

LISTENING--A Parent's Responsibility

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Listening can be the hardest thing we do. True listening takes discipline, self control, and emotional energy. To genuinely listen to someone for more than an hour with proper responses or feedback is very draining. Even listening for five minutes when we are already tired is a decision we must make or pay the consequences.

What are the consequences of NOT listening? 1) Alienation from our children. 2) Our children will give up coming to us and go to someone else. 3) **A false relationship**; One that appears to be fine but reality is something else.

Everyone needs someone who will listen to them. The problem is that most people don't realize they are not listening. Most misunderstand what listening is. In a family, listening can have an unspoken connotation of meaning, "You're not agreeing with me--You're not listening!" Parents can use listening as a time of control or manipulation. Children will comply without understanding that they are being treated wrongly. They will grow up and someday figure it out.

I believe that one of the major reasons that children grow up and away from their parents, possibly rejecting their values, and become isolated from them, are violations in listening.

What are violations in listening? First, I think I need to explain what listening is. LISTENING *is allowing another person to share, to speak, to ventilate what is on their heart without faultfinding, condemnation, or judgment from the listener.*

All of us need to get out what is bothering us. We all need to get in touch with our emotional baggage and put our finger on a particular feeling. We need to identify stress, depression, fear, anger, and boredom. Being able to articulate the emotional twinges within gives us that opportunity to make out what it is we are experiencing. This exercise is very hard to accomplish on our own. That is when we need someone else to hear us, help us, and allow us to open up, without fear of rejection, correction, advice, or even direction. What we want is a sounding board that will help us identify what we are going through.

Bottled up emotions, unshared experiences, repressed feelings, lead any one of us into loneliness. When people express the need to find themselves, discover who they are, many times it is the cry of the heart to know what is going on inside. Many times such a person has never been given the gift of a good listener. A good listener is a gift; however being a good listener requires learned skills. The truth is we choose whether or not we are going to listen to someone. Most choose not to. Many don't know that they are *not* listening.

Like leftovers in a refrigerator are pent up feelings that have never been identified and allowed to ventilate. Ventilation is required for many things so that tension is release, or pressure reduced. Leftovers, those things pushed back into our sub consciousness, can begin to sour, mildew, and mold. This leftover emotional baggage can affect our personalities in a negative way. We all need to get them out; listening is the skill of helping someone else to accomplish this. Proverbs tells us that no one knows the heart of a person except their own spirit. A good listener helps someone else get in touch with their self.

There are many levels of communication from superficial to deep, open and honest. Communication doesn't take place automatically, no one is a machine. There are common helps and pitfalls. If we are aware of them then our listening will become much more effective, beneficial, and serving of others. The scriptures admonish us to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger.

Children need a parent to listen to them. They need help in identifying what they are experiencing within. Being able to ventilate and open up goes miles toward building trust and security in a relationship. We will be training them how to communicate and how to listen by our example. *Their future happiness, emotional and physical health, and ability to be with others are at stake.*

Okay. Knowing what listening is supposed to be and what it is supposed to do is one thing, **being able to do it is another.** I want you to think about the times you were in need of someone to listen to you. Most of us need time to think over and through a problem or experience; however, most of us need to then share it, get it out, and ventilate it with someone else. A wall just doesn't do it. Even a daily diary doesn't do it. A dog or cat won't do

it. What is it that these things won't do? *They can't listen*. Listening is not passive, dormant, or impersonal. Listening is very active with the purpose of being there for someone else with an **UNDERSTANDING HEART**. But remember now, times when you tried to get someone else to listen. Did you ever come away frustrated, angry, disappointed, even humiliated? How about feeling stepped on, put down, or how about burned? If you did experience these things from someone you tried to get to listen you to then, you will not attempt to have this person listen to you in the future.

Being frustrated indicates that during your time of wanting to be listened to, the person supposedly listening wasn't. In fact the most common mistake a poor listener makes is to take **over the agenda**. A good listener allows the person ventilating to control the agenda--to control what is talked about and who's doing the talking.

Being angry indicates that during this experience the person supposedly listening stopped and began to **give advice, teach, correct, or make moral judgments about you or what you were sharing**. A good listener helps the person to open up free from such responses. A good listener doesn't worry about right nor wrong so much as has the person I'm listening to been able to grasp what it is they feel. We become angry because we are not asking for advice, teaching, correction, or judgments, we are asking for someone to hear us.

Being disappointed indicates that the person supposedly listening has responded to us by using clichés or trying to comfort us before we have expressed our feelings. **Many people are afraid of the emotions of others and try to cut them off**. They don't know what to do with deeply felt emotions and they become intimidated and tense. Some common responses to expressed feelings are, "It will be okay." or "Don't worry about it God will take care of everything--He is in control." or "Everything will work out you will see." Such clichés and comforting remarks really mean, "I'm feeling very uncomfortable with what you are saying." So, a good listener is also mature, patient, kind, and trustworthy.

Humiliated feelings may indicate that the person supposedly listening has *decided that you are way off*. They have decided that you need counseling from the pastor or some professional. They have decided that your faith and spiritual life is in question. They may even have rejected you for feeling as you do. Jesus said, "*Judge not, lest you be judged.*"

Feeling stepped on, put down, or burned also indicates that the listener wasn't listening to you but what they thought about in response to what you are saying. When a person gets enough courage to share what is bothering them, there are a few moments of time when that person is watching to see how the listener is going to respond. In a sense we are saying, "Okay, I've decided to trust you with a little bit, here it is; now I'm watching you to see what you do with it." If the listener honors, appreciates, and responds appropriately the one sharing will open up further, but if not, they will close up. ***In a very real sense it is up to the listener to allow another person to open up.*** By our responses we help someone else to unlock their heart's doors. In truth, it is a very precious gift, a priceless prize, for us to open up to another. The same is true of someone who is willing to listen. The scriptures speak of Holy Ground. Holy ground is the heart of another person so tread lightly, softly, cautiously, respectfully, sincerely...

What are some positive responses that allow the person we are listening to, to continue?

- 1) Non verbal cues such as: nodding the head up & down; good eye contact; good body position which shows interest.
- 2) Short responses such as: "uh huh" , "Yes..." , "Okay..." , "Go on..."
- 3) Rephrasing or restating in a brief way what the other has said: "You were feeling this or that?" "When this happen it effected you this way or that?" or "You were tired and..."
- 4) Seeking a short explanation or meaning so that we can understand such as: "When you said this, what did that mean?" or "Could you explain what you meant by..."
- 5) A short summary of what the person said such as: "You were saying that this happened and then that?" "The car stopped, you got out..." etc.

Conversations on a social level tend to be like tennis. One person says something and hits the ball across the net. The other person responds by saying or indicating something and hits it back. A conversation will continue as long as the volleying goes on. A conversation where someone really needs to be listened to is the same except that the **listener tries to keep the ball in the other court as much as possible.**

The above responses limit the person listening from taking over the agenda and allow the speaker to continue. These responses help to let the speaker

know we are listening and that they have the “floor.” A listener then lays down their right to control the ball. They keep giving it back to the one who really needs to share. Jesus said, *“No greater love does any man have than to lay down his life for another.”*

What person does not wish that the one listening to them would do so without interrupting them? We cut off, step on, and stop the person from sharing when we take over the agenda by giving premature advice, solving the problem for them, correcting them, defending God or others, judging their thoughts or feelings, using clichés and offer comfort not asked for. Even asking questions can be an effort to satisfy our curiosity rather than keeping the ball in their court.

What I am describing is not easy to do. It takes effort, will power, trial and error, and an effort to try again and again. Making ourselves stay out of the picture is difficult especially when what we hear will trigger many things in us. We might not like what we hear; we might not agree with it; we might want to comfort, correct, teach, admonish; we might want to question; we might want to share our own experiences now that we’ve been reminded of them. But these things must be put aside while the person we are listening to shares. Keep focused on them, help them to identify, help them to ventilate, and love them first.

If the person we are listening to wants advice, correction, teaching, comfort, they’ll ask for it. Most of the time, people want to be understood where they are at. **THEY WANT TO BE ABLE TO COME TO THEIR OWN JUDGMENTS AND CONCLUSIONS, AND A GOOD LISTENER LETS THEM.**

A good listener has **UNDERSTANDING from a Biblical perspective**. This means that we don’t judge what another is saying or doing, we concentrate on the person not so much the agenda. Biblical understanding means that we don’t judge the other person. We are all sinners and any one of us could do what anyone else has done no matter how vile or offensive. The reason is clear, the same nature of sin that dwells in the worse offended, dwells in us too. If we lived their life, walked in their shoes, and experienced the same things they did, we’d probably think, talk and act the same way as they did--or even worse. To say, “I would never have done that, or “If I were them I would have done differently.” is dangerously close if it is not judging.

I have explained in a brief way a very serious situation. As parents one of our chief responsibilities is to listen to our children. They need to be able to come to us about all that they are feeling, whether good or bad, without our faultfinding, condemnation, or judgment. If we can set aside our other parental hats, and be a good listener, then our children will feel safe, confident, and secure in coming to us all the days of their life, It is a gift we have been given and a privilege to be there for them, let's not blow it by moralizing, correcting, teaching, and everything else but listening.

WARNING: We want our children to feel free to come to us; they won't if when they begin to open up to us we are being poor listeners.