

Quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry

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[0 : 00] Let your glory Let's unite our hearts in prayer Our Heavenly Father we thank you that as we come back to your word we indeed are exploring truth that has not changed and will not change from the beginning of time we thank you that the words that we that we listen to and the words that we seek to be fed by will echo down through eternity and Lord we pray that you would indeed speak to us we ask that you would speak into our hearts we pray Lord that you would speak into our lives and that we would know that you are God and that you are dealing with us as individuals we pray for the help of the Holy Spirit we pray as we reflect on this morning that he himself would be our teacher and he would unblock our ears and cause the scales to fall from our eyes and stir our hearts and do us good that will be eternal we depend upon you Lord we need you every hour and we need you in preaching to be able to guide in speech and we need

Lord you in our listening that we would be alert that we would be intent and that we would be receptive to your words so speak to us Lord we pray again Lord we ask for your blessing upon all who are here tonight and those who are not here tonight we thank you that you are God and that you are everywhere the Holy Spirit is with us always and we ask that he may minister to those who would desire to be here that they may be fed from your word as they will be opening it and drawn in worship and Lord we pray that the Holy Spirit also may be ministering to those who are not here and have no desire to be here Lord that you would awaken that you would revive that you would draw those who may be far off back we pray for this week ahead of us and for those who may be anxious about unfolding events and we pray that you would comfort that you would strengthen that you would uphold and that you would go before all those who are anxious we thank you that we can bring all our anxieties to you in prayer knowing that you are the God who cares for us so help us to know that peace of God that passes all understanding and we pray that we may sense that in the stillness you are God and that you are with us take away us and empty us of all that would seek to exalt ourselves and help us to see Jesus as we consider this passage of scripture we pray this in Jesus name Amen as the calendar not so much the clock ticks but as the calendar moves from day to day and week to week and we go from summer through into autumn and we approach winter some people I believe as the year goes on they get sad seasonal affective disorder I think is a real condition and so some people as winter approaches they get sad why do they get sad well it's partly the darkness the nights are getting dark earlier the mornings are darker the weather gets a bit grim and so some people they get sad as this time of year approaches for me winter is a sad time not because of the darkness and not because of the weather but because strictly come dancing is back on the television and that's an indication that we're moving towards the end of the year it's a program that ruins

Saturday night for many of us I imagine and ever since Stornoway Primary when I think back to being five or six years old I hated dancing I couldn't dance I can't dance I couldn't remember the steps I can't remember the steps and even if I could remember the steps I could sequence the light in my mind I couldn't get my toes and feet to do what my brain would be telling me to do in the order and at the speed that they require so dancing has always been something that's brought misery into my life Mary and I can be getting on absolutely fine in a wedding until we have the dance and then everything starts to deteriorate from then on you might be wondering what on earth has this got to do with James chapter 1 but the link ten years as it might be is actually in relation to verse 19 verse 19

I don't know dance steps some of you know dance steps I know from having done a little bit of research 30 seconds worth of dance research that the fox shot is slow slow quick quick slow is that

correct Adrian Grems looking down but he's an expert in ballroom dancing well one of the commentators as they were looking at this passage was making the observation that in verse 19 it almost reads about like dance steps not slow slow quick quick slow but the dance steps to the righteous life that's expanded in the book of James and in this section that we're looking at here the righteous life verse 20 that God desires the dance steps for it are not slow slow quick slow but quick slow slow and that's our headings tonight if you think about the structure of this quick slow slow these are the steps in the dance of the righteous life so what are we to be we're to be quick to listen we're to be slow to speak and we're to be slow to become angry and that begins to outline for us the structure of life that the

[7 : 11] Lord looks for from us if we are Christ's ones if we are Christians so first of all we're to be quick to listen verse 19 my dear brothers take note of this everyone should be quick to listen and even if we look in the mirror we get an indication we get some clues to the fact that we should be quicker to listen than we are to speak we look in the mirror some of you have got less obvious examples of this than I do but we have two ears sticking out inside of our heads and we have one mouth and that in itself in our design sends a message to us that we should be more ready to listen than we are to speak two ears one mouth we say that often to children don't we two ears one mouth listen so who do we listen to well first of all we listen to each other and secondly we listen to God not in that order but these are the two points where we should connect in our listening we listen to each other and we listen to

God I was at a fraternal this week past and there was an experienced minister from a different area he was there and he was reflecting on many years of ministry and he was speaking to some of us who were a bit earlier in the road about some of the things that he would have done differently as he looked back on his ministry and the interesting thing was the first thing he said was if I had my time again I would really listen to people I wouldn't just come in and do six visits in a day and be looking at the watch thinking well I need to be out of here in the next 15 minutes he said I would go in and I would listen to people really listen to people and that's someone who's identifying a weakness that we all share our tendency our fallen tendency is we want to speak more and listen less we want other people to listen to us but we're not always as interested in hearing their story as we are in them hearing our story and what causes that that's pride and what's the effect of that that's clashes hurt misunderstandings because we don't listen to each other and it was happening in church fellowships right through the new testament and it's happened in church fellowships every generation since and it still happens in fellowships today everywhere and so James as the spirit of God inspires him gives us that timeless word of instruction that we are to be quick to listen because it's only as we're quick to listen to each other that we become aware of each other's needs and as we become aware of each other's needs we are to try to help our God is a God of compassion and what does compassion mean sometimes we think about compassion as feeling sympathy that's only a small part of compassion meaning of compassion is not only to feel sympathy and to feel empathy for someone in their situation but it's to reach out to them and to help them and that's our God he sees us he loves us he knows us he identifies and sympathies with us at the point of our need but he reaches out to us in our need he seeks us he saves us because he is a God of compassion and so we too if we are

God's people if we are God's representatives if we are ambassadors for Christ we are to listen and reach out in compassion to those who are in need we won't know who's in need if we don't listen but as we identify and see a need in each other's lives then we are to seek to help each other pray for each other and support each other and not just each other but all those that God puts in our sphere of influence that's not what saves us it's not good works that save us it's not acts of kindness that save us it's Christ who saves us it's what he's done at Calvary that saves us we're saved by grace but if we are saved if Christ is in us the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives we should be those who are quick to listen and quick to reach out in compassion and that connects with verse 27 we're jumping about a bit tonight religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless as this to look after orphans and widows in their distress that was a need in that community in that context at that time what are the needs of the people in North Harris where are these areas of need where are people struggling we won't know that if we don't listen to them we won't know these things until perhaps we stop saying to each other and find and start actually talking and listening to each other we have to be those who are quick to listen and quick to reach out in compassion to seek to help and support each other so we're to be quick to listen to each other it's the first time perhaps the first

point should have been though we are to be quick to listen to God but I want to explore this one a bit more we're to be quick to listen to

God and how do we listen to God well I could have the children sitting down here and they would give me that answer right away we want to listen to God we listen through his word and there's that emphasis going through this section even just these few verses that we're focusing on verse 21 speaks about the word planted in you which can save you verse 22 again we have a repetition of the word verse 23 speaks again about the word verse 25 speaks about the perfect will of God and all these phrases without getting into the technicalities of these phrases they take us back to the Bible so how do we listen to God we listen to God primarily through the Bible the spirit is our teacher as we thought about this morning the spirit of God is the one who inspired the scripture and brings it to us in persuasive power but if we are to be quick to listen to

God we must be often in the Bible we must take every opportunity that we are able in meeting with God's people and opening his word and hearing it read and hearing it preached we should take the opportunities that we are given like the ladies have tomorrow night to discuss it together to pour over God's word and to pray it through we have to be quick to listen quick to listen to God and if we are going to listen to God we need to be in his word there was a Facebook post that flashed across my news feed in the course of this week and it read like this pretty busy day was only able to check my phone 1400 times and that's a word in jest pretty busy day

[15:52] I was only able to check my phone 1400 times but the truth is many a word in jest actually speaks truth into our lives we are quick to check our phones are we not how many people when they have not even got to their car they have checked their phones we're quick to check our phones we're quick to check the headlines we're quick to be out and about checking the sheep if we are livestock but if we are to live the way God would have us live we need to be quick to listen to him and not only quick to listen but intentional in our listening we can sit and we can be in these chairs at every opportunity that we're given we can be at the service in the morning and the evening and the prayer meeting and every other meeting that's organised we can be sitting in the place where God's word is read and preached and discussed but not as the intent in our listening that's possible verse 25 talks about looking intently into the perfect law that gives freedom so how intently do we listen we sang the hymn just a moment ago speak oh Lord as we come to you to receive the food of your holy word we sang it but are we is that truly how our hearts are responding at the moment are we sitting here with God's word open just desperately waiting for him to speak into our lives are we listening for God to speak a word into our lives that will transform us how intently do we listen to

God when we are in his word if we're in an airport for example we can be sitting with our cup of coffee with three hours before the flight's going to go maybe we're in Glasgow or London airport the tannoy is forever going we're forever hearing messages in the background about this flight and that flight but we're not really hearing them but I remember once being in an airport on the way on route to India and over the tannoy system when we were anxious about going there and the safety about going over there I heard it coming over the tannoy system McLeod and Ross report to security then I was listening never listened to anything very much before that but then I was listening when we hear our names mentioned then we listen and that's how we're to listen to God God is living he's active his word is living it is active it's sharper than a two edged sword it pierces into our lives and our experience

God is a personal God he doesn't deal with the masses the faceless masses he deals with each of you and I as individuals he's personal and he deals with us personally he's the God who's all powerful there's nothing he can't do he's the God who's all wise and he is the answer to every one of the problems that we face in our lives he's the God who's able to save us eternally and he speaks through his word by the spirit and so we are to be quick to listen and intent in our listening we are to look intently into the perfect law that gives freedom struck me in preparation I was preparing this after Wednesday evening and Wednesday evening I read a portion from 1 Peter 1 into 1 Peter 2 and there was a verse in that chapter where

I was tempted to park up but I didn't park up Peter as he speaks about the wonder of salvation he says even angels long to look into these things even angels long to look into this salvation story and yet it's hidden from them they're not able to look into it and we have these things we have this incredible and yet credible salvation story that is recorded for us in this book and spoken to us by God the spirit and we have been given the opportunity to look intently into these things that are hidden from the angels so we should be quick to listen and intent in our listening but more than that

even as we listen to

God we don't just listen and register that as a point of intellectual interest and then get on with our lives the Bible as we study the Bible it's not like a desktop study and philosophy that's remote from us and locked into some other age that has no impact on our daily lives we listen and then we do we listen to God's word and having listened as the spirit takes that word and presses it into our own lives we don't just say well that's interesting I'm going to move on we listen and then we respond in obedience look at verse 22 and following James says do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves do what it says anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and after looking at himself goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like but the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues to do this not forgetting what he has heard but doing it he will be blessed in what he does we listen we listen intently

[22 : 15] I hadn't actually noticed this but we continue to listen not only intentional but we are persevering in our listening but we also we also do what we hear as God speaks that's where the blessing comes last weekend when I arrived in US I went to the church in North US and they were having some kind of a congregational lunch burger thing so I was happy to oblige and partake in what was provided there so there was a few burgers provided and we had some lunch and I met some people and there was a few children there and they said we're going to do some games now oh that's wonderful you play games no no you play games and so I got dragged into this game where you had to run along and stick your face into a bucket of water and try and retrieve an apple and then you had to go from the bucket with your face absolutely dripping wet and plant your face into another plate full of icing sugar and delve and try and retrieve a jelly baby that was somewhere in the bottom of the plate it was excellent fun and by the time

I finished and retrieved this jelly baby I was clanking from here to the top of my head in icing sugar and this sticky goo so what did I have to do well I had to go to the toilet and I had to look in the mirror and see this even more alarming face than usual but in having looked in the mirror I didn't walk away back in I said well that's me I've looked in the mirror I've seen how much of a mess I am didn't look in the mirror and then forget what I looked like I looked in the mirror realised how ridiculous I looked and how much things needed to change and then I went to the basin and washed it all off it would be madness to see the mess and then walk away as if I'd seen nothing and that's essentially the point that James makes we're to be quick to listen and ready to act and it actually takes us back to the example that Jesus sets us in John 13 remember in John 13 there's the there's the foot washing episode and Jesus says as he washes the the disciples feet in chapter 13 it is Jesus as he washes the disciples feet he says to them when he had finished washing their feet he put on his clothes he returned to his place do you understand what I have done for you you asked him you call me teacher and Lord and rightly so for that is what I am now that I your Lord and teacher have washed your feet you should also wash one another's feet I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you I tell you the truth no servant is greater than his master nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him now that you know these things now that you have seen you will be blessed if you do them and James is emphatic in reminding us to be doing not to save us but to show that we are saved to bring glory to the Christ who saved us so that's the quick step we are to be quick to listen listen to each other and quick to listen to God and secondly we're to be slow to speak we're to be slow to speak the book of James is full of the wisdom of God it's the wisdom of heaven imparted to earth there's a whole lot of cross referencing between James and the book of Proverbs the book of wisdom in the Old Testament and Proverbs like James speaks to us a lot about our tongues and how we're to be slow to speak quick to listen slow to speak give you four verses just as an example Proverbs 10 19 when words are many sin is not absent but he who holds his tongue is wise Proverbs 13 3 he who guards his lips scarves his life but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin Proverbs 17 28 even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent and discerning if he holds his tongue Proverbs 29 20 do you see a man who speaks in haste there is more hope for a fool than for him so so the wisdom of Proverbs the wisdom of James makes clear that you and I are to be slow to speak and James he picks up on that and he takes it another level along the road and he applies it boldly he takes it straight into our lives and he says in verse 26 if anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue he deceives himself and his religion or her religion is worthless I want to come back to that verse in just a moment but before we get to that verse

[28 : 01] I want to just think about what's behind it in that verse we're given the exhortation we're given the practical command the application of this principle we are to be people who are careful in what we say and slow to speak but James he doesn't just give us the exhortation he gives us his workings how he gets to it in this section in maths the girls will take their homework back and they've got various questions set at times and they have to give the answer but the teacher will say to them in the class don't just give me your answer show me your workings I want to see how you got to that answer and James takes us behind the exhortation and he begins to work it all out so how does this all work how do we get to this end point well when Jesus saves us we are saved by grace we are all agreed on that as

James has agreed on that it's not about us it's all about what Christ has done for us at Calvary but when we believe the moment we believe the Holy Spirit he comes into our lives as we thought about this morning and when he comes into our lives he isn't idle but he the Holy Spirit and he begins to change us to make us more like Christ he begins to change our behaviour he begins to change our thoughts he begins to change our tongues to make us holy to make us like Christ you saw the pictures on the screen last night of the new church building now when we purchased the church building we couldn't just move straight in there was a whole lot of stuff in that ripped out there was a whole lot of stuff that wouldn't help us but rather getting away of us coming together in worship so walls had to come down the bar had to be ripped out furniture that we couldn't use it all had to go all that wood was stripped away massive mountain of rubble outside of the place so there was a whole clearing exercise before we could move on it was the

Jesus comes in when the Holy Spirit comes into our lives he begins to show us the things that are not helping us in our walk with God he begins to put his finger on things that are too important in our lives in order that they will be reordered he begins to show us the things that are grieving him and so there has to be a clear act when someone becomes a change in our life there is no change we have to question whether or not there is actually life there has to be a clear act before the renovation of our hearts begin in earnest verse 21 you see the argument expounded here James says therefore get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you which can save you that's the pattern out with all the morally filthy stuff that once we held on to and once we prized so dearly out with all that and in with the word out with all that is not glorifying to

Christ and in with this word of truth this word that brings freedom and brings conformity to the image of Christ repent out believe in it's interesting the word there that's used for moral filth in the Greek it's the same word in the medical sense that was used for earwax out with the wax that's blocking our image and in with the word that brings life and that's what happens when we're saved but that needs to keep on happening if we're to be sanctified day by days the spirit continues to work the stuff that he shows us and he says get rid of it clear it out so that I can come in and do a more effective work in your life so we have to keep on working out verse 21 day by day we have to keep on asking the spirit will show us and help us to clear out the rubbish and to accept and to receive these wholesome things of faith that will build us up and as we do that that's the process as we do that as that work of the spirit goes on in the inside our lives begin to change from the inside out and our behaviour changes our tastes change what we watch changes what we listen to changes and our tongues change if anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue he deceives himself and his religion is worthless and I think it's fair to say we know that to our cost all of us we know that there can be years of good work done there can be years of good consistent

Christian witness there can be so much evidence of good and God in our life and yet just a few words just an angry outburst just an ill-advised status update an untrue rumour that's passed on and every good thing can be undone our tongue our speaking can render our professed religion our professed faith in Christ worthless and it often does and I think for us here in a small goldfish foal type environment this is even more so those who work in different fields of industry will come across these risks that are particular to working in confined spaces electricians and people like that they can go into a building and they have to assess the risk of different areas the risk of working in confined spaces is huge because the chemicals the atmosphere can be explosive it just strikes me in the confined space of North

[35 : 20] Harris the danger our tongues can actually have super high risk so we need to be slow to speak we need to be slow to update these things when the whole battle was going on on facebook

over the end and all these comments were coming in that were ill advised and hurtful the temptation was to jump in and say that's not the way it was that's not the way it was that's not the way things really are and I sat there looking at some of these conversations just praying please nobody speak and I was encouraged by the fact that nobody did speak we were slow to speak you see the kids with these bands WWJD what would Jesus do maybe we should wear a band on the other wrist saying

WWJS what would Jesus say he was slow to speak remember in John chapter 8 the woman caught in adultery caught in the act dragged before Jesus everybody's speaking against her everybody's speaking about her she's thrown in front of Jesus they're desperate to hear his judgment on her life what did he do bends down starts to write on the ground something illegible that nobody could actually read and he says nothing until the crowd is gone and then as he's on her own with her he ministers to her he's slow to speak and James teaches us that we too should be slow to speak quick to listen slow to speak slow to get angry it's just a final word and in some ways this is not so much the point and instruction but this is the end point of the last two points if we are quick to listen and help each other if we are quick to listen to God and to obey what he says in his word if we are slow to speak against each other if we are exercised in throwing out the rubbish from our hearts and our lives and receiving all the faith fuel that God is so willing to give us if we are all of that then we will be people who are slow to become angry 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 and this is not easy some of us are wired in such a way that our anger boils up more quickly than others us so this is not easy but this is necessary however we're wired if we want to live righteous lives and if we are God's people we will want to live righteous lives so just to finish where do we go this week when anger starts to boil up around the kitchen table or in the office where do we go this week when we hear what somebody said against us or about us and we feel hurt and we feel maligned and we feel offended and we feel hard done by where do we go when everything in us is saying I can't not be angry where do we go when the pressure is building and we're ready to explode well we go to God and we remember what we sang in psalm 103 we remember that in his nature and towards us he is slow to anger and he is abounding in love the lord our god is merciful and he is gracious long suffering and slow to wrath in mercy plentiful where do we go when the fury is rising we go to God we go to the cross because there we see again how God's right anger God's wrath against us was taken by the son and paid for and forgiven Jesus is the one who was the propitiation the one who took God's anger that we deserve upon himself in order that we could be declared righteous and free where do we go when we're angry we go to the cross and we listen to Jesus say to those who crucified him forgive them we don't know what they're doing we go to God we go to the cross with our anger and then we go back to our situation and we will go back with a new perspective and a new determination and God's strength to forget as we have been forgiven and to love as we have been loved and to be slow to anger as God himself was and remains slow to anger in respect of us so there's the quick slow slow step in the dance of the righteous life and may God enable us to to dance

I've written down here may God enable us to live for his glory and we'll pray our heavenly father as we think about these words and as we come to terms with what you're saying to us this evening we we look into the mirror of your word and we see once more our guilt and our sin we think about the mess that we make of so many things we think about the fact that we are slow to listen and Lord we pray that you would forgive us for the way that we don't listen to each other and we miss so much about each other that we could support each other in and Lord we confess that we are slow to listen to you and even when we sit with our Bibles open in a quiet place at the beginning of the day so often the words go over our heads we don't listen with that intent that you the living

God and the speaking God have a word for us and we pray for your forgiveness we ask Lord that as we go from here we go into a week with that desire and that strength to be able to listen well and forgive us for the times that we've been quick to speak and quick to get angry and give us the strength Lord we pray to be disciplined and holding our peace and listening to you and controlling our tongues we pray for your help that as we as we seek to throw out the rubbish in our lives and receive all that you have to give us we pray that you would more and more shape us that our tongues would be brought into conformity with your will and Lord that our tempers would be calmed and Father when we go from here into this we help us we pray to survey time and time again the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died and as we see the right anger of

[44 : 22] God laid upon him the anger that was caused by us help us we pray to look differently at those who are around us to look in love and with great patience and we pray these things in Jesus name Amen