

What Did You Say?
Pastor Erik Gauss
Cross, Yorkville

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry... James 1:19

There is one important truth I try to teach any couple that talks to me about marriage. If someone says, "You aren't listening to me," that person is always right, 100% of the time. There is usually some initial protest, but that typically doesn't last. Why? If someone says you aren't listening, what they are really saying is, "I don't feel like I'm being heard." The job of the listener isn't to just physically detect the noise from the mouth of the speaker but also to assure the speaker they have been heard.

When a speaker and a listener have a healthy relationship, a simple nod or grunted affirmation can be enough. In some instances this isn't even necessary because the affirmation of hearing comes through a responsive action, such as, "Let the dog out, please!" No other acknowledgment is needed other than that the requested action be accomplished.

What happens in stressful times or in unhealthy relationships is both people become speakers and no one listens and acknowledges. We might give the courtesy nod or say, "I am too listening!" but our body language and responses do not affirm to the listener that we are in fact listening. If we are "truly" listening, we take in ALL the information the speaker is telling us *before* we formulate a response. Our response would then be impacted by the information that was shared with us rather than whatever we had already decided to say.

Not sure what I mean? Try this. Next time someone says, "How are you?" don't say, "Fine." Give an honest response that requires someone to listen. Say you are tired, sad, excited, or don't say anything. If the person says, "Me too," or, "Fine," you know they didn't listen! If they say, "Why are you sad?" or, "What are you excited about?" you know they are listening.

What does this mean? It means the world in the flesh doesn't by nature listen well. We, the children of God, will make a meaningful impact if we truly listen and hear those near us. When we can take a moment from telling people about God to listen to their real questions about God, we might just meet them where they are. We might make God more tangible or acceptable than ever before.

We are the Body of Christ. We are the physical presence of God on earth, His Church. When we listen to others, we don't just hear the noise they make; we listen to the cry of their heart. Jesus heard our cry and showed us God's love. I pray as we hear the cry of those around us, we will answer with the same love God showed to us.