



# THE MINISTRY OF LISTENING TO OTHERS

We often hear about the importance of listening to others—spouses, children, co-workers, critics, those going through challenging circumstances, etc. While the idea is not something new to any of us, listening to others well is still challenging for many of us.

Honestly, it can be easier not to listen. Listening takes effort and patience. Sometimes we fear that listening will lead to compromising God's standards. Other times, we worry that, in listening, we'll hear information we aren't prepared to handle. Or we worry that, by listening, we aren't doing the job we're called to do—speaking the truth about Jesus. It can be hard to listen when we hear things that we're powerless to change or when we don't have answers or solutions.

Is it possible that listening is a way to reflect Jesus? Can listening minister to others even when we can't change their circumstances? Is better listening skills something we can grow and develop in? The answer to all three questions is yes!

## **We have a Listening God**

In Genesis, we read the story of Hagar, the Egyptian servant of Abraham and Sarah. When Hagar is pregnant with Abraham's child, she runs away into the desert to escape Sarah's mistreatment. There, she encounters the Lord who sees her. She refers to God as El Roi, "the God of seeing" (Gen. 16:13) Furthermore, God tells her to name her son Ishmael which means "God hears" because "the Lord has listened to your affliction (Gen. 16:11)." Throughout Scripture, we read that God hears our prayers, cries, and praise, and in the Genesis passage, we learn He "hears" our affliction. Because we have a listening God, one of the ways we reflect Him is to listen to others. Practicing good listening skills is one way others may see God through you.

## **Listening begins with a desire to listen**

Over the coming months we will continue to study how better listening skills can be developed and how to listen to others in grief, conflict, criticism, etc. However, to begin, let's build a foundation that starts with a conviction that listening to others is a priority and ministry that God wants to build into each of us. James 1:19 encourages us that: 'Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.' Good listening begins with a desire to listen.

## **4 reasons why listening to others is important**

1. Good listening affirms people. Author Hugh McKay says: 'When we listen, we are being remarkably generous: we are offering the other person the gift of understanding; the gift of acceptance (even if not agreement); the gift of taking that other person seriously.' When we listen, we validate the person's presence and acknowledge them as valuable. It seems simple but, when someone is expressing a need, one of the most powerful

things we can do is acknowledge them and respect their need for a listening ear. It is the starting point for good ministry.

2. We strengthen each other through good listening. In Matthew 26:38, Jesus and his disciples have gone to the garden of Gethsemane. Then he said to them, 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.' It seems that even Jesus gained encouragement from sharing his inner feelings with those who would listen. If Jesus needed this type of comfort, we can be sure that all of us do too. Author James Dobson once observed, "For some strange reason, human beings . . . tolerate stress and pressure much more easily if at least one other person knows they are enduring it." [1] Are you willing to be that "one person" for someone else?
3. Listening helps the speaker clarify his or her thoughts. When we give people an opportunity to talk, we often naturally help them sort out their tangled thoughts. Proverbs 20:5 reads: 'The purpose of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out.' Simply by listening, we can help draw out the deepest things in someone's heart so that they themselves can understand it.
4. Good listening improves the accuracy of our responses to what other people say. Like a student in school who raises their hand before the teacher has finished asking a question—sometimes we can be too quick to jump in with answers. When we take time to listen well before responding, we will have a better understanding of the person's real needs and concerns. Good listening is the only way we can respond with true wisdom and godly concern.

Spend time today working through the following devotional questions, which will help you reflect more deeply on the ministry of listening.



*Devotional Study*

MAY

*The Ministry of Listening to Others*

Good listening is often described as “wanting to hear.” Why should you want to hear others? In your own words describe why this is a central part of being a follower of Christ.

Read Mark 10:46-52.

What was the setting of this story? Why might it have been difficult for Jesus to listen to Bartimaeus in this moment? What was Jesus' response to Bartimaeus? What can you learn from Jesus about listening from this story?

Read Proverbs 18:2 and 18:13.

What warnings do you read or discern in these verses? How might you apply those warnings to your own situations?

Read John 13:34, Phil. 1:9-11 and 1 Peter 1:22.

Why is listening an act of love? What distracts you from loving others well through listening? Do you ever struggle with the simple desire to listen? If so, why does your desire to listen sometimes fall short?

In what ways do you see listening as an important part of your ministry? What do you believe God wants you to remember about your ministry and the need to listen well to others?

[1] <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-to-become-a-good-listener>