

Public Relations
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C.J. Mahaney was a young man who lived in Maryland in the 1970's. All he cared about was doing drugs. He and his buddies were doing them quite successfully, all over Montgomery County, Maryland. And he was very happy in this life. He had no desire to quit it.

One of his friends moved to Florida, stumbled one day into a Baptist church where he heard the good news of Jesus and got saved. He thought to himself, "I've got to go back to the D.C. area and tell all my friends there about Jesus." And that is exactly what he did. And as he shared Jesus with his friend, C.J. Mahaney, the Holy Spirit latched on to Mahaney's heart and convicted him of his sin and of the truth of the gospel. And he said yes to Jesus.

The change was radical and immediate. He never did drugs again. He had a great hunger for spiritual truth, and became a bold witness for Jesus. Later God used him to start a church in Gaithersburg even though he had not been to college or seminary. Many people have been saved through that church. And C.J., because of his humility and passion for Jesus, has impacted other preachers and pastors all over this country. And it all started when Mahaney's friend brought the good news of Jesus to him.

It was because of relationship that C.J. heard the gospel. The same has been true of many people over the centuries, ever since a man named Andrew did it.

John 1:35-42 (NIV) The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"

When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus.

Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?"

They said, "Rabbi,... where are you staying?"

"Come," he replied, "and you will see."

So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour. Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.

Ever since then, people have been bringing friends, relatives, and others to Jesus. That's how God works. He works most effectively through relationships, even casual ones. It is through relationships that people are brought to Jesus. So our relationships are very important. Even the ones where we aren't really friends. We just know each other. Just like you know people at work, at school, or among your neighbors.

It is in relationships that we most effectively share the gospel. It is in relationships that we most effectively share the good news of Jesus.

This morning we're going to look at three significant things that greatly affect any relationship you are in. We find these in James, chapter one.

James 1:19-20 (NIV) 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.

Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. These three imperatives are important to our relationships with people. And our relationships with people are important because it is in relationships that we most effectively share the gospel.

We're going to take these in reverse order than they appear. So the first one is to

Anger slowly.

Be slow to become angry. That requires some level of self-control. That requires some level of self-control. We tend to think of anger as uncontrollable. We say, "You made me angry." There was a time I believed that wasn't true. But I no longer do. Others can do something to make us mad. But that anger doesn't last very long.

Anger is an emotion. Anger is a very natural emotion. It often erupts when we are suddenly surprised by danger. The best illustration of this is on the TV show [America's Funniest Home Videos](#), where people intentionally scare other people. Someone jumps out of a box in a scary mask. The other person is totally surprised, jumps with fright, and then either runs, cries, or becomes angry. All that takes place in the first second. That response, even the anger, is an auto-response. It is involuntary.

But keep watching and in the next couple of seconds the brain catches up to the emotions and realizes the scary thing wasn't a real threat and the person now makes a controlled response, a choice. They may laugh. Or they may get even angrier and strike out at the person who scared them. They did not like being scared or surprised and they react angrily to hurt the one who caused their fear. They move from the initial natural involuntary response to an intentional response. You can see this on camera, in their faces.

But why does it occur? I believe it occurs because they are focused on self. They are focused on what they want for self. They don't like being scared, don't want to be scared, are made at you for making them scared, and are going to let you know it. It is all about them.

The basic cause of much of intentional anger is ego, a focus on self. Intentional anger is selfish behavior. It is the proud man, the conceited man, who goes off in anger. You express anger because you want to prove you are right. You express anger because you want your way. You express anger because you take offense at what was said about you or those important to you. You express anger because you think you deserve more respect.

The answer to angering slowly is to change your thinking about you. If you will adopt humility, with God's help, you can learn, with God's help, to anger slowly.

Sure, there are times to be angry, and even show some anger. But most of the time we are angry too soon, too quickly, and too vehemently.

This command is like baking in a cold oven. Most things you bake, you bake in a preheated oven. You turn the temperature on and let the oven warm up to that temperature before you put the food in. But there are some foods that you are supposed to bake in a cold oven. You turn the oven on AFTER you put the food in. This heats the food up slowly.

To anger slowly means we are slow to take offense. To anger slowly means we will give the other person the benefit of the doubt. When I think about how often I say the wrong thing, trying to be funny, clever, or trying to make conversation with someone, and end up making a fool of myself, ... I should be VERY patient and understanding towards others who do the same.

To anger slowly will help maintain my relationships. A second thing, that follows this control of self is to...

Speak Hesitantly.

Having worked on the source of our anger, we are prepared to stop and think before we speak. We can be slow to speak. The truth is, most of us, even us quiet, laid back types, are too quick to speak and that makes us doubly too slow to listen. We have to be slow to speak before we can become quick to listen. You cannot speak and listen at the same time.

We need to get in the habit of being slow to speak. And it IS a habit, one that can be cultivated. Some cultures are built upon it. For example, in the western United States you may find it hard to carry on a conversation with a Navajo person. The general exuberance many cultures define as friendliness is not considered such by the Navajo. From childhood they are taught not to talk too much, be loud, or be forward towards strangers.

This is reflected in Tony Hillerman's novels, that take place in modern times. In one, a Navajo policeman is talking to an elder of his people, asking questions as he investigates a murder. The elder gives a long answer and stops. But the officer doesn't ask another question yet. He waits, a loooong, respectful pause, to make sure the elder has finished saying what he wants to say.

So we can be taught to be slow to speak. It is a habit we can develop. It is hard to do so in our culture, especially if you are part of a group in the habit of talking on top of each other. But it can be learned.

Make it your habit to be slow to speak. Speak hesitantly, thinking carefully about what to say. You will better say the things that need saying, and avoid saying the things that you should not say. And there are lots of these in the Bible. I'll give you just one example.

Ephesians 4:29 (NIV) 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.

(Proverbs 10:19; 11:12-13; 12:18; 13:3; 15:1; 17:28; 21:23; 1 Peter 3:10)

When we are quick to speak there is always the danger of saying too much or saying the wrong thing. We may say what offends, tears down, or discourages others rather than what builds them up.

It is recorded from the ancient world that a young man known for his incessant talking once came to Socrates for speech lessons. "I will teach you," said Socrates, "but I will have to charge you double my fee. First I have to teach you how to hold your tongue, and then how to use it."

Let us learn in our relationships how to hold our tongue, how to be slow to speak. Then let us use the respect we will earn to share with others the Good News of Jesus.

Anger slowly. Speak hesitantly. And **Listen eagerly**.

Having mastered our anger, and having developed the habit of waiting to speak, let us use all the time it frees up to listen carefully and caringly to others. James says to be quick to listen. He does not mean to listen quickly. He means listen eagerly.

This is a most caring thing to do. Be quick to give others the love of Jesus by eagerly listening to what they want to say to you.

That's a major part of our problem. We are so self-absorbed that we are not eager to listen to others. It is only when they are talking about a subject we hold dear that we are eager to listen. That reflects our selfishness.

Home is a key place that we learn this about ourselves. Sometimes your kids want you to listen to something you have no interest in. Sometimes you are deeply involved in a novel, and your spouse wants to tell you something about her day. Sometimes the phone rings while your favorite TV show is on and no one else is available to answer it but you. It is times like these that we learn how selfish we are and slow to listen.

So you must choose to eagerly listen. Eagerly give someone your undivided attention. This is often the greatest act of love you can give another person. When you give someone your undivided attention you are most like Jesus to them. Professional counselors learn that caring and careful listening is often the most simple and effective technique for helping troubled people.

We should listen caringly and carefully.

Writer Charles Swindoll once found himself with too many commitments in too few days. He got nervous and tense about it. "I was snapping at my wife and our children, choking down my food at mealtimes, and feeling irritated at those unexpected interruptions through the day," he recalled in his book, Stress Fractures. "Before long, things around our home started reflecting the pattern of my hurry-up style. It was becoming unbearable.

"I distinctly remember after supper one evening, the words of our younger daughter, Colleen. She wanted to tell me something important that had happened to her at school that day. She began hurriedly, 'Daddy, I wanna tell you somethin' and I'll tell you really fast.'

"Suddenly realizing her frustration, I answered, 'Honey, you can tell me—and you don't have to tell me really fast. Say it slowly.'"

"I'll never forget her answer", he writes.

She said, "Then listen slowly."

I interpret that to mean eagerly listen caringly and carefully. Pay close attention in order to get the other person's message correct. Don't be thinking about what you want to say next. Be truly focused on all that the other is trying to communicate.

In the popular comic strip called Shoe, one character says to the bird named Shoe:
"Shoe, your problem is not that you are hard of hearing. You are hard of listening."

A good listener works to get the message the other wants to communicate. To do that, we have to listen with our eyes as well as our ears. Learn to read body language. Learn to read emotions between the words of what they say. Sometimes the body speaks what the person is feeling even as they deny those feelings with their words.

We have the most important news in the world to share with others. In order to share it effectively, let us be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

"We have two ears and one mouth; therefore we should listen twice as much as we speak."

-- Zeno, ancient philosopher

Invitation

In is our good fortune that God is all of these. One foundation of the Good News of Jesus Christ, that we can be forgiven of sin, is that God is slow to become angry. One day God will pour out His righteous, holy wrath upon the earth. But He is slow to do so. He gives us time to wake up to our sin and turn to Him in humility.

Are you ready to do that today? Are you ready to admit to God that you are a sinner, a great sinner, in desperate need of a great Savior?

Are you ready to put your trust in Jesus as the great Savior you need?

Are you ready to put your life into the hands of Jesus, who was raised from the dead and is now sitting at the right hand of God, our heavenly Father? Then use tell Him as we go to Him in prayer.

Sample Prayer: Jesus, I admit that I am a sinner against God. I know my sin deserves death and hell. I need a rescuer, a savior. I believe You are the Savior I need because You died for my sins. I now receive You, as my Savior and turn my life over to You as my Lord.