary definition of anger is this: a strong emotion or feeling of annoyance, displeasure or hostility resulting from real or perceived injury, mistreatment, or opposition.

Anger is just a feeling, an emotion – it's not necessarily right or wrong. How you handle your anger determines if it is right or wrong.

Here's what the Bible says about people who excuse it when they lose it. Proverbs 29:11 says:

*A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.*

Many times, when we're angry we let ourselves get out of control and into the flesh. But you know there are times when you've been mad and you've had to control yourself – maybe it was in a public place or in your boss's office – you had to control yourself and you did.

We've all been in arguments when the phone rings. We're saying things like: You make me sick – I can't stand you – tell me again why I married you. Then we answer the phone and sweetly say: Hello – oh Hi Pastor – Oh I'm blessed and highly favored!

Or we had a fight on the way to church – we're mumbling and grumbling across the parking lot up to the front door – then – Hey brother – Praise the Lord!

Remember – anger is the feeling – you determine your response. And you can control your anger! If you don't, it will hurt you and hurt others. If you don't, it will hinder your life and your career. People do not follow leaders who overreact or seem out of control. You must control your anger and you can learn to control your anger.

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!

I'm going to teach much more next week about how to control your anger. Please understand that James is not saying that all anger is wrong. But always remember that anger should be under your control.

Sometimes we blame others by saying, "You made me mad." But that's a cop-out. Anger is an emotion we can control. 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." 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 character 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 hateful – Jesus in us is love!

When we are foolish – Jesus is our wisdom!

When we are weak – Jesus in us is our 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!