

Pastor Jeremy introduced a new series 3 weeks ago called “Navigating Relationships” and pointed out the value of getting wisdom from the Book of Proverbs. Last Sunday Pastor Kevin taught about the power of words and we can quickly summarize his message:

Careful words build up; careless words blow up.

This morning we will learn about the gift of listening.

The goal is engaging in transformative dialogues that lead to deepening relationships.

The theme of listening is seen throughout the book, for examples:

Let the wise listen to these proverbs and become even wiser. (Prov. 1:5 NLT)

If you listen to constructive criticism, you will be at home among the wise. (Prov. 15:31 NLT)

Intelligent people are always ready to learn. Their ears are open for knowledge. (Prov. 18:15 NLT)

¹ Bob Weinstein, “Why listening is so difficult ... and what to do about it,” <https://www.reliableplant.com/Authors/Detail/620>. See also Scott Kedersha, “7 Challenges That Prevent Us From Being Good Listeners,” <https://www.scottkedersha.com/blog-pages/listening-challenges>; <https://hrdqu.com/communication-skills-training/learning-to-overcome-barriers-to-listening-skills-in-the-workplace/>

² “Purposes as understood by the purposer will be misunderstood by others.” (<https://www.mindingtherapy.com/laws-of-life-chisholms->

Some experts have suggested that we have trouble listening and remember very little of what is said to us because we usually focus on

**body language (55%), vocal intonation (38%),
speaker’s words (7%).¹**

No wonder listening is tough, as the first corollary of Chisholm’s Third Law of Human Interaction² states:

If you explain so clearly that nobody can misunderstand, somebody will.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer has pointed out that we often have “a kind of listening with half an ear that ... is an impatient, inattentive listening ... only waiting to get a chance to speak and thus to get rid of the other.”³

We can’t wait to speak⁴ and our words then diminish others and are care-less, manipulative, and selfish. We fall into what William Ury – one of the most influential experts on negotiation and collaborative problem solving - called “the conflict trap” when we focus on what we could say not how

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³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, p. 99.

⁴ “Unfortunately, many of us are too preoccupied with ourselves when we listen. Instead of concentrating on what is being said, we are busy either deciding what to say in response or mentally rejecting the other person’s point of view.” (Janet Dunn, [How to Become a Good Listener | Desiring God](#))

we could listen;⁵ and such rapid outburst without attentive listening is diametrically opposed to what James 1:19 teaches:

“You must all be ***quick to listen, slow to speak*** ...” (NLT)

And the book of Proverbs teaches this:

**The gift of listening flows out of God’s truth and love;
it shows interpersonal integrity and social harmony.**

Mindful listening is the most basic art and skills of human connections; it shows respect, builds trust, develops rapport, invites openness, and finds common grounds between conversational or conflicting parties.

Fools have no interest in understanding; ***they only want to air their own opinions***. (Prov. 18:2 NLT)

Fools care nothing for thoughtful discourse; ***all they do is run off at the mouth***. (*The Message*)

FOOLS just don’t listen and have no desire to understand; they just want to speak their minds – they are content with their own thoughts and they think the rest of the world should listen to them!

“Fools” in the book of Proverbs:

Refuse to submit to any authority.

Immature and have no self-control.

Lack insight, hindsight, and foresight.

Stubborn and without moral sensitivity.

Hate learning and resist correction.

Hold a know-it-all mentality.

FOOLS are not deficient in IQ: they are proud and “self-oriented, self-defined, self-justifying, and totally subjective”⁶ - their mouths are running so fast to spew out their minds, their ears are deafened by their own voice!

But attentive listening brings wisdom and understanding - it is not about us but how we embody God’s grace – it’s about humility!

Humility: recognize that listening is a means of grace for self and others.⁷

This means, first, we must listen to God and see what He says about our thoughts, attitudes, feelings, behaviours, and words (i.e., why, what, when, and how we plan to say

⁵ William Ury, *Possible: how we survive (and thrive) in an age of conflict*, p. 148.

⁶ Robert Hicks, *In Search of Wisdom*, p. 175.

⁷ Cf. David Mathis, “Six Lessons in Good Listening,”

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/six-lessons-in-good-listening#1-good-listening-requires-patience>.

before we say it) before, during, and after our conversation with the other.

Rebecca Z. Shafir has pointed out this: “the lack of self-listening is often the cause of communication breakdown.”⁸

But her point about self-listening needs to be “baptised” in scriptural truth:

Search me, O God, and know my heart; **test me** and know my anxious thoughts. **Point out** anything in me that offends you, and **lead** me along the path of everlasting life. (Ps. 139:23-24 NLT)

We receive the gift of listening when we pay attention to God/the Spirit’s promptings and, in doing so, we extend God’s grace to the one who is speaking.

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer says,⁹

We should listen with the ears of God, so that we may speak the Word of God.

⁸ Rebecca Z. Shafir, “The Zen of Listening: Mindful Communication in the Age of Distraction,”

<https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/231383-the-zen-of-listening-mindful-communications-in-the-age-of-distractions#:~:text=Listening%20is%20the%20first%20step,and%20why%20of%20their%20views>

⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, p. 99.

¹⁰ Rebecca Z. Shafir, “The Zen of Listening: Mindful Communication in the Age of Distraction,”

Just as God listens patiently to us, we remain patient (by the power of the Spirit) to speak so that we do not “air our own opinions” or “run off at the mouth” and thus exposing our foolishness and the underbelly of our hearts!

The average person speaks at a rate of 125 words per minute, yet we can process up to 500 words per minute.¹⁰ During that lag time, many things could possibly interfere our listening.

We have all heard about the old saying, “The longest distance in the world is the distance between the head and the heart.”

This means we must engage both our heads and our hearts while we are listening, i.e., having awareness of one’s own beliefs/convictions, values, feelings, past experiences, present perceptions, and future longings.¹¹

Boyd Bailey words are insightful and instructive:¹²

<https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/231383-the-zen-of-listening-mindful-communications-in-the-age-of-distractions#:~:text=Listening%20is%20the%20first%20step,and%20why%20of%20their%20views>

¹¹ William Ury, *Possible: how we survive (and thrive) in an age of conflict*, pp. 152, 156.

¹² Boyd Bailey, “Talk Less, Listen More,” <https://www.wisdomhunters.com/talk-less-listen-more/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CEven%20a%20fool%20is%20thought,catch%20up%20with%20their%20hearts>.

Wise people weigh their words before they speak. They allow their minds to catch up with their hearts.

We often forget ...

that there are external distractions and internal voices in every human interaction;

that we carry with us emotional baggage such as past hurts and wounds, fear and anxiety on top of our personal biases and prejudice;

that our own nonverbal and verbal expressions contribute to the dynamics of the interaction.¹³

When we give the gift of listening by being “quick to listen, slow to speak,” we show respect, invite connection, breakdown communication barriers, and build rapport so we know how best to love the other as God has demonstrated his love to us while we were still sinners.¹⁴

For us to engage in a transformative dialogue that leads to deepening relationship, we must take seriously Solomon’s word of warning:

Spouting off before listening to the facts is both shameful and foolish. (Prov. 18:13 NLT)

¹³ Cf. <https://hrdqu.com/communication-skills-training/learning-to-overcome-barriers-to-listening-skills-in-the-workplace/>

¹⁴ Cf. Rom. 5:4-6.

¹⁵ 1 Kings 3:16-18.

Answering before listening is both stupid and rude. (Prov. 18:13 *The Message*)

The wise King Solomon definitely understands the wisdom of hearing both sides of a matter before rendering a judgment, when he makes a ruling between two women who both claimed to be the mother of a child.¹⁵

The **heart of the discerning** acquires knowledge, for the **ears of the wise** seek it out. (Prov. 18:15 NIV)

Failure to keep open ears reveals our insensitivity and ignorance is “a badge of stupidity.”¹⁶

Speaking and deciding before careful listening and intentional consideration of the various perspectives is not just a sign of divided attention but also presumption, arrogance and overconfidence. Such rash, without thorough understanding words assume one’s superiority, diminish the other person’s dignity, and usually lead to a tragic end.

We are wired to “evaluate input, predict outcomes, make judgments and perform triage, all on a moment-to-moment basis.”¹⁷

Keep in mind:

¹⁶ David. A. Hubbard, *Proverbs*, p. 281.

¹⁷ Cf. The Science of Listening, <https://www.kornferry.com/insights/briefings-magazine/issue-13/514-the-science-of->

First impression may not be the best decision.

Haste makes waste – don't jump to conclusions.

Respectful listening includes intentionally gathering as many facts as possible, circumspectly analyzing all angles, and focusing on all the important circumstances before making deliberation.

So to avoid any misunderstanding we ask thoughtful and empathic questions. Here we are not just sympathizing but putting aside our personal agenda, “feeling into” the speaker’s world, in order to fully understand the intent and feelings as well as get fresh perspectives.

The purposes of a person’s heart are ***deep waters***, but one who has insight ***draws them out***. (Prov. 20:5 NIV)

Hear the wise words from William Ury again,

“It means listening from within *their* frame of reference, not just ours ... not just being said but for what’s *not* being said ... not just words but to what’s *behind* the words ... their wants and needs, fears and dreams ... Dropping my agenda

[listening#:~:text=%5Bt%5D%20continuously%20employs%20memory%20of,down%2C%20strategic%2C%20cognitive%20process.](#)

¹⁸ William Ury, *Possible: how we survive (and thrive) in an age of conflict*, p. 143, 144. (Author’s emphasis.)

¹⁹ Cf. **Medha**, “Mastering the 5 Levels of Listening and One Game-Changing Hack,” <https://fireflies.ai/blog/levels-of-listening#:~:text=The%20pinnacle%20of%20listening%2C%20empathetic,that%20truly%20resonates%20with%20them>.

did not mean *not* preparing. If anything it meant the opposite. To be attentive to all possibilities in the moment, I needed to research the man.”¹⁸

For one to share what’s important and deepest takes time; we make space for the speaker to share his story with us and for ourselves to respond in a way that truly resonates with the individual.¹⁹ We must consider what’s shared and be willing to be corrected, if it deepens the relationship, honours God, and makes advances for His kingdom.

To be and to give “the gift of listening” means we will not act like “a conversational narcissist” – self-absorbed, judgmental, manipulative, frequently blame others for our mistakes and fail to accept responsibility for their own words or actions.²⁰

Becoming a loving and attentive listener is a transformative process that “hangs not on one big resolve to do better in a single conversation, but on developing a pattern of little resolves to focus in on particular people in specific moments.”²¹

²⁰ Cf. The Science of Listening, <https://www.kornferry.com/insights/briefings-magazine/issue-13/514-the-science-of-listening#:~:text=%5Bt%5D%20continuously%20employs%20memory%20of,down%2C%20strategic%2C%20cognitive%20process>.

²¹ Cf. David Mathis, “Six Lessons in Good Listening,” <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/six-lessons-in-good-listening#1-good-listening-requires-patience>.

Practical takeaways:

- Learn the skills of listening as a means of extending God's grace to others.

Check out our Crucial Conversations workshop, on August 14 – August 21, 2024

(<https://cornerstonechurch.ca/crucial-conversations/>) which is based on the book with the same title. You will gain key insights and strategies to have difficult conversations. Go to our resource page and sign-up for this workshop using the QR code on the screen.

Another great resource is the book *How to Have That Difficult Conversation*. These tools can help you to grow in things like: confronting well, setting healthy boundaries and improving relationships.

- In preparation for your next “weighty” conversation, pray for the Spirit's guidance to connect your head with your heart so you could listen with the ears of God and speak the Word of God. (cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer)
- Be mindful of body language and ask empathic questions to ensure mutual understanding.