

Justin Lanham: Well, good morning, Valley Creek Church. It is so, so good to see you guys. Hey, let's do this. Before we jump in, why don't we just welcome all of our campuses, whether you're joining us in Gainesville, Denton, Lewisville, Flower Mound, or Online. Come on, can we just give it up for one another? Hey, we are so glad that you're with us today. If I haven't had a chance to meet you, my name is Justin, and I get to serve as one of our student directors at our Flower Mound campus.

And we hope you and your family had a great 4th of July. We hope that you're having a great summer because it has been an amazing summer here at Valley Creek. You see, this summer, we are in a series called 60 Days of Family. What we're doing is we're just talking about kingdom principles on how to have a healthy family, because God wants you to have a healthy family, and a healthy family starts with you. And so, our theme verse throughout this series has been this out of Joshua. It says, "As for me and my family, we will serve the Lord." And since a healthy family starts with you and me, what we've really been saying this verse means for us in this series is that, "As for me," then "my family." Because you may or may not be able to convince everyone in your family to apply these kingdom principles to their lives, but you can decide, "As for me, I want a healthy family. And so, as for me, I'm going to apply these principles to my life because I know a healthy family starts with me."

And so, what we've been doing is we've been talking about principles that allow us to have a healthy family. And we started with the principle of surrender, you know, everyone's favorite word. We said that in order to have a healthy family, you first have to be willing to surrender your family; and not just your family, but yourself to the Lordship of Jesus in your life. And then, we talked about the kingdom principle of having a vision for our family, because a vision tells us who our family is becoming and where our family is going. And then, we talked about being present with our families; that no matter what, when our family was ready to be present with us, that we would be available to be present with them. And so, that's where we've been in this series. And, today, we want to talk to you about another kingdom principle that allows you to have a healthy family, and that kingdom principle is communication. Come on, who in here would agree that communication is critical to having a healthy family? Married people, you can hold up both hands.

Man, communication is so important to having a healthy family. And so, here's what we're going to do today. Today's going to look a little different, because myself and two other communicators are going to take about 10 minutes each and just share with you all what God has been teaching us about communication, because communication is so critical to having a healthy family. And the Bible talks a lot about the importance of communication, how to communicate. And one verse that we really feel like grabs the essence of what it means to communicate in a healthy way comes out of the Book of James. Side note, in case you didn't know, James, the brother of Jesus. So, James was around Jesus all the time, spent time with Jesus, talked to Jesus. Really, what I'm getting at is if anyone knows how to communicate like Jesus, it's James. And out of the book of the Bible that James wrote, he says this on how to

communicate. "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry."

Okay, first of all, we are in a series all about family, and I love how James starts this. "My dear brothers and sisters," who is he talking about? The family, us, you and me. Just in case you're not convinced, he went ahead and threw in "everyone" to clear any confusion. But then, what does he say? "Take note of this." As in, hey, you may want to pay attention to what I'm about to say because it really matters, and it's super important. "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry," because this is how a healthy family communicates. And a healthy family is quick to listen. Quick to listen – that means you're a careful listener, an intentional listener, a patient listener. Another translation actually says you lead with listening. And I don't know about you, but in my own family, in my own life, I don't always lead with listening. I don't always lead with listening because listening is hard.

But have you ever wondered why? Like, why is it that listening can just sometimes be hard? Well, I think it has everything to do with our why, our why we listen. Because I think if we're honest, oftentimes, we listen so that we can share our opinion or so that we can respond, or we listen so we can get affirmation, validation, confirmation. But how often do you listen simply to value the person you're listening to, regardless of what you may or may not get out of the conversation? Because, spoiler alert, listening isn't about you and me; it's about the person that we're listening to. And so, what listening does is it really reveals what you value, because you will always listen to the things that you value most. And listening not only shows you what you value, but it also gives value. Because when someone feels truly listened to, they can't help but feel valued. And this is why Jesus was the greatest listener of all time, because the thing that Jesus valued most was you.

And all throughout the Bible, we see Jesus listen not to get anything from a conversation, but simply to value the person He's listening to. And so, one of the best ways that we can value the family in our lives is to just listen to them. And in Luke 8, Jesus is teaching the disciples, and he says this, "Consider carefully how you," say it with me, "listen. Whoever has will be given more. Whoever does not have, even what they think they have will be taken away from them." What Jesus is saying is the more you listen, the more you steward. And the more you steward, the more you can be entrusted with. And the same is true when it comes to listening. The more you listen to the people in your life, the more you're stewarding them. And the more you steward the people in your life, the more that they want to entrust you with as a listener.

And so, have you ever wished that you just had more meaningful conversations with the people in your life? Because maybe it has nothing to do with the other person. Maybe it has everything to do with the kind of culture that you've created as a listener, because "whoever has will be given more. But whoever does not have, even what they think they have will be taken away from them." And so, how you listen really determines how others respond. And so, do the people in your life know that they are valued from your listening? Like parents, does your

kiddos and students know that they are just as valued from your listening as that financial advisor when they're talking to you about your finances and your future? Students, does your mom and dad know that they are just as valued as that TikTok or that video game or that friend at school? Spouses, young adults, roommates, does your listening show the family in your life that they are just as valued as that TV show that you love or that podcast or that friend at work? Because whether you realize it or not, you're creating a culture as a listener and there is no neutral.

You're either being entrusted with more as a listener or with less. And so, what kind of culture are you creating as a listener? And, here's the really fun part. We don't get to answer that question. Like as much as we may want to, you and I don't get to answer that question. Only the people in our life that we listen to can answer that question for us. And so, do you have the humility to find out how well you listen? Like, do you have the humility to ask those in your life how well you listen to them, and take it one step further, how you can grow as a listener? Like, "Hey spouse, how can I grow as a listener?" "Hey mom, dad, son, daughter, friend, roommate, how can I grow as a listener?" And, then you know what you do next? You listen to what they have to say. And not only that guys, you can repeat back what they've said to you because what that shows them is that you were listening and that you're stewarding them and that you want to be entrusted with them.

And hey, maybe you're here and you're thinking, "I do all these things. Like, I'm a great listener. Honestly, I feel like it's the people in my life," and hey, maybe that's true. Like, maybe you grew up in a home where there wasn't a lot of listening or you're in an environment where there's not a culture of listening and so you've never really felt heard or valued. And if that's you, I just want to say, you're so worth listening to. That you have a good father who will always listen to you. And so, what you can do is decide right now, "As for me, I'm going to be someone who's going quick to listen." I'm going to be someone who's quick to listen because if we're honest, we all want the people in our lives to say that we're good listeners and we all want to listen the way that Jesus listened. And so, how do we do it? Like, this whole listening thing, how do we do it? Well, there's a lot of ways to do it but one of the best ways to do it is to ask good questions. Good listeners ask good questions and people love to talk about themselves.

Hence why we're doing a message on listening because we love to talk about ourselves. And so, I promise you, when you ask someone a good question, you're going to get a whole lot of opportunity to practice listening. But, I don't know about you, but I want to be someone who learns how to be more interested in what someone else has to say instead of all the things that I want to say. And so, when you ask that question, don't start thinking about how you're going to respond. Learn how to actively listen and listen to learn. Don't listen to lecture, because believe it or not, there may be something that God wants to teach you through that interaction if you're just willing to listen. And guys, learn your audience. Like, learn how the people in your life like to be listened to because how you engage a coworker at work while you're listening to

them is probably going to be a little different than how you engage a 5-year-old at home when you're listening to them. But, let me just remind you, when you're willing to listen to that 5-year-old when they're 5, they're going to be willing to talk to you when they're 15.

And so, learn your audience. Learn how they like to be listened to and stay focused, man. Eye contact. Remember, God is not on his phone or interrupting you when you're talking to Him. You have all of His attention because He wants to hear from you, because He values you. And so, let the people in your life know that you are listening. And guys, I've just got to say, believe it or not, there's going to be times in life you don't want to listen. Maybe you're not interested in whatever's going on. You've got a lot going on at home. You're distracted. Or maybe the person is harsh with their words. They're saying all the wrong things. They don't want to listen to you at all, and they're constantly interrupting. Okay, even then, can you be willing to listen? And, if that sounds impossible, can I just encourage you? Pray for that person. Pray for a blessing and a favor over their life. Pray for yourself, that God would give you a legit and authentic interest in that person and what they're saying.

Pray for patience and perseverance, because I believe that when you do, God will give you not only eyes to see them the way that He sees them, but ears to listen to them the way that He listens to them. And that's what it means to listen like Jesus. That's what it means to create a culture as a listener. And so, "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this. Everyone should be quick to listen." And so, if you want to have a healthy family, let your family be quick to listen.

Caleb Chapple: So, "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak." And in this season, God has been showing me the importance of being slow to speak.

You see, here on staff, I've gotten a lot of growth opportunities. In other words, I've made quite a few mistakes. And a lot of them have to do with my communication. And one stands out above the rest. It was my first few months here on staff. I was getting to help people connect with Circles, and I loved it. But I was also new and wasn't really sure what I was doing. And so, I went to my friend Esther for help. And being the super nice person that she is, she sent me a few sample text messages. On like, what to send to people whenever they wanted to join a Circle. And so, I read them through and thought, "Man, this is great." And so, what did I do? Copy, paste. And it was like, that easy. All I had to do was when someone wants to join a Circle, copy and paste. And so, for like two months I was copying and pasting and connecting people to Circles. And it was going great, until one day I got a text back saying, "Thanks Esther." And sure enough, I scrolled through my text messages. And for two months I had been sending texts that says, "Esther from Valley Creek."

And so, if you're here and you got one of those texts, I am so sorry. I am not Esther. My name is Caleb. It's nice to meet you. And, hey, you may not have pretended to be someone else for

two months. But all of us have had times where we've been a little too quick to speak. Like, maybe you've said something and you wish you could take it back almost immediately. Or maybe you sent a text without actually reading what you sent. Regardless of what it looks like, we've all had times where we've been a little too quick to speak. And sometimes, I think we can be so quick to speak that we don't take the time to recognize how our words are impacting the people around us. But, really, our words are super powerful. Look at this, "The tongue has the power of life and death." Man, the tongue has the power of life and death, what's God saying here? He's saying that our words are so powerful that we must measure them before we use them. That we should be slow to speak. Like, think about it. If our words are some of the most powerful tools we have, they have the power of life and death and can cut to the heart, then shouldn't we be slow to speak?

Shouldn't we measure our words? Like, the tongue has the power of life. Words can bring life. Man, if any way that God could have created the universe, He chose to speak it into existence. Or how about Jesus? The Bible says that He is the Word of God and that He came that we may have life. The Word literally brought life. But, the tongue also has the power of death. Words can be wounding or can drain life. Like, how many of you can literally sit here and recall a wounding word that was spoken to you by a family member that you regret? Or you're still holding onto, that's affected you. Maybe it was said 30 years ago. Maybe it was said 30 minutes ago. Or maybe, how many of you can sit here and recall a wounding word that you spoke to a family member that you're still holding onto? And, man, that's how powerful our words are. And we don't want to do that to someone else. And so, if you've been a part of a family that uses words to tear each other down, man, that is not what the kingdom looks like.

In the kingdom, we measure our words so that they can bring life. In the kingdom, we were made to have healthy communication. And we just got through an entire hope carrier series where we talked about how we have a kingdom that God has given us that we rule through our words and our actions. And so, the reason we have to be slow to speak is because those words are so powerful. But, slow to speak also doesn't mean don't speak. So, like parents, slow to speak isn't, explode with anger at your kids and tell them how awful they are. But it also doesn't mean don't say anything. It might mean like, "Hey, I love you." "I'm proud of you." Or siblings, slow to speak isn't wait until you're locked in a car together or wait until you're on a family vacation to actually talk to each other. It might mean sending an intentional text about something that they like. Or, like, spouses, roommates, slow to speak isn't like, don't say anything, but make a mental list of everything that they do wrong. It might mean like, thanking them for everything they do really, really well.

Look what Paul says to the Ephesians, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." He's saying the same thing. Be slow to speak. Measure your words. And when you speak, release life instead of death. And so, what would it look like for us to have healthy communication and be slow to speak? Well, I think it starts with simply thinking

before we speak and choosing to speak life. Like, think before you speak. You want to get real practical? Ask yourself, "Is this helpful?" "Is this according to their needs?" "Does it benefit those who listen?" Like, is this helpful? Am I just speaking to speak or do my words actually have a purpose? Or is this according to their needs? Is this to fit to their agenda? Or is this just to fit to my agenda? Or how about, does it benefit those who listen? Like, parents, do your words benefit your children? Or how about students, young adults, do your words benefit the people in your life?

Or maybe as a follower of Jesus, do your words benefit the lost, the lonely, and the broken? Because I think if we're honest, a lot of times our words come out as reactionary way more than they do intentional. Like, we're reacting to what someone said or we're reacting to what's going on around us instead of building others up. We end up cutting others down. So, can I ask you, are your words intentional or are they reactionary? Are they intentional? Are they measured? Do they build others up? Or are they reactionary? Do they correct? Do they control? Do they cut others down? Man, imagine how different your family would be if you were slow to speak. And what you said was helpful, was according to their needs, and benefited those who listened. Like, imagine how different your family would be, and that's the authority that God has given you and your family. Man, there's a Proverb that says that "the heart of the righteous weighs its answers." And who are we in Christ Jesus? Well, we are the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus and we're learning how to live like Jesus lives.

So, we're learning how to weigh our answers. We're learning how to be slow to speak. And that's exactly what Jesus did all the time. You see, He had the authority to say whatever He wanted to, but the Bible says He only spoke what He heard the Father saying. Or how about when He was crucified? When He was innocent but condemned to death, He was beaten and mocked and humiliated. He stayed silent. He chose to only say one thing, what was helpful, what was according to our needs, and what benefited everyone. What did he say? "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." He was slow to speak. He measured His words. He weighed His answers so that they could bring life. And that's how He speaks to you. It's how He speaks to me. He is slow to speak. He measures His words and weighs His answers so that they can bring life.

And He's teaching us how to do the same. So, "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak." So, if we want to have a healthy family, everyone should be slow to speak.

Dawson Shields: Okay, y'all. "My dear brothers and sisters," hey family, "take note of this. Everyone should be," are you still included in everyone? Okay, cool. "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak," and oh my goodness, you knew it was coming, "slow to become angry." Okay, James. I know it's probably better for me to be slow to become angry, but like, are you serious, bro? Like, it's hard not to be angry. Do you know my life? My life is moving so fast, no one listens to me, and everyone's doing something wrong all the time.

Okay, remember, James, he's the little brother of Jesus. And so, he was around Jesus and His communication a lot. And so, when he says we should be slow to become angry, I think we've got to take him at his word for it. So, if we're going to be people who are slow to become angry, I think we need to have a good understanding of what anger really is. That's easy, right. Like, anger is when my kids don't listen to me and I get mad. Anger is when I'm right and my spouse is wrong, and they're challenging me on it. Anger is when someone does something that was so dumb, but so easily it was, like, "Are you serious, bro?" Okay, those things, they might feel like anger, but that's not the root of anger. You see, the root of anger is feeling out of control. Think about it. When was the last time you were angry with your family? Why were you angry with them? "Well, I didn't get what I wanted." "I don't like the decision we made." "I don't like the decision my parents made for me." "I didn't like that." "I felt out of control."

Well, what is control? It's my preferences, my opinions, my way, my will. And so, when my will is being challenged, I start to feel out of control and that's anger. And so, guys, man, anger, it's a big deal. But here's the thing, it's about us. Like, it's a choice that we make. We choose to be angry. Like, parents, you don't have to get angry with your kids to get the point across that what they did is not okay. Spouses, you don't have to argue with your spouse even though they're wrong to let them know, "Hey, this is the way forward." Like, bros, you don't have to get mad at little bro to let him know that's your turn to hop on the video game. Sisters, you don't have to get mad at little sis to let her know that your closet, off limits. And here's the thing, I thought I would never have to deal with that one, but now I'm married. Guys, my wife, she's stealing all my hoodies. I don't have to get angry to get my hoodie back, right.

Anger is a really big deal, but we have made it such a normal part of our lives. Like, some of us are totally content with anger being a part of our family communication. But guys, God never intended it to be that way. Look at what it says in Galatians, it's crazy, "The acts of the flesh are obvious: Sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; Idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, Fits of rage..." anger, "and the like." So, a whole bunch of other stuff. Guys, that's a heavy verse. Like, it is, and so, every time I'm angry, I can acknowledge I'm acting in the flesh. And so, if that doesn't bother you, that's okay. But if the goal is to become more like Jesus, then this verse right here, it's a really big deal. Like, look at that. Do you rope in anger with witchcraft, hatred and idolatry? Like, is that on the same playing field for you? And, so every time I'm acting in the flesh, I can acknowledge I'm angry. And so, here's the thing.

While anger is normal in the world, it doesn't have to be for you and me. It doesn't have to be for the people of God. And so, let me just be really clear right now. No one in this room can be free of anger by yourself. Like, I can not be angry. Like, I'm human, guys. But the spirit inside me can. And so, where does all that anger come from? Well, it comes from the brokenness of humanity. It comes from sin within us. But some of the Fruits of the Spirit are: love, joy, peace, patience, self-control. Not control over the situation, control over myself. And so, when I'm walking in those things, I can be free of anger. And please hear me, I'm not saying don't correct

your kids. I'm not saying your family doesn't make mistakes. I'm not saying your spouse isn't making bad decisions. All I'm saying is, there's a better way to communicate as a family than acting in the flesh. And it's by walking in the Spirit, all right. So, someone does something wrong: Spouse, roommate, friend, brother, sister, mom, dad. Whoever it is, they do something wrong, and you start to get angry.

And you can feel it. You know what I'm talking about? Like, you can feel that anger just bubbling up inside of you. You know what I'm talking about, right? All right, cool. I'm not alone in that. Okay, so check this out. This happens to me all the time, okay. So, there will be an important decision, a thing we need to decide, a situation, a scenario. And it's important to me. And I know I'm right. And the person I'm talking to, they're wrong, okay. And, as we're going back and forth, I start to get a little frustrated. And that frustration, because I'm not in control, starts to turn into anger. And my friends and family will tell you, when I get angry, I get an attitude. And it's really obvious, guys. And so, I'm angry. I've got an attitude. Next thing you know, I'm apologizing. How did we get here? Like, I'm right. Why am I apologizing right now? Okay, well, I can be right or I can be in a relationship, but I can't have both. So, I'm right, but now I'm angry, and now I'm not in a relationship. And guess what? We're spending more time talking about how I got angry than the actual important thing we were supposed to be talking about.

My anger is hurting our ability to have healthy family communication. But, if I'm quick to listen; like, if I actually listen to the words they're saying, like, even if it's dumb, even if it's wrong, even if it's hurting me; if I actually listen to what they're saying, and if I'm slow to speak, if I think about what I'm saying before I say it, I don't just start saying all sorts of crazy things; then, I can actually take that anger – I can take that anger that was bubbling up inside of me, and then I can submit that to the Lord and trust that He is in control. And when I'm trusting that He's in control, guys, I have His agenda on my mind and not my agenda. My agenda is to be right. My agenda is to get my point across. His agenda is for us to communicate as a healthy family. And so, man, can I just ask you right now, do you get angry? Yes, everyone gets angry. Welcome to being human. Do you get angry a lot?

Like, would your family say, "Oh, that's just how they are?" "They're just quick-tempered." Would your family identify you as an angry person? And, maybe you're sitting there right now and you're thinking like, "Yeah, that's me. Like, I'm the one that gets angry all the time. I'm the one that's struggling with it. I'm the one that's hurting our ability to communicate." And if that's you, man, I want to say I know that's hard. Like, I know it is, but can I just say, man, God sees you in all of that. And He's not angry with you. No, He loves you. And His heart for you is to experience the fullness of life that comes with becoming slow to anger, and it's by walking in the Spirit. And, guys, let's be clear, man, we're all learning this together. We're learning how to have healthy family, and we're learning how to have great communication. And, today, we're just talking about being slow to become angry, and we're learning it together. And why is that



important? Check out the very next verse, "Because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires." Come on, man.

What is righteousness? It's character. It's life. It's hope. It's freedom. It's self-control. You want the righteousness that God desires in your family, be slow to become angry. How do you do that? By being quick to listen to what God is saying is happening in this moment. And being slow to speak, because I want to speak His words that He wants to be spoken into that atmosphere. Because I know what I want to do, I want to get angry. And I can't free myself of anger, but the Spirit inside me, it can lead me there. And when I trust that the Spirit is in control, I'm now not focused on the frustration of the scenario. I'm focused on Him and what He wants to happen, right. And, so, can I ask you, if Jesus was in your position, in your role, in your family, how would He communicate with them? If He was married to your spouse, how would He respond to them? If He was parents to your kids, how would He teach them? How would He correct them? If He was roommates with your roommate, how would He live with them?

You're saying, like, "Bro, you don't know my life. You don't know the things my family does. Like, He would not let any of this slide." Okay, maybe He wouldn't let it slide. But I know He would be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. So, maybe here's a better question for you, how does the Jesus inside of you want you to respond in your position and in your role in your family? And, so, if we want to learn how to have a healthy family, then one of the things we've got to keep practicing is great communication. And whether you feel gifted at it, good at it, maybe you struggle at it, that's okay. If you just keep spurring it to the Lord and trusting that He's in control, then He's going to teach you how to have great communication because Jesus is the greatest communicator in the world. Will you close your eyes with me? So, what's the Holy Spirit saying to you right now? Maybe He's speaking in one of those three areas, and if He is, I want to encourage you, man, trust Him with that. Surrender control to Him.

Like, Jesus, we give you our agenda, our preferences, our opinions, and our will because we want to do what you want to be done. Jesus, we want to have a healthy family. Like, we want to have great communication, and the only way we can do that is by walking with You. So, would You just teach us? You're a great teacher. Jesus, I'm excited to keep learning with You. We're excited to keep learning with You this summer. Would You keep teaching us how to be a healthy family? In Jesus' name, Amen.