

Message Extras

a little something extra to keep you connected to Jesus this week

Message Extras accompany the [weekly message](#).

The Lord most definitely has a sense of humor. We've been learning the five habits of people who live highly questionable lives using the acrostic, B.E.L.L.S. The first letter is for BLESS and the second letter is for EAT. I bless people and I love to eat! I was feeling pretty good about how I personally live those out, but then came this week: L for LISTEN...

One could say I am more of a talker than a listener. I was speaking in full sentences by the age of one. My great uncle nicknamed me "S.A.T." because, at five, I had quite the extensive vocabulary. I can still feel the sting of the nun's ruler coming down on my palm for talking during class in the second grade. I can still hear Mrs. Tucker, my high school French teacher, snapping at me, "Anne-Marie, ferme la bouche." That translates to, "Anne-Marie, shut your mouth" and it may be one of the only things I remember from four years of French classes. Talking I can do, listening...not so much.

Our speaker stated that we won't connect anyone to Jesus without listening to them. He talked about how our ministry and evangelism fully depend on our ability to listen to others, in the way exemplified by Jesus himself! He, being God, didn't need to listen to anyone. He knew he was right! And yet, he asked 307 questions but only directly answered three. He was more interested in listening. In James 1:19 we are given three practical tips on how we are to listen to others: *"Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry."*

- 1) **Quick to listen** - as in always ready and eager to gain understanding first. In Philippians 2:3-5 Paul commands us: *"Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ had."*
- 2) **Slow to speak** - as in being careful and measured with words. J.C. Ryle said, "Speak the truth in love. Truth without love is barbarity; love without truth is cruelty." This quote really made me think deeply about the way in which I tell some truths.

Sometimes we, by we I really mean me, justify our harshness by covering it with the cloak of necessary truth. Besides, loving someone means telling them the hard truths, right? Well, it's not what we say but how we say it...the truth, in love. What is love? It is patient, kind, not envious or boastful, not arrogant or rude, it does not insist on its own way, it is not irritable or resentful (1 Cor 13). I don't know about you but I could use a moment of pause before I speak. There are several acrostics that remind us to be slow to speak. There's W.A.I.T for "why am I talking?" and there's T.H.I.N.K: Is what I am about to say "True, Helpful, Inspiring, Necessary, or Kind"?

- 3) **Slow to anger** - as in remaining calm. There are many bible verses that equate listening to gaining wisdom but being quick to anger to foolishness and evil. Proverbs 14:29 says, *"Whoever is patient has great understanding, but one who is quick-tempered displays folly."* and Ecclesiastes 7:9 advises us, *"Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools."*

I can hear some of you now, "This is the opposite of who I am. How can I BE these things if it's not remotely close to my big, loud, boisterous, and passionate personality?" Again, it's me...I am "some of you". To us I would say, the heart of the problem is the problem with the heart. I know, this sounds like we have no hope, but it's just the opposite! Our hope is in JESUS CHRIST! We are saved through faith, but by the Spirit we are sanctified. He has given each of us his Spirit. He is faithful to complete the work he began in us and we will become more and more like him until the day of Christ's return (Phil 1:6). Until then, the Spirit will shape us as we devote our lives to the Lord, as we read our bibles, as we spend time in prayer, as we seek his kingdom, as we have community with other believers, as we submit ourselves continually and daily to his will. The Spirit will bless us with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). So be encouraged. We can improve our listening skills and through Christ we might even perfect them.

- Think about or share with your small group a time when someone really listened to you. What were the circumstances and what did it mean to you?
- Do you consider yourself a good listener? Why or why not?
- Which of the three tips from James 1:9 do you find most challenging? How can you be intentional about improving in this area?
- Who do you need to listen to this week?

