

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. James 1:19

There is a difference between hearing someone and understanding what they are saying. I'm always amazed at the wisdom found in scriptures that many people will pay money to receive from a counselor. James states that we need to be quick to listen and slow to speak. Most people struggle to listen to the point of understanding. Some tend to prepare their response to what is being said while the other person is still speaking. They may hear the words, but they do not understand the words, or if they understand, they are not communicating their understanding to the other party.

Years ago, I was providing marriage counseling to a couple. I was working with them on developing better listening skills. A simple exercise we use is to work on reflective listening skills. One person will state what they want more or less of in the relationship and the other person responds in a manner that indicates they understand what is being said. Typically, that happens by repeating back what they hear in their own words. The husband kept hearing what his wife was saying and would reply by either defending himself or by being overly agreeable. I replied that being defensive or agreeable was not the goal. It was more important to let his wife know that she was understood and not that he agreed to everything she asked of him. He finally looked at her and asked, "Would you really be happy if I learned to listen, and you felt understood?" With exasperation, she nodded her head and said, "yes, you never understand what I'm saying!"

Here is the wisdom of James 1:19. When we truly listen to what others are saying to the point of understanding them, we can build relationships. We communicate that they are important when we really work to understand them. The result is that we tend to avoid unnecessary debating and arguing. We tend to have productive discussions where each person feels valued and heard. Yes, there are times in life when we need to debate and take a stand. Yet, when we listen and express extreme anger in our communication, it does not please God. By understanding others, you are more likely to communicate in a healthy manner that does not lead to hurt feelings and temper tantrums. How well do you listen?

Read James 1:19-27