

## **Empathetic Listening.**

**(August 21, 2025)**

One of the toughest verses of the Bible to follow might be James 1:19, “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” In this single verse, James provides a blueprint for response regulation.

Empathetic listening means that we listen until we understand the other person. It just might be the most important relational skill of them all. Good listening involves being present and giving full attention, withholding judgment and interpretation, and is complete when the speaker feels understood. A great test of your listening is to make your first response a question like; “So do I understand you properly to mean...?” or “I’m hearing you say...is that correct?” When the speaker confirms that you understand them correctly, the listening cycle is complete.

One common mistake that short-circuits listening is trying to connect what the other person is saying to something the listener has previously experienced. This is called autobiographical listening. I have made this mistake far too often assuming that I was showing the speaker that I understood where they were coming from. However, I was actually taking the focus away from the speaker and their experience and putting it on me. At that point, I was no longer listening.

Empathetic listening is an essential way to love people and it is a major tool for personal regulation. It keeps me from missing the point, so I can speak more accurately. And it adds a level of understanding that reduces wrath and increases compassion.

I assume that James learned this skill from his older brother. We can too.