



# THE EXHORTER

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***“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40***

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. ([prchurchofchrist.org](http://prchurchofchrist.org))

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***James 1:19 "This you know, my beloved brethren, but everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger."***

We know this verse. It comes up often in sermons. It's the core of many Bible classes. Although we know it, we don't do real well with it. The "slow to speak" part is what I'm talking about. And talking is something we do. As I write this, in the background plays the oldies song, "Silence is golden." Silence. Folks don't talk about that much these days. We wake up to the radio. Our cars start with the radio on. There's noise everywhere. Just sitting with someone and nothing being said, seems eerie. "Why aren't you talking?" one person will ask the other. I was sitting out back the other day just listening to the wind blow through the trees. It was a pretty sound. You miss those things when there is too much noise around us.

But, I tend to think that James doesn't have in mind the noise of traffic, radios and things we call life. There seems to be a connection between three important words in this verse: hearing, speaking and anger. These three words are linked and often illustrative of why we get in the messes that we do. Hearing, speaking and anger. James adds some directives or qualifiers on these three words. Two of them are to be slow. Slow to speak and slow to anger. The other, listening, is to be quick. Now, our problems come from getting these things all mixed up. We don't listen well. We jump to conclusions and talk too much. We allow ourselves to get angry too fast. Our talking fast fuels our emotions which tends to blast off in a fiery anger. The more we talk, especially when we are angry, the louder and the faster we talk. All the while, the quick to hear has been parked on the sidelines. We've heard all that we need to hear, and with guns raised we are ready to take down our opponent. I don't need to hear anymore. I've heard enough. That is often spoken from the lips of an angry person. Slow. Slow. Quick. Hear comes first. Speak comes next. Last comes anger. Seems to be an order here. The more we hear, most likely the less we will speak. The less we speak and the more we hear, the less we will get angry.

All of this seems to make good sense. We leave the church building having heard such words and immediately, before we even sit in the car, we have our phone out and are talking to someone. Have you noticed how many people are always talking on their phones. All the time. In stores. In the drive through. At the movie theatre. In church. At weddings. At funerals. Talking and talking and talking. What is there to talk that much about?

So much talking that there isn't much time for just thinking. The Bible often calls this pondering or meditating. Just thinking thoughts. Just reflecting. Just considering. Hard to do when a person is talking all the time on their cell phone.

(OVER)

Here's another thing, it's hard to notice things such as the songs of a bird or the whistling wind through the trees or the sound of rain coming down when we are talking all the time. Those sounds of nature remind us of God's creation. God must like music because the wind, the bird and even the falling rain make their own melody. Have you heard them or could it be that you were talking and missed it?

Here's another thing. It's hard to hear someone else when I'm doing all the talking. I think some people like the sound of their own voice. I was with a guy a while back. He sure liked to talk. A couple of times I wondered if he ever took a breath. He'd ask and answer his own questions. I wasn't real sure why I was even there. He could carry on a conversation all by himself. When we parted, he said, "It was great talking to you." I felt like saying, "It was great hearing you," but I didn't. Conversations, like friendships, involve two sides. Let the other person do some talking. You do some listening. This is how we learn each other. This is how we get to know one another.

So, here's the real question. How do I become quick to hear? How do I learn to be slow to speak? Those two go together. You won't find a person who is quick to hear and quick to speak at the same time. It's one or the other. God wants us to be those who are quick to hear. How do you do that?

First, just listen. Keep your mouth closed. Don't interrupt. Let the other person finish their story. It may take a while, because they may be quick to speak, just like we have been. I've found that those who are quick to speak tend to interrupt. They can't wait for the other person to pause so they can jump in as soon as they can and they steal the conversation. Don't be that way.

Second, you don't have to have an opinion about every subject. You don't have to editorialize everything that is mentioned. You can just listen.

Third, it takes work to be slow to speak. It doesn't come easy. Solomon said there is a time to speak and a time to be silent. Most have just never found that time to be silent. Pray about this. This is something that God wants you to do. Having a listening ear will make people gravitate to you. They will like you for that. Anyone can talk and they usually do. Often they don't have much to say, but they still have to talk. But it's rare to find that person who really listens. You be that person.

Fourth, you'll find after you do this a while, a whole new world of things that you have missed. You'll learn things about other people because you listen. You'll observe things. You'll see things. You'll get this amazing insight. You'll notice the sounds all around us that you missed before. It's nearly impossible to hear and speak at the same time.

Fifth, you'll soon see that by listening more and speaking less, that you don't get in trouble as much as you did before. Our mouths get us in trouble. We talk without thinking. We repeat things that we are not supposed to. We say things in anger and that only makes the other person angry back at us. Talking and talking opens the door for trouble. Listening more than talking will help us stay out of trouble.

The Psalmist declared, "Be still and know that I am God." Be still means to stop striving. I like the Be still part. It's like a parent telling a child to sit still. That's worse than getting a shot for some of them. We do well to practice being still. Stop worrying so much. Stop complaining. Stop fussing. Stop talking. Be still and know that I am God. Listen. Be quick to hear.

Quick and slow. We tend to lean to the quick side of things. We like quick exits out of a store. We like our coffee quick. We like traffic that moves quick. We like stop lights that turn green quick. Some even like quick worship services. Get to it and get it done is how some feel. But some things just need to be slow. Slow to speak. Slow to anger. These follow being quick to hear.

Quick and slow-they go together. It's important to get them in the right order.

Roger Shouse (used by permission)