

Invalidation Kills Empathy. (March 5, 2026)

“So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear,
slow to speak, slow to wrath.” (James 1:19)

Truly listening to another person is harder than it seems, and the greatest challenge is often our own impulse to respond. We reply too quickly and, as a result, we answer questions that are not being asked or provide solutions to the wrong problems. These responses invalidate, rather than help.

Invalidation is a big empathy blocker. This happens when we tell another person that their understanding of an experience is wrong or that they shouldn't feel a certain way about an experience. Gas-lighting certainly fits in this category, but so does the more common Christian “should” that many use to correct the feelings of others.

Invalidation is often employed because we confuse the subjective experience of a situation with the objective reality of what actually occurred. As Christians, we do not have to agree with or affirm another person's false understanding of a matter of truth. But before we respond, it would be helpful if we understood why the other person believes it in the first place. This allows us to remain connected with the person while we disagree with their thoughts and ideas.

Remember...feelings are to be validated.

Feelings are subjectively experienced, not objectively argued.

Thoughts can be challenged.

Thoughts contain objective truth statements that are either right or wrong.

It is possible, and even healthy, to dispute thoughts while validating feelings.

In other words, it is possible to love someone and disagree with them at the same time.

In the life and ministry of Jesus, He modeled this for us perfectly.