

Cultivating a Heart for God's Word

Epistle of James
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Moving to a new section in the epistle of James this morning, verses 19 to 27, will become our focus today. The title of the message, I think it's going to be a three part message through these verses and that is "Cultivating a Heart for God's Word," and what I mean by that, cultivating a heart for God's word, that's the title, it's cultivating a heart that's receptive to God's word, that receives and is changed by and continues to grow. So cultivating a heart for God's word, this I think is what James turns to in this section in his letter and really in this passage, this section, we come to the burden of his heart, the essence or theme of his entire epistle.

We began looking at it, I shared with you I thought that the theme of his epistle is that we be doers of the word, not merely hearers but doers, and that's exactly what we come to in this section where he says that expressly. James, the half-brother of the Lord Jesus, who writes this epistle to believers in the first century, Jewish believers in Jesus, his burden is that they live out their faith; that their faith be worked out in practice; be evident in their works, in good deeds. He wants them and us to move from belief to behavior; that our belief would correspond or be evident in our behavior; that our convictions would be reflected in actions; that our doctrine would be seen in devotion and duty; that we would not just be hearers of the word or those who ascribe to a certain doctrine, but that our lives would evidence that.

That is the heartbeat of this apostle in this letter and we come this morning to begin to unpack, in one sense, the theme statement in verses 19 to 27 and what we're going to see is that in these verses he shows us how the word of God is lived out, and he shows us how we should cultivate our hearts, that we should change our mindset in some fundamental ways. But I think the passage at large calls us to make three fundamental mindset shifts. We're going to look at one today. Lord willing, next week we'll look at the second one. And then the third week, the third mindset alteration, as it were, attitudinal heart shift that he wants us to make.

So today we're looking at the first one in James 1:19-27 and that is that we would be disciplined hearers or be disciplined listeners. Let's say that, be disciplined listeners. That's the theme of this morning's message. So the title is "Cultivating a Heart for God's Word," subtitle theme today is, "Be Disciplined Listeners." To cultivate a heart for God's

word, we first of all have to be disciplined listeners. We have to learn how to listen. So the bigger picture, we're trying to cultivate a heart for God's word in this passage, but this morning verses 19 and 20 focus on helping us learn how to listen. Be intentional disciplined listeners.

Let's read, we'll begin reading at verse 18 all the way through verse 27 to give us the context and our focus is going to be verses 19 and 20 this morning. James 1:18,

18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures. 19 This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. 22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; 24 for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. 25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. 26 If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. 27 Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Let's pray together.

Father, we ask that you might now grant us the grace, the ministry of the Holy Spirit to take your word, to plant it in our hearts and to bring forth fruit unto your glory, fruits of repentance and faith and love for God. We pray this in the name of your Son. Amen.

So we're looking at cultivating a heart for God, a heart in which the word of God will bear fruit and his focus in these first two verses, 19 and 20, says if you're going to cultivate a heart for the word of God, you have to learn how to be a good listener. That's really the focus in verse 19 and we see that the flow of thought, let's observe the flow of thought. One of the reasons I read verse 18 was so that you could see something of that. Remember, James has just dealt with in an extensive way our need as followers of Jesus, our need as we go through trials and tribulations and difficulties, our need to know and be certain of the goodness of God. That was the focus of the last section. He ended that section by proving the goodness of God to us by even reminding us of our conversion, our regeneration in verse 18, "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures." He says if you doubt God's goodness as you go through life and you encounter difficulties, just reflect on the fact that you have been born again and you have been brought from death to life;

that you used to be dead in trespasses and sins and now you're alive. You now have the Spirit of God living in you. You've gone from being an enemy of God under his wrath to being a precious child. Not just a friend but a family member. Marvel at that. The Father of lights has given birth to you. He has brought you forth by the word of truth.

So he says as he thinks about, as he tries to encourage us to think about the wonder of the distance that we've come, he now in speaking about the word of truth, he begins to think about how the word of truth must continue to impact our lives; that regeneration is not the end, it's just the beginning of a transformational process that is going to continue until we die or until Jesus returns, whichever comes first. James is so wise and he's so practical in the way he thinks. It's like he anticipates the problem that we often have. I mentioned last time how beautiful the church is. You know, not the building itself. It's okay. I mean, I think it's beautiful but anyway, sorry, I digress. The point of it, we talked about the beauty of the body of Christ, that we look at another person and we see someone who used to be hopeless, helpless, separated from God, bound up in sin and lust, and now transformed by the grace of God into a new creature. This is first fruits of the new creation. This is what makes things so incredibly beautiful and he says look around you, but also look at yourself and see God's handiwork, God's kindness. You're a testimony to his goodness so don't doubt his goodness.

Think about the incredible distance between the person who has not yet repented and believed in Jesus, still dead in trespasses and sins, still under the wrath of God, the holy righteous wrath of God because we all deserve his wrath because we've all sinned and come short of his glory, but a person who in the dark can't see and then what happens when the Spirit of God comes through the word of God and gives someone new life, the incredible distance that is brought about. It's not a small step to become a Christian, it's an incredible chasm spanning work of God that Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4 is like the creation of light out of darkness. It's like the creation ex nihilo of the universe when he looks at a soul and says, "Live." So this incredible distance that has happened and he says spend some time thinking about that and give glory to God and trust in his goodness.

Now, but watch out. This is the flow of thought. Watch out that you don't think you've already arrived. Don't spend so much time glorying in that that you forget that now, yes, you've come a long way but you've got so much farther still to go. That's his focus. He's saying that now that we have become believers, and I think this is actually evident in that first phrase in verse 19, "This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger." Some of the translations picture that first phrase or clause in verse 19 as an imperative, "Know this." Or, "Take note of this." And it's certainly a possibility. This is one case where the Greek word translated by the NASB, "This you know," is actually ambiguous. It could be an imperative or it could be an indicative. Remember an imperative is a command, an indicative is a statement of fact and the question is which is it. It doesn't make a huge difference because essentially it doesn't change the meaning of the verse. It slightly makes a little difference in the emphasis. I think it's an indicative as the NASB translates it. The NASB doesn't say, "Know this," or, "Take note of this." It says, "This you know." So it's connecting to what

he just said in verse 18. "You know this. You know that you have been born again; that you have been brought forth a new creation."

"Know this," and the reason I think it's the indicative is because those other translations I mentioned that translate it as an imperative that say, "Know this," or, "Take note of this," the ESV says, "Know this," the NIV says, "Take note of this," they both fail to translate a conjunction in verse 19. They just leave it out that the NASB puts in there. "This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone." There is an adversity of conjunction there, "But." In the other translations, sometimes it's like an "and," it can be "and or but," and they just, "Well, it sounds better in English just to leave it out." I think it's there as a conjunction.

"This you know, my beloved brethren. You know that you've been brought from death to life but, you see, don't let that go to your head. But everyone, every man, must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger." So he's saying you've come a long way. God has done an amazing thing but realize that you must now, as a part of being a believer, the essential quality of the true believer is humility, not pride. Now, the problem we have is our old nature is proud and so he knows that it's our tendency as a new believer with an old sin nature still abiding in us to start looking around and being proud. Now that I'm here, I need to hear the words as a new believer, every new believer needs to hear the words, be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger. Exactly the opposite of our natural disposition. Most of us are quick to speak, quick to anger, slow to listen.

And let me just say right up front: for those of you who might be very quiet by nature and some of you have done that because you're actually manifesting the grace of this verse, others of you, watch out because just the fact that you don't speak doesn't mean that you've learned what this verse is talking about because you can be slow to speak but not quick to listen. You can be slow to speak because you fear man rather than that the grace of God has worked in your life and in that attitude, you can still not listen to your brothers like you should. So this applies to every one of us. We need to all evaluate where we are. It's not a natural disposition for any of us to fulfill this passage. It takes grace. Be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger.

So what I want us to do in putting our thoughts together around this passage, there are three points this morning and the first point as we consider being diligent listeners or intentional listeners, the first thing that we want to look at is a threefold command. A threefold command. Verse 19, "But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger." There is an imperative there, "But everyone must be." In the Greek, that's a third person imperative. They had third person imperatives, we just have basically second person imperatives pretty much in English is all we really use. Occasionally somebody will say, "Let us," in sort of a first-person imperative, "Let us go." Nobody really says that but I guess they used to. Maybe they do. "Let's eat." Yeah, they do say that. That's a first-person imperative, "Let's eat. Let us eat." That's the problem, right? We don't say it that way. But in Greek, they had the third person imperative, "Let every man or every man must be or everyone must be." This is an imperative. It's a command.

So he's saying, "This, you know, that you've been brought forth by the word of truth as a new creation, my beloved brethren, but everyone must be," and there's the threefold command, "you must be three things: quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger." You must be. You must develop. As I said, it's an imperative, it's a command, it's not a suggestion, and it's also a Greek present tense imperative. That is, remember the Greek present tense is a little different than English present tense. In the Greek language that the New Testament is translated from, the Greek present was more about the kind of action than the time of the action and the kind of action in the Greek present is ongoing continual action. So the idea is he's commanding us to continually cultivate a heart that listens well. Continually work at it. Continually work at it because you need to because it's a continual battle. The natural disposition, the pride of the human heart is to not want to listen, to be quick to speak, to be quick to anger.

So he says, first of all, we need to be quick to listen. Quick to listen. That is, when we become a believer, we should labor to be listeners. I was reading a commentary by Spiros Zodhiates who has a commentary on James, and he made the point that in America, he's actually a guy from Greece himself, Spiros Zodhiates, that's a Greek name, in fact, I heard a pastor say one time in preaching, he said, "Yeah, you know, I know a little Greek and his name is Spiros Zodhiates." Anyway, he was apparently a short guy too. But Spiros Zodhiates in his commentary makes the point having moved to America and observed culture in America, he said one of the things that's really interesting in America is that when somebody gets saved that's well-known, one of the things that you see happen is people thrust them in a pulpit or put them in front of large audiences of people to start teaching and talking about what has happened in their life. This is completely against what James is saying in James 1. James says when you get saved, you should be quick to listen, slow to speak. Zodhiates said it would be like taking a baby and putting him up here on the platform and letting them preach the sermon. That's what it's doing. Just because someone is well-known, well, they're a well-known baby so let's listen to what they have to say.

Now, it's true that the believer has something to say even as a baby. There's a balance. You see what I'm saying. But this passage seems to be saying that what we want to cultivate in the hearts of each other is a willingness to listen and that there's a danger, as Paul talks about in 1 Timothy 5, of laying hands on too quickly or in 1 Timothy 3, elevating someone to the office of deacon too quickly and thus exposing them to the temptations of pride and of Satan.

So we need to be careful and this passage certainly says that, but in reality, what it's doing is it's basically calling us to live out how we truly came to faith in the first place. It needs to be lived out on a daily basis in our lives and this should remain true all of our lives. We should labor at being good listeners, being quick to listen. You know, someone has noted that we have two ears and one mouth and that's for a reason. When you think about it, how does someone come to faith? How did we get saved in the first place? If you know Jesus Christ, if you've repented and placed your faith in him, how did you get saved? If you've not yet come to know Christ but you're going to, this is how you're going

to be saved. How is that according to the Scriptures? By hearing. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. God saves not through what we see but what we hear.

It's one of the interesting things about the biblical revelation that we have. God is not showing us things to look at as much as he is speaking to us. It's so clear. You remember when Moses asked the Lord to show him his glory in Exodus 33. He says, "Show me your glory," and the Lord says, "Okay, I will show you my glory but I'm not going to show you my glory full on. You can't see that and live." But what happens is he puts Moses in the cleft of the rock and he passes by in front of him and Moses just sees the back of God's robe, as it were, passing by, but what's significant is not what Moses sees but what Moses hears. "You want to see my glory," what the focus is, what Moses hears for as the Lord passes by, these are the words that God speaks, "The Lord, the Lord, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness, who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin, but who will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of the fathers to the third and fourth generation." Moses hears that and he fell to the ground and worshiped. It's what he hears, not what he sees. And think about the Christian life. We live by faith, not by sight. And how does faith come but by hearing?

So it's all about hearing. So if everything's about hearing, if you were born again by hearing the message which is what you were. If you are born again, you were born again through the hearing of the word because faith comes by hearing and hearing the word of Christ. You have to hear the message about Jesus. If you were born again by the hearing, then you're going to continue to grow by the hearing of the word and so he says be quick to listen. It's like speed up your listening, slow down your speaking. He doesn't say don't speak. He doesn't say you never speak. No, of course you speak but he says just slow down the impulse. Just kind of slow down, take your foot off the accelerator, maybe touch the brake on the speaking and accelerate the listening. Be more focused on the listening.

Be quick to listen, slow to speak. So slow down the speaking. That is going against the natural grain of what we want to do. In fact, James, many commentators note the fact that he seems to speak like the wisdom literature, the Proverbs, seen the way they've informed him greatly. You think about how the Scripture tells us about being slow to speak again and again in Proverbs.

Turn with me to Proverbs. Hold your place in James and turn back to Proverbs, about the middle of your Bible, right after Psalms. Proverbs 10:19. Here we have a verse which tells us one of the benefits of slowing down our speaking. Proverbs 10:19, "When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable." If you keep talking, you're going to sin. Some of us know that better than others. Some of us are more disposed to just talking and talking and talking and Proverbs says that's not a good way to be. Stop talking. Listen. "When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise." When you can restrain your lips, that's wisdom.

Look with me a couple of chapters over, chapter 12, verse 16, "A fool's anger is known at once, But a prudent man conceals dishonor." A fool gets angry and you know it at once. How do you know? Because he speaks. But a prudent man may be having some trouble with what's going on but he conceals it. He restrains himself.

This theme continues, verse 18, "There is one who speaks rashly," one who rushes to speak, speaks rashly without thinking. "There is one who speaks rashly," look what the effect of it is, "like the thrusts of a sword." Isn't that amazing? The power of the words, the words to destroy people. This shows that there was not much wisdom in that saying that we learned, many of us learned when we were young: sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me. It's an unbiblical concept. Words do great damage. They're like thrusts of a sword and so if you speak rashly, you speak out of the moment, in the heat of the moment, it's like stabbing someone that you love repeatedly and then you gather yourself but the damage is done. "But the tongue of the wise brings healing." So the wise, it's not that he doesn't speak at all, but he's restrained himself and when he speaks, it brings blessing and healing. This is what James is calling us to.

Verse 23, same chapter. "A prudent man conceals knowledge, But the heart of fools proclaims folly." So a prudent man may know a lot more than you know because he's just learned to not speak so quickly, but a fool, they just tell everything they think they know and show that they don't know much. So we don't want to be fools. The Scripture is calling us to be wise.

Slow to speak. Quick to listen, slow to speak, and there is this connection, then, between being slow to speak and slow to anger. We saw it even in the passages we just read like thrusts of a sword is one who speaks rashly. If you speak quickly, that's often a sign of anger and the expression of violent words, I mean, words that are hurtful. There is this connection between speaking and anger.

That's why James, back to James 1, verse 19, he says speed up your listening, slow down your speaking and slow down your anger. Be slow to anger. I read a moment ago from Exodus 34 where we heard the nature of God, Jehovah, Yahweh, "The Lord, the Lord, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger." God is slow to anger and those who have been begotten of God are supposed to look like their Father so God wants us to be slow to anger. And one of the ways that you, the beginning of accomplishing being slow to anger is to be quick to listen. Isn't it amazing how quickly we can get angry? And so often we can get angry without any reason because we misinterpreted the situation.

We've had, Patti and I, you know, I don't hear well which really makes it...I need to really work hard at this. I have a hearing loss in both ears so if I've said something, if you've said something to me and I really acted strange, you know, "My cat died," "Oh, that's nice." Actually with cats, that's almost... No, sorry. I really don't mean that. But if I said something like that, it may have been because I didn't understand you. I've often thought I heard something and then rather than say, "Huh?" Anyway, so just be aware of that.

But there have been times where we've realized, we've had disagreements, arguments because we just misunderstood each other. Listening better would have solved everything. Even just asking the question, "Now, did I hear you correctly? Did you say this?" Even just stopping that, stops the rush toward anger, asking that question. And then by asking that question as Proverbs 15:1 says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath," even if someone has said something and you understood it correctly and it was an expression of anger and wrath, a gentle answer turns that away. "Hey, what's your concern? I want to understand. What's going on?"

So this is what James is saying. We need to cultivate hearts that do that. And over and over again also in the Proverbs, he says we should be slow to anger and he commends being slow to anger. In fact, Proverbs 16:32 says that a man who rules his spirit is better than a man who conquers a city. That if you can be slow to anger and rule your spirit, you've done more than conquering a city. And what amazing fruit for the glory of God when a person goes from being dominated by anger to being one who rules his spirit.

I remember hearing some years ago the testimony of a man who had a real problem with anger and he didn't see it that bad. Most of the time we don't see our sin that bad but we need to be quick to listen, to listen to others tells us about our spiritual issues. He was a leader in the church but his son was an unbeliever and he was disturbed about his teenage son, late teenage years, rejecting Christ. He felt like there was just so much distance between him and his son but this man had a pattern of blowing up and God began working with him on that and he began trying to apply his heart to learn truths like this and apply them by the grace of God, the grace of Christ. And one day his son had gone to the refrigerator to take out a Jello mold and he had been a little, you know, premature. Sometimes teenagers can be or we all can be, and he moved quickly and just kind of bumped into something and the Jello mold went out of the mold onto the floor and just a Jello explosion. The young man internally braced, his dad was right there and internally braced himself for the explosion that was about to happen from his dad and almost closed his eyes but was just prepared and then he noticed that his dad was on the floor cleaning up the mess and his dad just cleaned up the mess, there was no explosion of anger, there was concern for the son. And it was later that his son went to his dad and said, "I want to learn more about Jesus. If he can change you like that, I'm interested."

You see, we don't understand the power that the transforming grace of God has and we're too complacent and James is saying don't be complacent. Don't rest on your laurels of what God has done. The Christian life is a life of progressing in holiness, all by the grace of God. We continue to look to him. We continue to have to hear his word. We continue to have to allow his word to have fruit in our lives but the Lord wants to change us more and more to look more and more like Jesus and as that happens, we will have a more powerful impact on those around us.

So a threefold command: be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger. Then he offers the second main point this morning: a compelling reason. He says, "Listen, you must be slow to speak, quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger," and then he gives a reason. You see that in verse 20, "for," the conjunction "for." "For the anger of man does not

achieve the righteousness of God." Here's the reason. Listen, you need to do this because if you allow yourself to continue the pattern of being quick to speak, slow to hear, quick to anger, if you continue that way, realize that that's never going to produce what God wants to have produced in your life. The anger of man will never produce the righteousness of God. It will not achieve it and the idea of the word "achieve" here in the NASB is to work the righteousness of God. The anger of man will not work out the righteousness of God.

Now, think about that. It means, I think especially applicable is, I know from my own heart is that there are things that we see that we would like to see changed in those that we love, those that we care about because one of the pitfalls that we have as people is that we have spiritual farsightedness. I can see your problems better than I can my own and I really am bothered by your problem more than I am by my own and I'd like to fix your problem. Now, if we can be humble and realize that our greatest problem is the log in our own eyes not the speck in our brother's, Jesus says get the log out of your own eye but he doesn't say then don't get the speck out. He says, "No, go ahead and help your brother but have it in perspective."

So when we understand that, that getting the log out is getting the anger of man out, it's a key part of getting the log out of my own eye because I sometimes think, I had a coach that was like this too, or a couple of different coaches, that they seemed to think the anger of man produced something good and I guess in some ways it sort of did. You know, fear of them did result in some good things, but it doesn't result in the righteousness of God. It may work in a worldly sense but not in a spiritual sense. So our anger at others is not going to make them do that which is pleasing to God. It's not going to motivate them toward holiness. It may change their outward behavior in some ways, but it's not going to change their heart which is what God is interested in.

So he's saying don't allow this pattern to continue. Don't continue to be slow to listen, quick to speak and quick to anger. Don't continue that pattern because it's not going to produce anything good but rather realize that if you are quick to listen and slow to speak and slow to anger, the godliness in your own heart will bear fruit and will achieve the righteousness of God. So that's the compelling reason. It doesn't work is what he's saying.

So we've seen a threefold command, a compelling reason and, thirdly, an important application of this command. Let's talk a little bit about application. We touched on it a little bit but let's kind of flesh it out a little more. How do we apply this, be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger? I want us to think in two areas, two sub points under this third point on application and the first is in relation to unbelievers. How do we work out this being quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger in relation to unbelievers?

I mentioned that James, I think the flow of thought is he's thinking about the great distance that the believer has come when they've come to know Jesus Christ. When a person, their spiritual eyes are opened to see the beauty of the Gospel and in seeing the beauty of the Gospel they see the reality of their sin, the hopelessness that we have before God, that we are condemned and we have no hope because we have failed, we're marred,

we're under his righteous anger and wrath, we're headed to hell and it's just, and when a person sees that and then they see that Jesus Christ is God's gift to save us from his wrath, that he instead sent his Son into the world to be an offering for sin, to bear the punishment for the sins of everyone who would ever believe; when we see that Jesus Christ is a great Savior, that living a perfect life he offered himself with an atoning sacrifice, when we place our faith in him, we repent and believe, then we move this incredible distance and the lights are now on. It's something when you see someone that's converted in later life and it's like for some people it's like everything changes like that. I mean, the way sometimes you hear people's testimony, sometimes it's they were controlled by alcohol or drugs or whatever, and suddenly they're just amazingly delivered. Now, often what happens is later on they're going to have to come back and deal with that issue because the Lord sometimes allows the growth process, a period of real grace to be followed by, now let's walk this out in your life.

But we see this incredible transformation and if that happens, what's the natural disposition as you, the new believer, look at those around you who are not saved? There is a tendency to want to get their attention, "Listen, you've got to understand who Jesus is. You've got to give your heart to him." And it's appropriate for us to bear our hearts and to earnestly plead but we must watch out for wrong attitudes and there needs to be a sense in which even as we talk to unbelieving friends, as we witness to them, there is a sense in which we want to humbly listen and speak. Not that we don't want to speak at all, we want to speak wisely by listening well first. What's this person's issues? We don't just kind of bulldoze over them. We ask questions. Proverbs 25:11 says, "Like apples of gold in settings of silver Is a word fitly spoken." That is, under the right circumstances when you have discerned what the right word is and you speak that word, man, that is gold.

And so we want to develop that ability by learning to listen and realizing that our frustration and anger because what happens often is when we try to bulldoze over people, we're frustrated that they won't believe. You can't see but they're in the dark and your anger is not going to produce conversion. It must happen by the Spirit of God. So take that counsel of this verse and apply that in our efforts to share Christ with those that we care about, those that are around us.

But then, secondly, applying this passage in relation to other believers. I think that's the main focus. He wants us to learn how to be good listeners to our brothers and sisters as we live in community as Christians. He wants us to learn to hear the word, to respond to the word. And so as we relate to other believers, you know, we need to learn to be quick to listen, to have a disposition to want to hear from my brother or sister, even from the baby. I mentioned that illustration earlier about the baby preaching, right? Well, that's not a perfect illustration. It does show we shouldn't elevate to the top of the teaching ministry and stuff like that, but the newest believer has value to offer every other Christian because they have the Spirit of God living in them and the word of God has brought them to faith. So there is this tension, there's a balance, you see? So if you're a brand-new believer, don't think that you don't have something to contribute. You do. God can use you mightily in the lives of those around you and he wants to, but he wants all of us to have the attitude of slow down our speaking, speed up our listening.

Now, how do you do that? Well, I mentioned asking question. One of the things we should do is learn how to ask questions better. In Sunday morning Bible study this morning, we were talking about "Pilgrim's Progress" and Todd Guthrie was sharing about how many questions there are in "Pilgrim's Progress" as Christian is making his way through life. He's running into people and they're always asking questions. We need to learn how to ask questions. In fact, one of the things that I was thinking about yesterday that I want to do myself is study the questions of Jesus. It's astounding how many questions Jesus asks. He's always asking questions. He doesn't just go up to heal someone, he's, "Do you want to be healed?" The rich young ruler comes to him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Rather than answer his question, Jesus asks a question, "Why do you call me good?"

Even God asks questions. The story of the creation and fall in Genesis 3, God says to Adam, "Adam, where are you?" God didn't need to ask Adam where he was. It wasn't for the information purposes but there is power in the question because the question helps Adam think about where he is. Where is Adam? He's hiding. "Why am I hiding?" The question has power to help someone really expose what the need is. Rather than just rushing ahead with solutions, find out what the need is.

Proverbs 18:13 says a fool answers before he hears. But to give someone instruction before you know what they need, that's foolishness so slow down the speaking, speed up the listening by asking questions.

The basic orientation of the Christian is that we should be listeners. I mean, the word "disciple" actually we're going to see next time, is a word for "learner." The Christian is someone who is listening to God and the way that God speaks to us is through other people. I mean, we have our Bibles and we're supposed to read our Bibles but even there he's speaking to us through other people. When you read James, you're being taught by God through the life of James. His personality comes out. And so the Lord then in the church has us in community so that we can speak the truth to one another. Colossians 3:16, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Remember, that's not a singular "you," that's a plural "you." Let the word of Christ, Paul says because we think in terms of so often individualistically or atomistically. Let the word of Christ dwell in me richly, I think, but what that passage says, Paul is writing to the Colossian church and he says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly," and you can see that because what does he say next? "Teaching and admonishing one another." We need to speak the word to each other.

So if that's going to happen, if our hearts are going to be built and grow up, what has to happen is we have to be people who are committed to listening. We need to be people who love reproof, who love to be corrected. That's what a wise man does. He loves reproof and the word of God gives reproof but the word of God, God chooses to speak through people. It's really interesting how the Lord in giving us his word, I think he teaches us this in the way he gave his word. He could have spoken out of heaven and somebody could have just written it down.

You know, sort of the Mormons have that idea with what they believe. Definitely not a Christian religion, though they call themselves followers of Jesus Christ. They're not following the Jesus Christ of the Bible. And even the way the revelation came through the Angel Moroni is completely inconsistent with how the Bible was given. Joseph Smith went into a cave and he found some secret, heavenly, printed, gold plates and he transcribed them.

So it's kind of like hearing God speak out of heaven or this miraculously...the Bible, God gives us his word through people. He chose to speak to Israel through Moses so he tells Moses his word and Moses speaks it and then he keeps raising up prophets and then his plan is to keep speaking his word through people which is why we gather together for Bible studies and sermons. He speaks through people. It's not that the people have anything but it's the word of God coming through another person.

One of my favorite quotations of John Calvin is when he shares the wisdom of God in calling us to hear the word from people. He says if the Lord had chosen to speak from heaven, it would have evidenced some of our reverence for God if we heeded what he spoke from heaven. But he says how much more glorious is it that when he speaks, he says, when some puny man – listen to this – when some puny man risen from the dust stands before you and speaks the word of God, that calls forth humility and reverence. And what is our greatest problem? It's pride. So the Lord has willed that you and I live in relationship to each other and we have to continually humble ourselves before one another as we share the word with each other and when we do that, we become more and more like Jesus Christ, more and more meek, more and more humble, and more and more holy and that's what God has called us to. Cultivating hearts to receive the word of God, the first thing is we must be diligent listeners.

Let's go the Lord in prayer.

Father, we thank you for your perfect wisdom in giving us your word. Lord, you know that we are titillated and distracted by things we see. Lord, we need to learn the discipline of listening, humbling ourselves. Father, help us. We pray for those that are here this morning that have not yet repented and placed their faith in Christ, that you might call them to yourself. They've heard the Gospel, now draw them, Lord. Grant them grace to cry out to you to save them, to give themselves to you, to surrender to Jesus as their Lord and Savior. And Father, for those who belong to you, we pray that you would help us to apply our hearts to the things that we've heard today, that we would be quick to listen, that we would be slow to speak, and as a result we'd be slow to anger, that we would look more and more like Jesus and that we would have more and more joy in seeing your Spirit produce that in us. And we pray all of this in the name of your Son and for his glory. Amen.