

This Fruit of the Spirit Equips You to Shine in a Mean-Spirited World

Listening is tough. So is holding our tongue. Maybe that's why the Bible instructs us to do both.

The writer of James tells us, "But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger" (James 1:19, NASB).

It may seem simple. As Christians, we are to listen readily, hold our words closely and not get angry fast. But this is often easier said than done.

In our social media and texting culture, where people express their thoughts (and anger) quickly, how do we follow God's Word? Can we learn to control ourselves—and our words—and really listen to each other?

Scripture offers much advice on this (see the book of Proverbs). The Holy Spirit also helps in our weakness (Rom. 8:26).

Perhaps the best place to start is by agreeing with God's Word. We must include ourselves in the "everyone" of James 1:19. It doesn't matter what your personality is or what other people do, the Lord says "everyone" for a reason.

The truth is, we all need grace to walk this out—and our God is more than willing to help in our weakness (2 Cor. 12:9).

The Bible urges us to watch our words (Prov. 29:11) and to tame our tongues (James 3:2–12). This applies both to our spoken words and our words on social media. God's Word is especially relevant today when people express their thoughts freely online, where tempers flare quickly.

Instead of jumping to conclusions, getting angry or airing all of our thoughts and arguments in public, as Christians, we are held to a higher standard. The Lord will judge us—and the world—by our words. “But I say to you that for every idle word that men speak, they will give an account on the Day of Judgment,” Jesus says in Matt. 12:36).

But the good news is, “if any man does not err in word, he is a perfect man and able also to control the whole body” (James 3:2–4), because the tongue is a very small rudder that turns a large ship.

There is great reward in watching our words. As we learn to really listen—to God and to others—and not let ourselves be easily angered, we become people of peace (Matt. 5:9). And while we may utter careless words at times, we can repent and ask God and others for forgiveness. We’ll still feel angry at times—Jesus certainly did—and yet, the Bible tells us “be angry but do not sin” (Eph. 4:26). This can mean restraining our desire to lash out and refusing to vent all our frustration, in person or online.

The Christian walk isn’t easy. Jesus said anyone wanting to follow Him would have to “count the cost,” “deny themselves” and “take up his cross” (Luke 14:28 and 9:23), but the Holy Spirit is our promised helper (John 14:16). The Lord wants His people to resemble Him—“meek and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29), not crying out in the streets or quarreling (Matt. 12:19) but quick to forgive (Luke 23:34).

The desire to listen and watch our words is a great way to do this.

You may want to pray a daily prayer like this:

“Father, I want to be like Jesus: quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger. Please help me do this in every area of my life—at school, work, home, with friends and online. Wherever I go and whatever I say, give me Your words and peace. Help

me, Holy Spirit, to tame my tongue. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Blessings to you as you walk toward the Lord, "who is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or imagine" (Eph. 3:20).

Question: What is one way you can start watching your words? Tell us on Facebook.

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