



April 10, 2023

One evening I was going to the movies with a group of friends, excited to see a new movie that just came out. Everyone was buzzing with energy and conversation! *Almost* everyone. I noticed that one of my friends who was normally bright, energetic, and outgoing on even a normal day was being very quiet and keeping to himself. Instead of staying caught up with the general excitement of the group, I pulled away to ask my friend how he was doing. At first, he gave me a pretty generic response. However, as I continued to give him my attention and ask a few more questions, he opened up. This resulted in a tremendous opportunity to minister to him, which he later told me *saved his life*.

Not every conversation we have will be as critical as the one just described. However when we have a conversation with our family, friends, coworkers, or even people we've just met, it is important to listen well to what is being said and how it is being said. Spending time developing our ability as good listeners can open great doors for us to understand and then help others with the Word. To truly help others, we show them that we value and respect them by listening attentively. This encourages them to share more. By listening well, we can understand the needs of others and encourage those we speak with to fully share their hearts, enabling us to give them the help they need with the fitly spoken Word.

We can understand the needs of others and encourage them with the Word when we listen well. Proper communication is covered in many places in God's Word. Let's start by looking at just one of these important verses.

James 1:19:

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.

God encourages us all to be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath or anger. This can be our golden rule, or guiding principle, of listening well! In conversation with others, we want to be swift to hear so that we can understand what they are saying. Our understanding of that person's needs could be misconstrued or they may feel discouraged from sharing in the future *if* we do not take the time to listen well. Yet, if we *are* swift to hear and let others finish speaking without interruption or distraction, we will be able to comprehend their needs and encourage more open sharing in the future.

When we listen well, we not only avoid uncomfortable situations and misunderstandings, but we also demonstrate our love for the one speaking. Our focused listening acknowledges that what they have to say is important and shows the speaker that we care about them. This encourages the one we talk with to express the deeper things that are on their heart. Once their heart is open, we can then help by sharing God's Word.

To help us be better listeners, we can apply these three keys in our conversations: be engaged, seek to understand, and be aware of our responses. First, as we stay fully engaged with the person we're listening to, we are better prepared to respond to God working in us to help. Staying focused and vigilant and giving all of our attention are vital to accomplishing God's will in any situation. Listening well enables us to help.

Second, we can seek to understand. As we stay engaged, we can ask questions. Proverbs 20:5 says, "Counsel in the heart of man *is like* deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out." As we seek to understand the hearts of others by asking questions, we can draw out their inner thoughts and feelings that would otherwise lie beneath the surface. We can draw out the deep thoughts in the hearts of those we talk to by being men and women of understanding that ask questions and listen well.

Third, we can be aware of our responses as we listen. Whether we're having a casual conversation or seeking to understand by asking questions, it is vitally important to be aware of how we react to the other person. These reactions include both verbal and nonverbal responses. Part of being aware of our responses is making sure we don't reply *before* we understand what is being said.

Proverbs 18:13:

He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.

We want to avoid jumping to conclusions, judging another person, or thinking about the next thing *we* want to say while *they* are speaking. Those would be answering a matter before we hear it. It's impossible to know exactly what someone is going to say, so we listen all the way through. Only once we have heard them out all the way will we be in the best position to help with the Word.

When we give others our full attention in conversation, we encourage their hearts by showing that we value what they have to say. This opens even greater doors for them to share their hearts and for us to minister to them! The next time you get into a conversation with someone, show them what a great listener you can be—you may be surprised at how much you draw out of them and how many needs you are able to meet with God's Word.

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