

NORTHWESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Thesis

'The Importance of Listening'

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INTRODUCTION

Somebody once said, 'Listening is fifty per cent of our education' and *Benjamin Franklin* said, 'A pair of good ears will drink dry a hundred tongues'. Several years ago there was a public service announcement on television. It talked about the importance of good listening skills and the difference between hearing and listening. It stated that whilst hearing is a physical ability, listening is a skill. Listening skills allow one to make sense of and understand what another person is saying. In other words, listening skills allow you to understand what someone is "talking about".

For most of us our daily lives are a continuous array of things to do. There are work commitments, family commitments, friends, social activities, and whatever else we choose to spend our time in and on.

We probably spend, possibly without even realising it, more time using our listening skills than any other kind of skill and like other skills, listening requires practice. Listening is extremely important to us. The modern day expression, 'You are not listening to what I am saying' is very true. People may look as though they are listening when being spoken to, but they are not really listening, they are not registering what they are hearing.

If we were to be shut up in a room from birth with no sounds around us, we would be deaf although we would possess all that is necessary to hear – the ear, inner ear, the ear drum and the bones of the ear could be in perfect condition, but if we were not exposed to sound or sound waves, we would not be able to develop the skill of listening and the ability to interpret the sounds into words, neither would we be able to speak so we would be both deaf and dumb. Dear people or hearing impaired

people who try to speak, usually speak in a rather flat monotone way without changing the pitch of their voice; this is because they cannot hear the changes that are used in normal speech.

Listening and the interpretation of the sounds we hear comes and develops almost without us thinking about the process and because of this we don't often think about the process or pay much attention to the whole manner and sphere in which listening develops.

“It was weak tactics to disagree with the man until you had listened to everything he had to say”. (Wilbur Smith).

The difference between hearing which is merely a physical ability and listening which is actually a learnt skill is that by being able to listen, we are able to effectively make sense of what other people are saying.

Listening makes others feel worthy, appreciated, interesting and respected. Ordinary conversations emerge on a deeper level, as do our relationships. When we listen, we foster the skill in others by acting as a model for positive and effective communication.

COMMUNICATION

“Happy are your ears because they hear! Many prophets and saints, I tell you, desired to ...hear what you hear, yet never heard it.” (Matt 13:16).

Almost all can listen but how often have you had a conversation with another person only to feel that you were not really heard? Active listening is a technique that can improve communication between people.

What does it mean to really listen?

There are three basic steps in the active process of listening: Hearing, Understanding and Judging.

There is a wonderful character in Lewis Carroll's book '*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*'. This fictional character is the White Rabbit and he spends a great deal of his time running up and down getting nowhere, saying, "I'm late, I'm late, for a

very important date. No time to say 'Hello', 'Goodbye'. I'm late, I'm late, I'm late."



Communicating well isn't just about talking, but more importantly listening - really trying to hear what the other person is saying. Communication is a continuous process of taking time to hear each other. So, you're less likely to try and

'mind-read' the other person and jump to the wrong conclusions, and more likely to be able to offer each other support and greater understanding.

When I worked in Malawi I remember asking my students what language a child would speak if I were to take a newly born Malawian infant and raise it in England. They all, without exception, said Chichewa, the main Malawian language. I had to explain that we speak the language we hear. Listening is letting the sound in, we first have to hear the sound, which is then turned into language and interpreted. Of course with this comes accent and grammar and all the other parts of speech associated with language. Many years ago there was a radio programme in England especially for young children. The programme was called 'Listen with Mother' and it always began with the question, 'are you sitting comfortably?' and continued, 'then

we will begin'. You always have to be ready to hear. Listening leads to hearing and then hearing leads to communication. From this we see how significant is listening. Listening is the fullness of hearing. From the children's programme we learn that it is possible to hear another person speak but not be listening to them. In order to both hear and listen, we have to engage many parts of our brain, but above all we must be paying attention – concentrating on what the other person is saying and trying to express.

Maureen Staiano a Life Coach writes, "The importance of listening in communication is enormous. People often focus on their speaking ability believing that good speaking equals good communication. The ability to speak well is a necessary component to successful communication. The ability to listen is equally as important.

The importance of listening in communication is often well illustrated when we analyze our listening skills with those closest to us. In particular I am referring to our spouse, partner, children or friends. Pay attention to the everyday conversations we have with these people with whom we think we communicate well.

Do you ever find yourself mindlessly saying "uh huh" when one of these folks is trying to tell you something only to have say just after "I'm sorry what did you say?" Have you been in a conversation with one of them and you are not really listening completely to what they have to say because you are too busy formulating your response?

This is actually quite common and yet we think we are good communicators. In order to communicate effectively we have to be able to hear what the other person is saying. Not just hear because the acoustics are good or because the other person is

speaking in a loud enough tone. It is important that we hear what the person is saying because we have taken the time to actively listen.

Listening takes work and when it comes to improving our communication there is no getting around that. When we are listening to music or watching T.V. we can certainly let our minds wander. If we want our communication skills to get stronger it is important that we not day dream in a conversation but instead concentrate fully on what the other person is saying.

No doubt this can be difficult. Not every conversation we are in is particularly interesting. If however, we want to improve these skills focus is important even when dealing with younger children and teenagers.

Allowing the person to completely finish their thought before you begin to form a response is also crucial to good listening. To take it even one step further wait a moment before you begin to reply. This gives the other person a chance to add anything else they may have thought of. By waiting an additional moment before you reply you also let the other person know they have been heard completely. If you practice this for a time people will relax when conversing with you because they will know that they don't have to rush to get their two cents in. They will appreciate the fact that they can communicate with you and be heard.

When having those important conversations with the people closest to you, try taking it one step further and repeating back what they said "what I heard you say is you are uncomfortable..." By doing this you give the other person the opportunity to correct any misconceptions that may have occurred or to clarify any points they were trying to make. This heightens the level of communication you are enjoying. And the

person you are communicating with will certainly feel respected and important given the care you are taking with the conversation.

The technique of repeating back for clarity had been extremely useful when I have had conversations with my teenagers. It also comes in handy when speaking with a spouse or partner. Often times in those situations we begin to assume we know what the other person means. Allowing them to express themselves completely actually allows for greater intimacy, something we often desire in our relationships but wonder why we are not achieving.

The importance of listening in communication is something worthwhile to consider. Good listeners are often some of the best speakers because they have taken the time to find out what people are truly interested in. If you understand what is important to people then you understand how to reach them.

The strategies I spoke about are just as effective in the workplace especially in sales. If you are really listening to what your customer wants it will be that much easier to fulfil their needs. The customer will be impressed that you listened to what they were communicating instead of just going into sales mode. I have personally found in sales that the more I listened and the less I talked the better my sales ratio was and the more satisfied my clients were. That is a win-win situation for all involved". (Maureen Staiano).

Misconceptions about listening

Listening is a little more complex than most people realize, and there are various misconceptions about the listening process.

Research has indicated that while there may be a slight link between the intelligence of the listener and the actual listening ability, the relationship is very slight. The difference would manifest itself in the level of understanding and the level of language used not in the actual process of listening.

Improving reading ability also improves listening ability:

Obviously one has to understand the language of the speaker to be able to listen and comprehend what is really being said, but research indicates there is no relationship between reading ability per se and listening ability.

Listening is easy:

This is probably one of the biggest misconceptions about listening. Most people believe they are listening, when, in fact they are not, or at least are doing so minimally or ineffectively or as some would say, 'with one ear'. It requires the focusing of attention, being open and wanting to really understand another person, and putting aside one's own agenda. These things and the other requirements for effective listening need to be practiced, and learned, and above all, a great effort needs to be made in the whole process of listening because listening is not easy.

Listening to nature:

Our ancestors knew their place in the world by listening to nature. Scientists have speculated that in the distant past, humans first learned to sing by listening to birdsong, and then refined that into spoken languages.

We might ask what have we lost when nature seems just a meaningless background noise? Perhaps we can learn again to appreciate the music of nature – after all, to fully enjoy jazz, classical or any art music, we have to spend time and learn about it.

“The more I listen to the natural world, the more complex and marvellous I find it. Not only does each species have its unique songs, some of them extraordinary, but the whole symphony of nature is finely crafted. All the sounds fit together like an orchestra, creating a music that changes continually throughout the day, responding to the weather, and from season to season. Every habitat sounds unique, every place in the world singing its own songs. Boredom has been described as a lack of engagement. We reckon that if someone finds nature boring, they’re just not really listening!” (www.listeningearth.com)

There are well over 6,000 languages used throughout the world. Within this number some are more important than others, not better or more advanced, just more important because they are spoken by more people in more countries. That does not mean that Finnish is not important to the Finns or Maori is not important to the Maoris of New Zealand. It is just that these languages are not so important to the rest of the world.

Mandarin Chinese is spoken and understood by over a billion people. Chinese origin words really account for about 60% of Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese vocabulary. Knowing Chinese helps learning these languages.

Learning a language isn’t difficult, it just takes time. What is required is that the person learning must listen and read. When learning a language it is paramount that the student listens.

There are a number of misconceptions about listening. Some will say that Listening is a passive thing. The answer to that is NO as listening requires an active responder. Then it is sometimes said that Listening involves obtaining meaning from words. Again the answer is NO because there are many implied meanings or unspoken feelings. There are those who would say that Listening is only an 'ear' activity. Here the answer is once again NO for you need to listen with your eyes, ears and mind.

A conversation requires concentrated listening. Many people assume they know how to listen. However, these people may be mistaking hearing for effective listening. Listening does require hearing, but it also requires interpretation and understanding – in other words listening is a two-way communication.

Perhaps the most popular misconception about listening is the idea that listening is effortless. To listen effectively you have to make an effort to understand the spoken words and sentences as well as the intent and emotion behind them.

What effective listening means

Listening effectively enables us to better understand and interpret what someone else is saying. In a work situation if you listen carefully or effectively, you are able to show your co-workers that you are interested in and have respect for what they are saying. You encourage others to do the same and thus develop a mutual respect which fosters a strong and smooth working relationship. By listening carefully you will know what your manager needs from you and this helps to improve productivity and avoid costly mistakes and wasted time.

Perhaps one of the greatest benefits to being able to listen effectively is the opening of the mind to new and greater experiences. We are learning constantly and other people's thoughts, knowledge or ideas inspire our thinking and encourage us to be more innovative.

Effective listening is actively absorbing the information planted in our ears by a speaker, showing that we are listening and interested, and providing feedback to the speaker so that he or she knows that the message or information was received. Delivering verbal communication like writing a newsletter involves trying to choose the right words and nonverbal cues to convey a message that will be interpreted in the way that we intended. Effective listeners show those who are speaking that they have heard and understand the message.

Simply hearing what's being said isn't effective listening. Effective listening requires concentration and effort. There is a need to understand the meaning and intent of what is said. We must always remember that not everyone hears the same thing. This may sound strange but if you think back to those children's party times and playing the game of 'Chinese whispers'. What is stated off at the beginning is usually not the same as what comes back at the end of the game. Almost everyone sincerely believes that they are listening effectively which leads to very few people thinking that they need to develop their listening skills. However, listening effectively is something that very few people do. Not everyone hears the same thing. Sentences and even individual words can and do have several meanings and therefore can be open to different interpretations which result in potential misunderstanding and confusion.

Effective listening isn't a natural skill. Listening effectively, like many other things, is learned and therefore requires practice.

Different types of listeners:

Listeners can be divided into four main categories:

There are the non-listeners those who do not intend to listen, those who do not hear and do not make an effort to pay attention. This is the type of person who would rather do all the talking and as a result constantly interrupts the speaker and always attempts to have the last word. The non-listener may offer you blank stares and also demonstrates nervous mannerisms while you are actually speaking and may even go to the extent of faking attention during a conversation. The result of all this is that the non-listener will respond incorrectly or even inappropriately to the conversation. This type of person is not generally liked because their lack of effort demonstrates a lack of respect for what other have to say.

Then there are the superficial listeners, those who hear what is being said but completely miss the point that is being made. Such a person listens only for the basic meaning of what is being said and takes no notice of body language, voice tone and other forms of communication. This type of person is usually busy thinking about what they want to say next. They often project the impression that they do not understand what is being said and this can lead to confusion and mistakes. People who listen superficially often search for an excuse to avoid conversation or difficult discussion.

The next type of person is those we could call logical listeners. They make an effort to hear what is being said and to comprehend the meaning of the actual words.

However, they so often do not understand your intent or even the meaning behind the words used. Important components are lost because they do not receive messages from vocal intonation, body language or facial expressions. Logical listeners need to concentrate more on the nonverbal communication accompanying speech.

Then there are those who are the active listeners who do not judge but try to understand what is being said and why it is being said.

Active listening



An active listener has reached the highest level of listening skill, one who understands both the meaning of the words spoken and the intent behind them. The person who is an active listener will do their best to understand what is being said and why it is being said. They will respect your point of view when not necessarily agreeing with it. They will listen for the intent and emotions behind the words so that they can better understand your line of thought.

The ability to listen actively really demonstrates that nothing is being assumed or taken for granted. Active listening is most often used to improve personal

relationships, reduce misunderstanding and conflicts, strengthen cooperation and foster understanding. It is proactive, accountable and professional.

Active listening is a structured way of listening and responding to others, focusing attention on the 'function' of communicating objectively as opposed to focussing on 'forms', passive expression or subjectivity.

Active listening is a communication skill or technique that requires the listener to 'feed-back' to the speaker what they have heard. This is done by restating or paraphrasing what he has heard in his own words. This confirms what he has heard and confirms understanding for both parties.

"The ability to listen actively demonstrates sincerity, and that nothing is being assumed or taken for granted. Active listening is most often used to improve personal relationships, reduce misunderstanding and conflicts, strengthen cooperation, and foster understanding. It is proactive, accountable and professional".

(about.com Human Resources).

When interacting, people often 'wait to speak' rather than listen attentively. They might be distracted by other things which are going on around them. Active listening is a structured way of listening and responding to others, focusing especially on the 'function' of communicating objectively as opposed to focussing on 'forms', passive expression or subjectively.

There are a number of opinions on what is 'active listening'. A search of the term reveals interpretations of the 'activity' as including 'interpreting body language' or focusing on something other than or in addition to words. Successful communication is the establishment of common ground between two or more people.

Agreeing to disagree is seen as common ground. However, common ground can be false, i.e., a person can say they feel a certain way about something but they do not. Nevertheless it is common ground once accepted as understood. Real dialogue, understanding and progress can only come about from common ground. Common ground cannot be established or brought about without respect for the words spoken by the speaker, for whatever reason.

The essence of active listening is as brutally simple as it is effective: paraphrasing the speaker's words back as a question is a great help in developing active listening. There is little room for assumption or interpretation. It is functional, mechanical and leaves little doubt as to what is actually meant by what is said. The whole process is successful if the person receiving the information gives feedback which shows understanding. Suspending one's own frame of reference, suspending judgment and avoiding other internal mental activities are important to fully listening to the speaker.

Active listen includes the following components:

Hearing: Listening attentively to make sure you understand what someone is saying.

Interpretation: Confirming your understanding of what you have heard.

Evaluation: Asking questions regarding what you have heard.

Respond: Letting the person know that they have been heard, including the use of non-verbal techniques that show your interest, such as nodding your head.

Listening is a communication skill not often taught in school. Along with employee recognition, active listening is an opportunity to demonstrate respect and thankfulness. Listen deeply to co-workers, employees, and peers to demonstrate

respect, share meaning through effective communication and learn. Learn more about how to listen.

What does listening allow us to do?

Have you ever found your thoughts wandering during a lecture? After listening to your teacher or guest speaker for several minutes, do you suddenly realise that absolutely nothing but nothing is sinking in?

You can improve your retention by practicing active listening. This can be achieved by imagining that you are just sitting down to a class or lecture, when the teacher announces that ‘there will be a quiz on this subject.’ Suddenly, you become more alert. You begin to watch attentively as the teacher speaks and you underline each and every word that is emphasized or repeated. In other words you become far more attentive. You will seek a better understanding: You will build a better relationship: You will accomplish more when you remain silent and listen. By listening before speaking, your life, your relationships and your communication skills will all improve.

You will seek a better understanding: Stephen Covey in his book, “The 7 Habits of highly Effective People”, states, “Communication is the most important skill in life. You spend years learning how to read and write, and years learning how to speak. But what about listening? What training have you had that enables you to listen so you really, deeply understand another human being? Probably none, right?”

We know that the most important thing in any relationship is communication. Communication is the basic key, but communication does not mean putting forth your opinions without first trying to understand the other person's side of thing.

Building a better relationship: Listening is the key to building relationship with other people. Communication is so important in a relationship but we do not always impress that idea on the relationships we have with people.

"Have you heard a parent say, "I don't understand my 9 year old son." Or, "I don't understand my teenage daughter." Most of the time a parent doesn't understand because their approach to understanding is to tell their child not to speak because they "don't want to hear it." Then they say they don't understand their child.

How do you expect to understand a child, understand anyone for that matter, if you don't want to hear what they have to say?" (Ramez Sasson).

When we are seeking to build a better relationship, we have to start with communication. We have to try and discover how a person is feeling by listening and keeping quiet and the relationship will begin to grow.

If you hold back your opinion, you will accomplish more than you realize. The person you are speaking with might not want to hear your opinion because it might spawn into an argument because you have different opinions. All the person might want is an ear so they can let off steam. If you take this line you may find yourself in more winning situations than you realize and who doesn't like to win when you don't have to do anything but listen.

Communication is the key to every successful relationship. But part of communication is more than just speaking, we also have to listen. "A good listener is not only popular everywhere, but after a while he knows something." (Wilson Mizner).

The question is do we dominate a conversation or do we let other people talk? There are many people who like to talk about themselves, about what they have done and about they have not done, about their health, their ideas and a host of other things connected with themselves. In the end they hardly let other people open their mouths. People seem to derive pleasure from speaking about themselves, but if they always speak about their achievements or their problems, other people become fed-up with their egoism and avoid them.

Conversation is always a two-way activity. A person who dominates the conversation might feel good about it because they attract all the attention, but they will soon discover that others are avoiding them.

If we are willing and able to listen to others, we will gain a lot:

We will be more appreciated by the people whom we talk to.

We will get new points of view and perspectives.

We might receive some good advice.

We will have more harmonious relationships.

Listening develops patience and tolerance.

Listening to others can solve problems.

People will like us more because people like good listeners.

Listening to people will help us understand them and their needs, and this will enhance our popularity.

Next time you converse with someone, try to listen more. Let the other person speak their mind. You might not agree or accept their ideas, you may not like some criticism and you might not care about their experiences, but being patient, tolerant and a good listener will win you more friends, improve your relationships and get you more useful ideas and practical tips, that can help you in a number of ways.

To listen well is as powerful a means of influence as to talk well, and is as essential to all true conversation. Most successful people do more listening than talking.

The following are useful tips to help improve listening skills:

Listen for verbal clues.

Watch for nonverbal clues.

Be mindful of your own reactions.

Avoid making predictions.

Focus on the words spoken, not on the person delivering them.

Don't get caught up on one detail.

Don't let your mind wander.

What are the barriers to listening well?

It might sound simple. All you have to do is pay attention to what another person is saying to be an effective listener. But and it is a very big but, effective listening is more than paying attention. There are some barriers that sometimes have to be overcome to listen effectively. Effective listening is necessary for there to be effective communication whether it is the classroom, at work or in a personal relationship. There may be barriers to effective listening, but understanding these barriers can help you to overcome them and become a more effective listener.

Good communication skills require more than the ability to speak well. People should also be able to effectively receive information or to listen well, which is not the same as hearing.

"As a leader you have to be a really good listener. You need to know your own mind but there is no point in imposing your views on others without some debate. No one has a monopoly on good ideas or good advice. Get out there, listen to people, draw people out, and learn from them." (Richard Branson).

Effective leaders and influencers master the art or skill of listening, and they understand that people want to be heard. In our fast-paced world, active and empathetic listening is rather a rarity and it is not as simple as it sounds. Even if we know, or we think we know, how to listen, we often don't for a number of reasons.

When you next talk with another person watch carefully for the following common listening barriers that block a good conversational flow and which might cause misunderstanding:

Joining the conversation with a predetermined attitude and holding assumptions about the other person or the subject matter under discussion:

Good conversation can have the power to create new shared meaning and understanding, but this can only be possible if we are open enough to consider those now possibilities. Join a conversation with an open mind and desire to learn something new.

We are often so preoccupied with our own thoughts that we are unable to listen attentively: Maybe, we are distracted by something unrelated to the topic of the conversation, or we are too busy developing our own response and miss completely what is being said. We have to train and discipline our minds to listen actively and push any other distracting thoughts aside.

We try to complete the other person's thoughts and jump to conclusions: How often do we hear something and say to ourselves: 'I know where that is going'. We so often attribute ideas, motivation and intentions to others that they may not have. This leads to misunderstanding. Patience pays off in conversations.

We often engage in selective listening: This occurs when we listen only to what we want to hear. We like to be right, and our minds like consistency. We don't feel at all comfortable when something upsets our belief system. Engage in conversations with people who you know will disagree with you and learn to discuss your disagreements respectfully. Encourage different opinions with the intention of considering them thoroughly and learning from them.

We so often feel too tired, anxious or angry to listen actively: Our brains run on glucose and the level drops when we are tired, so that we no longer have the energy

to think clearly. Strong feelings and emotions affect our listening, reasoning and judgment.

We fail to pay enough attention to body language and supersegmentals such as intonation, rate of speech, emphasis or tone: We can focus not only on what is being said, but also on what is not being said. To be a good or active listener, you have to be a good observer as well.

We are in too much of a hurry: We become like the White Rabbit with no time to listen or wait for other people to finish their thoughts so that we can get on with our business. A conversation is not a race to the finish line.

“You have heard; now see all this; and will you not declare it? From this time forward I make you hear new things, hidden things that you have not known”. (Isaiah 48:6).



Hearing is a physiological process that differs from listening.

“Good communication skills require more than the ability to speak well. People should also be able to effectively receive information, or to listen, which is not the same as hearing. When a person is listening, according to the American Communication Association (ACA), she derives some meaning from the sounds that she receives and responds to it verbally or non-verbally. There are, however, numerous barriers that can interfere with effective listening”. (Felicia Dye).

Let us look at some more Barriers to good listening:

Environmental Noise: Effective listening is always difficult in noisy environments. For example often at work noise from machines and co-workers can and does effect communication. When driving people often have to try and listen over the sounds of passing traffic and the honking of other road users. At home sounds such as dogs barking, babies crying, neighbors cutting the grass, loud radios or televisions can put a further strain on efforts to listen.

Technology: Technology supplies us with a lot of noisy distractions, such as MP3 players, mobile phones and electronic toys. It is rather ironic that electronics such as cell phones and laptops facilitate faster and more effective communication, whilst at the same time they also create barriers to effective listening.

Concentration: Listening barriers can also be created by us, by internally generated noise such as monologues. People often miss what others are saying because they are distracted by their own thoughts or daydreams. Sometimes they fail to concentrate because they are too self-absorbed with themselves.

Attitudes: Often the way people feel about themselves and about others can be a major listening barrier. This is clearly shown when people feel that they know best, either in general or when discussing a particular topic. This sort of attitude can prevent people from effectively receiving information from another person. People also have a tendency to erect listening barriers when they feel threatened by what they are hearing. They may think that they are being attacked, accused or insulted and thus become defensive. This results in poor listening skills.

Reactions: The American Communication Association (ACA) says that certain words can trigger reactions that create listening barriers. In this age being politically

correct and using emotionally charged vocabulary has this effect According to the ACA such words as 'gay' and 'liberal'. Words denoting ethnic or racial identity such as 'Latina' or 'Hispanic' can also have this effect if they conjure thoughts of negative stereotypes. This type of language grabs attention but also tends to create a situation that prevents people from listening effectively to the overall message.

Unfortunately more attention is usually paid to making people better speakers or writers with completions for such and obtaining prizes, rather than on making them better listeners or readers. The most direct way to improve communication is by learning to listen more effectively.

Nearly every aspect of human life could be improved by better listening, from family matters to corporate business affairs to international relations. Most of us are terrible listeners. We are such poor listeners that we don't know just how much we are missing.

'Knowing the answer' is a great fault. It means that you think you know what the speaker is going to say before he/she actually finishes. The result is that you might impatiently cut the speaker off or try to complete the sentence or thought for them.

Even more disruptive than that is interrupting the speakers flow by saying that you disagree with them. This is a common problem especially when a discussion becomes heated and which causes the discussion to quickly degrade.

By interrupting the speaker before they are finished, you are essentially saying that you don't value what is being said. Showing respect to the speaker is a crucial element of good listening.

The 'knowing the answer' barrier also causes the listener to pre-judge what is being said. This is a sort of closed-mindedness.

A good listener always tried to keep an open mind and receptive mind approach. Looking for the right opportunities to stretch the mind when listening, to acquire new ideas or insights and expanding existing view-points, rather than simply reinforcing existing points of view.

A simple way to overcome the 'knowing the answer' barrier is to wait a few seconds after the speaker has finished speaking before replying. The 'short time' can seem a awful long time during a heated discussion and following this rule also means you might have to listen for a long time before the other person actually stops speaking.

Another strategy is to have a structured session during which only one person speaks whilst the other listens. You then switch the roles in the following session.

It is worth emphasizing that the goal of good listening is simply to listen and nothing more.

Keeping the mind open during conversation does require discipline and practice. One strategy is to make a commitment to try and learn at least one unexpected but worthwhile thing during every conversation. Trying to look for something new and interesting helps the mind to be more open and receptive whilst listening.

Another barrier to good listening is 'trying to be helpful'. Although this might appear to be beneficial, it does rather interfere with listening because the listener is mostly thinking about how to solve what he perceives to be the speaker's problem and therefore misses what the speaker is actually saying.

An old Zen proverb says, “When you are walking, walk. When eating, eat.” In other words, give your total attention to whatever you are doing. As has been said before the goal of good listening is simply to listen – nothing more, nothing less. Interrupting the speaker in order to offer advice disrupts the flow of conversation, and impairs the listener’s ability to fully understand what the speaker is saying.



Unfortunately a number of people have a type of ‘messiah complex’ and try to fix or rescue other people as a way of feeling fulfilled. Such people usually get a kick out of being problem-solvers, perhaps because it gives them a sense of importance. However, this sort of behaviour can produce a big hurdle to good listening. Trying to be helpful whilst listening also implies that certain judgments have been made about the speaker. This can raise emotional barriers to communication as judgments can mean that the listener doesn’t really have complete understanding of or respect for the speaker.

In a way, giving a person your undivided attention while listening is the purest act of love you can offer. Human beings are such social animals, the fact of simply knowing that another person has listened and understood what you have been saying is empowering. Often that is all that is required for a person to solve the problems they are facing. If as a listener you just step in and offer your solution, you are often implying that you are more capable of seeing the solution than the speaker is.

If the person who is speaking is describing a rather difficult or even long-term problem, and you offer a facile off-the-cuff solution, you are often forgetting that the speaker may have already considered your instant solution long before.

Many people simply forget that it is rather rude to offer advice when the speaker hasn't asked for it, even if the advice is good. However, a person can offer better advice if the speaker has been carefully listened to in the first place. If you believe you have valuable advice to offer, first ask if you may offer a possible solution to the problem. Then wait for the speaker to invite you to go ahead before you actually offer your advice.

Some people have the feeling that to agree with the speaker during a heated discussion is a sign of weakness. They feel compelled to challenge every point the speaker makes, even if they inwardly agree with what is being said. The result of this type of attitude is that discussion becomes a contest, with a mental score being kept on who wins the most points.

Treating discussion as a competition is one of the most serious barriers to good listening. It inhibits the listener from stretching and seeing a different point of view. It can also frustrate the speaker.

Although competitive debate serves many useful purposes, and can be great fun, debating should be given a separate session of its own, where it won't interfere with good listening. You should try to voice active agreement whenever you agree but be very specific about what you disagree with.

A good overall listening principle is to try and be generous with the speaker. Offer affirmative feedback as often as you feel comfortable doing so. Generosity also entails clearly voicing what you disagree with, as well as where you agree.

Because good listening depends on listening for the sake of listening, any ulterior motive can diminish the effectiveness of the listener. Examples of ulterior motives are trying to impress or to influence the speaker. A person who has an agenda other than simply to understand what the speaker is thinking and feeling will not be in a position to pay complete attention to what is being said.

Psychologists have stated that people can understand language about two or three times faster than they can speak. This implies that a listener has a lot more mental 'bandwidth' for thinking about other things while listening. A good listener knows how to use that space capacity to think about what the speaker is talking about.

A listener with an ulterior motive, such as to influence or impress the speaker, will probably use the space capacity to think about the 'next move' in the conversation; his rebuttal or what he will say when the speaker is finished, instead of focusing on understanding the speaker.

'Trying to influence or impress' is a difficult barrier to overcome because motives usually can't just be willed away. Deciding not to have a motive usually drives it beneath the awareness so that it becomes a hidden motive.

As you become more aware of your motives in closer and finer details, you'll eventually become more fully conscious of ulterior motives, they may even unravel, allowing you to let go and finally listen just for the sake of listening.

We have noticed that certain words can provoke a reaction in the listener that wasn't necessarily what the speaker intended. When this happens the listener won't be able to hear or pay full attention to what the speaker is saying. Red flag words or expressions trigger a strong association in the listener's mind, often because of the listener's private beliefs or experiences.

Unfortunately technology which helps to improve our lives often seems to create noise and discord as much as it melds minds. Good listeners have learnt how to minimize the distractions caused by 'red flag' words, but a red flag word will make almost any listener momentarily unable to hear with full attention. An important point is that the speaker may not have actually meant the word or phrase in the way that the listener understood. However, the listener can become so distracted by the red flag word or words that what the speaker actually meant will be missed.

It must be noticed that red flag words don't always provoke emotional reactions. Sometimes they just bring about slight disagreements or misunderstandings. Whenever a listener himself disagrees or reacts to what is being said, he should be on the lookout for red flag words or expressions.

When a speaker uses a word or expression that triggers a reflexive association, the good listener can ask the speaker to confirm what was said or what was meant to be said.

When a word or expression raises a red flag, try to stop the conversation, if possible, so that nothing is missed that the speaker says. Then ask the speaker to clarify and explain the point in a different way without using the red flag word or words.

One of the trickiest barriers we come up against is 'believing in language'. This is a misplaced trust in the precision of words. Language is and can be a guessing game with both speaker and listener using language to predict what each is thinking. Meaning must always be actively negotiated. It is a fallacy to think that a dictionary definition can be transmitted directly through using the actual word. An example of this fallacy can be seen in the statement, "*I said it perfectly clearly, so why don't you understand?*" Of course, the naive assumption here is that words that are clear to one person are clear to another, as if the words themselves contained absolute meaning.

Words have a very unique effect in the mind of each person, because each person's experience is unique. The differences can be small, but the overall effect can become large enough to bring about misunderstanding. A worse problem is that the words can often point at experience shared by both speaker and listener. If the listener hasn't had the experience that the speaker is using, then the words points at nothing. The listener may quietly substitute a totally different experience to match the words being used.

A good listener ought to practice mistrusting the meaning of words. Ask the speaker supporting questions to cross-verify what the words mean. Just don't assume that the words or expressions used mean exactly the same to you as they do to the speaker. You can stop the speaker and question the meaning of a word or expression. Of course doing this too often tends to become an impediment, but if you suspect that the speaker's usage of the word might be slightly different, you ought to take time explore that possibility before the difference leads to misunderstanding.

The common saying of 'mixing up the forest and the trees' refers to an inability of, 'can't see the forest for the trees'. Sometimes people pay such close attention to the details, that they completely miss the important overall meaning or context of a situation.

Some speakers are often referred to as 'tree people'. They prefer concrete, detailed explanations. They often explain a rather complex situation just by naming or describing its characteristics in no particular order. Other speakers are 'forest' people because they try explaining situations by giving a sweeping, abstract, bird's-eye view of things.

Good and sound explanations usually involve both types, with the big-picture, 'forest' view providing the context and overall meaning, whilst the specific 'trees' providing the illuminating examples.

When trying to communicate complex information, the speaker needs to accurately shift between 'forest' and 'trees' in order to explain how the details, like a jigsaw puzzle, fit into the big picture. However, speakers often forget to use the term 'turn indicators' to signal that they are moving from one to the other, which can and often does lead to confusion and misunderstanding for the listener.

There are weaknesses in both styles of communication. For example, 'trees' people often have trouble telling their listeners which of the details are more important and how those details fit into the overall context. 'Forest' people on the other hand often baffle their listeners with obscure abstractions. They tend to prefer to use concepts, but sometimes the concepts used are so removed from the world of senses that their listeners get completely lost.

'Trees' people often accuse 'forest' people of going off on tangents or speaking in unwarranted generalities, whilst 'Forest' people commonly feel that 'trees' people are far too narrow and literal.

This barrier can be overcome by the good listener asking the speaker for an overall context or specific exemplary details as needed. The speaker can be cross-verified by the listener by asking how the trees fit together to form the forest. Thus having an accurate picture of how the details fit together is crucial to obtain an understanding of the speaker's thoughts.

It is important to remember that a 'trees' speaker may become rather confused or even irritated if the listener tried to supply the missing context and a 'forest' speaker may show signs of becoming impatient or annoyed if the missing examples are supplied.

Perhaps a more effective approach to the whole situation would be to encourage the speaker to supply the missing context by asking him open-ended questions. Asking open-ended questions is generally a more effective way than asking close-ended ones. For example an open-ended question such as, 'Can you give me a concrete example of that?' is less likely to cause confusion or disagreement than a more closed-ended one such as, 'Would such-and-such be an example of what you are talking about?' The strategy of asking open-ended questions instead of close-ended or leading questions is an important overall component of good listening.

The organizing thoughts of speakers are shown in the different styles used when presenting complex situations. Some speakers, the 'splitters' tend to pay more

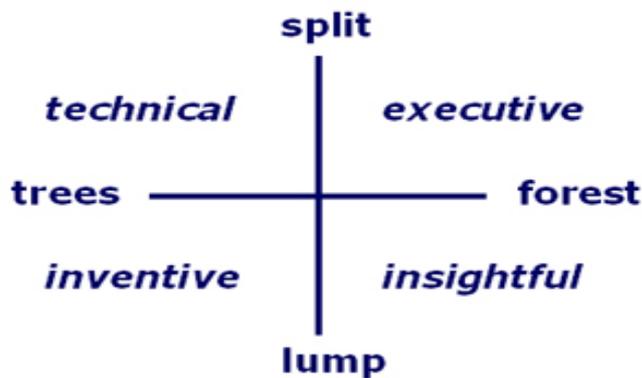
attention to how things are different whilst the 'lumpers' tend to look for how things are alike. If the speaker and listener are on opposite sides of the 'splitter-lumper' spectrum, the different mental styles can and often do cause confusion and a lack of understanding.

On the other hand a listener who is an 'over-splitter' can often inadvertently signal that he disagrees with the speaker over everything, even if he actually agrees with most of what the speaker says and only really disagrees with a nuance or point of emphasis. This can cause 'noise' and interfere with the general flow of conversation. Likewise a listener who is an 'over-lumper' can let critical difference of opinion go unchallenged, and this can lead to a serious misunderstanding later on because the speaker will mistakenly assume that the listener has understood and agrees with what has been said.

It is important to achieve a good balance between splitting (critical thinking) and lumping (metaphorical thinking) but it is even more important for the listener to fully recognize when the speaker is either splitting or lumping.

An approach to overcoming this barrier when listening is to ask questions to determine more precisely where you either disagree or agree with what the speaker is saying, and then to explicitly point this out when appropriate. For example you could say, "I think we have different views on several points, but we agree that" or "We seem to agree with each other on most of the points you have raised, but I think we have different ideas in the following areas"

“By actively voicing the points of convergence and divergence, the listener can create a more accurate mental model of the speaker's mind. That reduces the conversational noise that can arise when speaker and listener fail to realize how their minds are aligned or unaligned”. (skatch.net).



Quadrant of cognitive/explanatory styles

There may be several barriers present at the same time. A speaker might be an over-splitter who has trouble seeing the forest, whilst the listener could be an over-lumper who can only the forest and not the trees. There also might be a problem with communication if one or both also has the habit of ‘knowing the answer’ or ‘treating a discussion as a competition’.

One of the most important skills to have today is good listening. Families need good listening to be able to face the complicated stresses of modern family living. Corporate employees are required to solve complex problems quickly and at the same time stay competitive in the field of commerce or industry. Students also need to be able to understand complex issues in their field of study. Much can be obtained by improving listening skills. When the question of how to improve communication arises, we find that most attention is always paid to making people better speakers

or writers. Colleges and schools have debating clubs or societies which help peoples speaking skills.

However, more depends on listening than speaking. As especially skilful listener will know how to overcome many of the deficiencies of a vague or disorganized speaker.

On the other hand it doesn't matter hoe knowledgeable, eloquent or cogent a speaker is if the listener isn't paying attention. It is the listener who arguably bears more responsibility than the speaker for the quality of communication.



We Need To Listen To God

“If you have ears to hear, then hear”. (Luke 14:35)

Look in any Concordance and you will find pages and pages of references to hearing, hear and listening.

“Jesus would often end His teachings with the statement, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” We need to open our ears, and pay attention. We need to listen to some important things in this life. Many opportunities for “listening” come along only once in a lifetime. It is regrettably too late when we find ourselves saying, “I should have listened...” (T. Sean Sullivan)

God is a communicator who uses WORDS and those WORDS are recorded in the Bible for our learning. The Bible is the Word of God. Because of this we need to

listen to the word of God so that in turn we can speak to others about God and our faith.

If we are to grow and help others to grow in the faith and knowledge of God, **we** need to listen to His word. Jude tells us that, “the faith” was once delivered for all. And in the Letter to the Hebrews we are told that “... *in former times God spoke to our forefathers ...through the prophets. But in this final age he has spoken to us in the Son.*” (Hebrews 1:1-2) That is through the words of Jesus.

By listening to God we become his communicator. Teresa of Avila wrote the following:

CHRIST...

Has no body now on earth but ours

No hands but ours

No feet but ours

Ours are the eyes

through which is to look out

Christ's Compassion to the world

Ours are the feet

which He is to go about

doing good

Ours are the hands

with which He is to bless men now.

To that prayer could be added the words, '*Ours are the ears to hear the Word of God and communicate it to others*'.

To be able to achieve this we have to be able to listen. A crucial step to becoming a good listener is to become aware of the ways in which we can become distracted from giving our full and complete attention when listening. There are many ways in which our listening to God and to others can be impeded – ways which we must avoid if we are going to be a good communicator for God:

Comparing: It is almost impossible to listen if you are assessing yourself and your own experiences against what you are hearing.

Mind-reading: Trying to work out what the other person is “really” thinking or feeling, as opposed to what they are **really and honestly** saying.

Rehearsing: Preparing your next comment or question before the person you are speaking and listen to has finished speaking.

Filtering: Listening to some things and not to others, perhaps blocking out elements of what is being said uncomfortable.

Dreaming: Drifting off into private associations while pretending to listen.

Advising: Jumping in with a quick-fix or poorly considered solution before hearing the whole story.

We may think that we don't need guidance on how to listen to God or others because we do it all the time; it is part of our everyday life. We must always ask ourselves the question, 'Am I listening in the right way?'

"Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works. Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart." (Psalm 119:27 & 34)

Why would the psalmist ask for understanding of God's ways and God's laws? Isn't it enough to know what they are? Isn't it enough to be able to read them and understand them with our human understanding? Of course the answer is, 'No, it's not'.

Every person perceives things differently based on their own life experiences. I can read a verse in the Bible and come up with an entirely different interpretation than somebody else. God intends us to understand what He is saying. The Bible is given to us so that we can know more about God and His plan for our lives!

Too many people read the Bible, feel they have a good understanding of what it says, and start teaching others what they have learned. It is not enough to just **read** the Bible! We need to ask God to help us to understand what it says. Without knowing God's opinion on what the Bible says, we are spreading false information about God! That is certainly not a good thing.

No matter how sincere someone seems, no matter how intelligent someone seems, and no matter how spiritual someone seems **DO NOT** accept everything they say about God until you have checked with God, Himself. It is possible that you know absolutely nothing about God if you have gathered your information by listening to people speak about God or have read what people have written about God. There

are two things you have to do. You have to read the Word for yourself and combine that with personal communication with God. God has the facts that you seek and he is a very good teacher and communicator.

"But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him." (1John 2:27)

The Holy Spirit, which is God in us, teaches us. So we have to find out or discover how to **listen** to the Teacher as Samuel did when he was a boy in the Temple, *"Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. The LORD called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." Then the LORD said to*

Samuel, "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle". (1 Samuel 3:1-11).

Why Listen to God?

When we look at Genesis and follow right through to the New Testament, we see that our whole salvation is mapped out for us. The New Testament of Jesus Christ brings the whole thing to life for here we find wonderful examples, clear instructions, dire warnings and tremendous promises. The **THEME** of the Bible is man's salvation, a salvation which is freely given if we follow the ways of God and not man's or our own desires. The whole Bible is focused on mankind and we are part of mankind.



God has spoken, we need to listen, for in those words is the way to success, success in every walk of life which leads to salvation. True success is not wealth or position but the preparation for eternal life, *"This is cause for great joy, even though now you smart for a little while, if need be under trails of many kinds.... These trials come so that your faith may prove itself worthy of all praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. You have not seen him, yet you love him; trusting in him now without seeing him, you are transported with a joy too great for words, while you reap the harvest of your faith, this is, salvation for your soul."* (1 Peter 1:6-9).

For this great joy to happen we need to **LISTEN**. We must become the listener. We must open our ears to the message God has given us because if we do not have within ourselves the words God has spoken, how can we speak to others about him.

How can the Word or Message of God be spoken to others? If we don't listen to God then we are just putting forth our own ideas and concepts.

The example of how we should listen to God is seen in the account of how God spoke to Elijah.

"And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice." (1Kings 19:11-12).

Elijah was feeling sorry for himself. He was discouraged because he felt the Israelites were all turned away from God and he was the only righteous one left. God told him to stand on the mountain. God wanted Elijah to rise up out of his discouragement and to get his mind and heart focused back on Him.

He pointed out to Elijah that there were 7,000 people who still worshipped God. He told Elijah the things that He wanted him to be doing. He didn't give any place to Elijah's self pity. He had things for Elijah to be doing and they weren't getting done whilst Elijah was moping around doing nothing.

We should notice how God spoke to Elijah for this is very important. God showed Elijah some things that many people feel would happen to show that God was speaking. After all, God created the entire world with His voice. It shouldn't be such a surprise to have God speak through a great wind, a wind that is strong enough to

break boulders. How about His speaking to us in an earthquake? After all, the earth had to tremble as the mountains were being formed!

That would be an appropriate way for the great and powerful God of Creation to speak, wouldn't it? How about in a raging fire? Have you ever heard the sound a large fire makes? The fire, itself, is powerful and consuming and the sound it makes is enough to put terror in your heart. When God speaks it will probably be in a HUGE and IMPRESSIVE fashion. God was not in the wind. God was not in the earthquake. God was not in the fire. He spoke in a still, small voice.

Many people don't believe that God speaks to us today because they are not listening for a still, small voice. The cares of this world, the phone ringing, the television noise, the bills that need to be paid, the novels that beg to be read, the money that needs to be made, the newspaper that needs to be perused, the rest of the day-to-day living drowns out any still, small voice. Can you hear someone whispering when a room is full of shouting people? It is almost the same thing.

The difference is that the still, small voice comes from within. The Holy Spirit inside you is speaking. God is trying to communicate with you. He wants a one-on-one relationship with you. He has things to say to you. He has things He wants you to be doing. He is speaking to you in a still, small voice. We must learn how to listen. Learn how to hear Him in the midst of everything else. There is an eye in that hurricane you call your life. In that eye is God. The peace, the comfort, the guidance, the love, and all the other things you need. That is why we need to listen to God.

Our need to listen to fellow Christians

Not only do we need to listen to God, we need to listen to others – our Brothers and Sisters in Christ. Good requires our active participation in the process. It is no good and nothing can be achieved if we just sit there and staring at the other person. We have realized that listening is a two-way communication.

Although it is a two-way communication, silence can and does play an important part. Often we feel or find it uncomfortable to sit in silence. But often your presence is far more important than anything you might want to say. Silence also gives times and space to get to know what really needs to be said.

When we listen to our fellow Christians we are listening not only to their joys and moments of happiness, but also for something else. We are listening for their subconscious requests or cries for help, comfort and direction.

We know that God is always willing to supply our needs and among those needs is companionship on the road of faith. The church was established by Christ, *'I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.'* (Matthew 16:18) and the church was designed so that it could meet the needs of those who joined it, *'just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.'* (Ephesians 1:4).

We have spoken of God's willingness to supply our needs and how the church was built by Christ. The church is populated by the power of the gospel, *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by*

faith." (Romans 1:16-17). *"The church is made up of brothers and sisters of like precious faith"* (2 Peter 1:1-2).

Any relationship is sustained by conversation; both speaking and listening. The church is a family of brothers and sisters working together for the cause of Christ, *"Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel."* (Philippians 1:27). We are to be unified in our relationship (Romans 15:1-6; I Corinthians 12:20-27).

Christian Fellowship - Christian Companionship occurs when two or more Christians are in one another's company. The dictionary defines fellowship as "friendly association with others; companionship." Christian fellowship, then, involves friendly association with other Christians. It means you choose Christians to be your companions and in that companionship there is communication through listening to each other.

"He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will". (Ephesians 1:5). Christian fellowship begins through a process of adoption. Are you a Christian today? If you are, you have been adopted by God. You may have heard it said that we are all God's children, but the truth is, we don't become God's children until we are adopted, through faith in Christ.

If we were all God's children by virtue of being His creation, then adoption wouldn't be necessary. Ask any parents of adopted children and they'll tell you the process is long, hard and painful! Why would God choose adoption if we were already His

children? Because God longs to have you as His child, He sacrificed Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, on the cross in order to purchase your salvation.

After adoption, Christian fellowship grows naturally. Because it's natural for us to want to be around people like ourselves, in time you'll find yourself desiring the companionship of people who think like you do. As a Christian, depending on where you live on this planet, your beliefs may now be in stark contrast to the society around you. That desire for fellowship with "like-thinkers" is God-given.

If you ignore it, or think that by being with "Christians" your non-believing friends will think you're not "cool," you deny yourself the companionship of your new family members, stunt your Christian growth - and worse, you open yourself to risk.

One phenomena common to all believers is the recognition that without Christ, our spiritual understanding was dark. Some even say, "It's as if I stumbled in the darkness, and then God threw on the light switch." Unbelievers are still living in spiritual darkness. While God desires that we live among them and share what we have learned with them, we are called to be separate in our choice of close companions, and for a very good reason! Paul tells us why: *"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? And what fellowship can light have with darkness?"* (2 Corinthians" 6:14).

If you seek out fellowship with other believers, you will find yourself surrounded by new friends who'll think as you do and both can communicate and listen to each other. And through that new friendship, you'll discover that the light only gets brighter.

Why do we need to listen to our brethren? We need to be aware of their needs, *“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching”*. (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Often, when speaking with our brethren, we offer “suggestions” of need without openly saying we need. We need to consider one another (pay close attention, listen carefully) in order that we do not miss some clues that indicate need.

When listening we also need to pay close attention in order that we might come to the right conclusions. Because we can hear and not listen completely at the same time we need to guard ourselves from “conclusion jumping” (Evil suspicions). *“Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up. Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; (I Corinthians 13:5); “he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmising” (1Timothy 6:4)*. Listen carefully so as to not come to the wrong conclusions about your brethren. Always give them the benefit of any doubt and ask them personally to explain themselves if you for any reason do not understand.

Your brethren need you to listen, so that together we can withstand the world and successfully inherit eternal life. The great and important question is, **“Are you listening?”**

We Need To Listen To Others

We need to listen to others just as we need to listen to our Brothers and Sisters in Christ. To be a great listener is to be a great friend who has your best interest at

heart. Be loving and caring and by listening let the person know that you are there for them. Don't share their information with others. This can break up a good friendship. There is nothing worse than someone betraying your trust. Always use direct contact because this shows the person that you are giving them the attention that they are looking for in you, a good listening friend.

Again, with others, we are not looking for further instructions beyond, or differing from, God's revealed word. Whether they are currently aware, or not, the world is accountable to their Creator. They will stand in judgment for all that they have said and all that they have done, *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences"*. (2 Corinthians 5:10-11). This is not a little problem, this is a big problem. The world is filled with souls, who desperately need God, and the plan of salvation made available through His Son and perhaps by listening we can become the instrument by which they are brought to God.

Why listen to others? Because by listening we can hear their cries for help. The world is lost and dying in their sins. They are not going to make it by following their own hearts, *"all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23); *"they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition."* (1Timothy 6:9). We have what they need—the hope of salvation and life everlasting—the gift of God, *"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."* (Romans 6:23).

The world is in need of a Saviour and there is only **One**, *“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”*. (Acts 4:12). We must carry the gospel message out to the world, *“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth .Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.* (Matthew 28:18-20). We must hear those who are asking for help, we must listen to them and give them what they need *“I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”* (Romans 1:16).

Yes, the world is in need and those who recognize their need are asking for help; and we have the source of help. Once again we come back to the very important question, “Are you listening?” It is easy to speak but far more difficult to sit and listen

We live in a dynamic and uncertain time. We worry about the threats we face, and they are real -- terrorism, economic recession, loss of jobs and too many people being one step away from homeless. We live in an era of mass communication where opportunistic people, including politicians, are exploiting the changes brought about by globalization, where anybody can put anything on the Internet and airwaves without verifying the source or taking responsibility for the accuracy of the information. The public is left confused and alone to sort and discern the facts and make an informed decision. Many of our leaders have stopped listening to us as they become more preoccupied with staying in office.

But perhaps the greatest threat we face is from within. As we feel more helpless in managing our affairs, we become insecure and less able to reach out to work and

help each other. We become short-tempered, judgmental and intolerant with each other, entrenched in our thinking and even turn against each other. We blame others for our problems. The growing anger and loss of civility is a symptom of the fear we have of losing control over our lives. And the symbols and institutions that hold a society together are now being ignored, since they no longer give us the comfort we have come to expect from them.

Somewhere along the way, we forgot how we built our world--through our common values, ability to work together, and willingness to care for one another. All are vital for the perpetuation of any society. More alarming is we seem to have lost our ability to risk, to dream and to hope, which has always defined the people's character.

So it becomes even more essential that we listen and hear what others are saying so that we can effectively communicate to them the message of hope and salvation given to us by God. We have to become active listeners for in doing so we:

Share problems and struggles

Engage with difficult feelings

Gain perspective on experiences

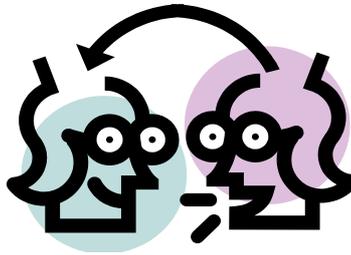
Re-build relationships

Find solutions to problems.

Build self-esteem and resilience.

Conclusion

We must fully understand that communication is both listening and speaking. We cannot be like the White Rabbit; we have much listening to do as well as speaking. We must listen to God in order to be pleasing to God. And to learn God's will. We need to listen to our brethren, helping one another to be pleasing to God. We need to listen to others, to hear their cries for help and bring them to a place in which they too will be pleasing to God. The great and important question is, 'Are you listening to God, to your brethren and to others in the proper way or are you just running up and down and getting nowhere?' The difference between hearing which is merely a physical ability, and listening which is a skill. By being able to listen, we are able to effectively make sense of what other people are saying and in turn able to help spread the gospel of Christ.



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