

THE MINISTRY OF LISTENING TO OTHERS

Wise people can help you see what you missed

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What has it already cost you to be the only person you will listen to?
A person can love God, pray sincerely, and still make a poor decision because they refuse to hear anything that challenges what they want. Sometimes the question that irritates you is the question you most need to answer.

Today, I want to talk about the ministry of listening to others. Listening serves the person who needs to be understood, and it opens us to wisdom we cannot supply for ourselves. Keep one decision in mind as we walk through this. Ask yourself whether you have made room for someone to tell you the truth.

PROVERBS 12:15 KJV

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.

Notice where the danger begins: being right in your own eyes. Your certainty still needs examination. Wisdom makes room for counsel.

#1 STOP DEFENDING WHAT YOU NEED TO EXAMINE

EXODUS 18:13-24 KJV

13 And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses sat to judge the people: and the people stood by Moses from the morning unto the evening. 14 And when Moses' father in law saw all that he did to the people, he said, What is this thing that thou doest to the people? why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from

morning unto even? 15 And Moses said unto his father in law, Because the people come unto me to enquire of God: 16 When they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judge between one and another, and I do make them know the statutes of God, and his laws. 17 And Moses' father in law said unto him, The thing that thou doest is not good. 18 Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone. 19 Hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee: Be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God: 20 And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do. 21 Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: 22 And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee. 23 If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace. 24 So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father in law, and did all that he had said.

In EXODUS 18, Moses is handling the people's disputes from morning until evening. Jethro, his father-in-law, watches and asks why Moses is carrying that responsibility alone. Moses explains that the people come to him to inquire of God.

Moses has a spiritual explanation for his method. Jethro still sees a problem with it. The burden will exhaust Moses and the people waiting on him. Jethro recommends sharing the work with capable, trustworthy leaders.

EXODUS 18:17 KJV

And Moses' father in law said unto him, The thing that thou doest is not good.

That is a difficult sentence to receive when you have been working hard. You are tired. You are trying to help people. Then somebody walks in and questions the way you do it.

But good intentions do not make every method wise. You can be committed to the assignment and need help with how you carry it out. Moses relationship with God did not eliminate his need to hear another person's observation.

Some of us answer correction by reciting our history. We explain how long we have been doing this, how much we have sacrificed, and how many people respect us. None of that answers the concern somebody just raised. When a person says, "You seem exhausted" explaining how important your work is does not resolve your exhaustion. When a spouse says, "We rarely spend time together," describing your sacrifices does not address the absence they are experiencing.

Listen to the actual concern. You may discover something you have been explaining away.

QUOTE: "You can be experienced and still have a blind spot."

A blind spot is the part you cannot see from where you are standing. Having one does not make you worthless. Refusing every opportunity to examine it makes you difficult to help.

Sometimes defensiveness grows out of shame. A correction reaches your ears, and you hear it as a verdict on your whole life. Slow that reaction down. A problem with one decision does not erase your value. You can examine your behavior without condemning yourself.

The next time a trustworthy person raises a concern, let them finish. Ask, "What are you seeing that I may be overlooking?" Request a specific example. Then repeat their concern in your own words before you explain your position.

You might say, "You are concerned that I have taken on more than I can handle. Have I understood you?" That sentence gives the conversation a chance to help you. You still have room to explain, disagree, or ask another question after you understand.

Moses allowed Jethro's counsel to change his approach. We should ask ourselves whether we are that teachable.

Who can question my decisions without having to manage my anger first?

#2 LET WISE COUNSEL CHALLENGE YOUR FIRST

IMPRESSION

1 SAMUEL 25:23-35 KJV

23 And when Abigail saw David, she hasted, and lighted off the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, 24 And fell at his feet, and said, Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be: and let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak in thine audience, and hear the words of thine handmaid. 25 Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal: for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him: but I thine handmaid saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send. 26 Now therefore, my lord, as the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, seeing the LORD hath withholden thee from coming to shed blood, and from avenging thyself with thine own hand, now let thine enemies, and they that seek evil to my lord, be as Nabal. 27 And now this blessing which thine handmaid hath brought unto my lord, let it even be given unto the young men that follow my lord. 28 I pray thee, forgive the trespass of thine handmaid: for the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house; because my lord fighteth the battles of the LORD, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy days. 29 Yet a man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul: but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the LORD thy God; and the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out, as out of the middle of a sling. 30 And it shall come to pass, when the LORD shall have done to my lord according to all the good that he hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have appointed thee ruler over Israel; 31 That this shall be no grief unto thee, nor offence of heart unto my lord, either that thou hast shed blood causeless, or that my lord hath avenged himself: but when the LORD shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thine handmaid. 32 And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: 33 And blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand. 34 For in very deed, as the LORD God of Israel liveth, which hath kept me back from hurting thee, except thou hadst hasted and come to meet me, surely there had not been left unto Nabal by the morning light any that pisseth against the wall. 35 So David received of her hand that which she had brought him, and said unto her, Go up in peace to thine house; see, I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person.

In 1 SAMUEL 25, Abigail meets David as he is preparing to retaliate against Nabal's household. She asks him to consider the bloodshed and the burden it would leave on his conscience. She calls his attention to the future God has promised him.

David listens. He recognizes that her intervention has kept him from taking vengeance into his own hands.

1 SAMUEL 25:33 KJV

And blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand.

David's anger had an immediate demand. Abigail helped him consider what that demand could cost him later. That is one of the gifts of wise counsel: another person can help you see beyond the moment you are living in. When you are offended, the question can become, "How do I make them feel what I felt?" A wise person asks what your response will do to your character, your relationships, and the responsibilities you still have tomorrow.

When you are lonely, attention can become so valuable that you stop examining the behavior of the person giving it. A wise friend may notice that you are accepting something you once said you would never accept. Their question deserves consideration, even if it interrupts your excitement. Your emotions deserve attention. Anger may alert you to mistreatment. Fear may identify a real concern. Affection can be sincere. But a feeling does not give you every fact you need, and it does not settle what you should do next.

QUOTE:

"Wise people can help you see what you missed."

That takes us back to this question: Can my impression survive wise counsel? If I believe God is leading me, can I explain the decision without using "God told me" to end the conversation?

A sincere conviction can be examined. You can pray, review Scripture, consider the facts, and hear a fair question. If your conclusion changes, you

can acknowledge that your understanding needed correction. You do not have to keep defending a mistake because you attached God's name to it. Before making a consequential decision while emotionally stirred, tell a trustworthy person the whole story. Include the part that makes your position harder to defend. Explain what happened, what you feel, what you want to do, and what you may be overlooking.

Ask, "What consequences am I failing to consider?" Give them permission to disagree. Resist the habit of retelling the situation to one person after another until somebody approves the response you already chose.

If you have already reacted poorly, listening still matters. Counsel can help you decide what to acknowledge, what to repair, and how to respond differently next time. Am I asking for wisdom, or am I collecting approval?

#3 STOP MEASURING WISDOM BY TITLES AND STATUS

2 KINGS 5:9-14 KJV

9 So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. 10 And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean. 11 But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. 12 Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage. 13 And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be. clean? 14 Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

Naaman arrives at Elisha's house with his horses and chariot. Elisha sends a messenger with instructions to wash seven times in the Jordan. Naaman becomes angry. He had pictured a different encounter, with the prophet coming out personally and performing the healing in a particular way. As Naaman turns away, his servants appeal to him. They ask whether he

would have undertaken something difficult if the prophet had required it. Why refuse this simple instruction? Naaman goes to the Jordan, follows the instruction, and is healed. Pay attention to who helps him reconsider: his servants. He outranks them. Yet they see the problem with his response, and their counsel helps him act wisely.

QUOTE: "A person does not have to outrank you to help you."

Some people can receive an observation from a person on a platform but reject the same observation at their kitchen table. The words are similar. The difference is the status they have assigned to the speaker. We should respect faithful leaders and value people with relevant experience.

We should also remember that titles do not make every opinion correct. A familiar voice can carry wisdom. A celebrated voice still needs to be tested. Your spouse may notice a change in you before an audience does. A coworker may understand why a process keeps failing. Your adult child may be able to describe what your interruptions feel like from the other side of the conversation.

Will you examine what they said? Or will you spend the conversation explaining why they have no right to say it?

Familiarity can make us careless with a person's contribution. Because we know their weaknesses, we decide they have nothing to teach us. But their imperfection does not automatically make their observation false. You would have to reject every human voice, including your own, if perfection were the requirement for being heard.

When counsel comes from someone you are tempted to dismiss, identify the actual claim. Ask whether it is true, what evidence supports it, and whether the person understands the situation. Evaluate that before you evaluate how impressive their name sounds.

Ask yourself, "Would I consider this differently if a person I admire said it?" If the answer is yes, your reaction may have more to do with status than substance.

Naaman could have continued home angry. His servants gave him an opportunity to reconsider. Receive the opportunity when it comes to you. Whose wisdom have I dismissed because I am too familiar with them?

#4 LISTEN TO UNDERSTAND BEFORE YOU SPEAK TO CORRECT

JAMES 1:19 KJV

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

James places this instruction in a passage about receiving God's word and restraining anger. The order also challenges the way we conduct our conversations. We often prepare our answer before we have understood what someone is trying to say.

PROVERBS 18:13 KJV

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

PROVERBS 18:13 warns against answering a matter before hearing it. Your experience may give you useful insight, but you still need to learn this person's situation. They deserve more than a conclusion you reached during their first sentence.

We have talked about receiving counsel. Now consider the person who comes to you. Ministry begins with taking them seriously enough to listen. Imagine your spouse says, "I feel alone in this relationship." You may immediately want to list everything you provide. But first ask, "When do you feel that most?" You may discover that the concern is about your attention during dinner, your absence during a difficult season, or the way every vulnerable conversation becomes an argument.

You cannot address a concern you have not allowed the person to explain. Or someone tells you they are struggling spiritually. Before you deliver a lecture about prayer, ask what has been happening. They may be grieving, confused by something they were taught, or ashamed to admit a question. The answer you offer should respond to the situation they actually describe.

QUOTE: "People should not have to compete with your answer to finish their sentence."

Listening does not require agreement with every conclusion. You can recognize that a person is hurting while asking whether their interpretation is accurate.

Understanding gives you a sounder basis for encouragement, correction, or a necessary boundary.

And when someone describes how your behavior affected them, resist making your intention the only subject. You may have meant well. You still need to hear what happened to them. Both can be part of an honest conversation.

Put down the phone. Let the person finish a complete thought. Ask a question that helps you understand: "What happened next?" or "What has been the hardest part?" Then summarize what you heard and ask whether you understood correctly.

Before offering a solution, ask, "Would it help for me to listen a little longer, or would you like us to think through what to do?" Give counsel with humility, and keep what they share out of casual conversation with other people.

If a discussion becomes too heated to hear each other, agree on a specific time to return to it. A pause should make understanding possible; it should not become a way to avoid the matter indefinitely.

Do people feel understood after talking with me, or simply corrected?

#5 LET WISDOM CHANGE WHAT YOU DO NEXT

PROVERBS 19:20 KJV

Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end.

The verse points beyond the conversation to the person you are becoming. We can appreciate a lesson, thank a counselor, and continue the same behavior.

The benefit of sound counsel becomes visible as we apply it. Moses changed the way he handled the work. David stopped his retaliation.

Naaman went to the Jordan. Each account contains a response. Ask what your response will be.

First, examine the counsel. Teachability does not require surrendering your judgment to everyone who has an opinion. Ask whether the advice agrees with Scripture, addresses the actual facts, and leads toward responsible conduct.

JAMES 3:17 KJV

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

JAMES 3:17 describes wisdom from above in terms of purity, peace, gentleness, willingness to listen, mercy, and good fruit. That gives us something more useful to examine than a person's confidence or volume. Consider the character expressed in the advice and the conduct it asks of you.

Advice that requires dishonesty fails that examination. Advice that ignores essential facts needs more work. A person who cannot bear any question about their counsel should be willing to practice the humility they are asking of you.

At the same time, do not use discernment as a respectable word for refusing every correction. Sometimes the counsel is clear, the facts support it, and the remaining obstacle is your reluctance to change.

QUOTE:

"The evidence that you received wisdom is what you do with it."

If you have learned that you interrupt, practice allowing the next person to finish. If your commitments exceed what you can responsibly carry, revise them. If your words injured someone, offer a specific apology and change how you speak to them. Let the application be clear enough that you can tell whether you followed through.

Write one sentence: "Because I have heard this, my next step is [state your next step]." Choose an action you can begin this week. If facts are still

missing, make gathering those facts the action. If counsel conflicts, identify the disagreement and seek clarification from someone equipped to help.

When the matter is clear, take the step. Tell the trustworthy person what you decided and why. You remain responsible for your choices, and you can remain open to correction as you make them.

Do not demand a perfect outcome before you are willing to become more teachable. Wisdom helps you act faithfully with what you can know. It also helps you adjust when you learn more.

What will I do differently because I listened?

Return to the question we began with: What has it already cost you to be the only person you will listen to?

You may be remembering a warning you dismissed. You may see a conversation you have avoided. Or you may realize that someone close to you has stopped sharing because they expect an argument every time they speak.

Let that recognition become a beginning. You can say, "I have been thinking about what you told me. I was defensive. Will you help me understand it again?"

Those words can reopen a conversation your pride closed.

Moses had work to carry. David had a future to consider. Naaman had an instruction to follow. In each account, another person's voice helped them take the next step wisely.

There may be someone in your life whose observation deserves another hearing. There may also be someone waiting for you to give them your attention. Make room for both.

Before this week is over, return to one unfinished conversation. Ask one honest question and stay present long enough to hear the answer. Then act on what proves true.

You cannot recover every opportunity you missed. You can become more willing to receive wisdom now. Start with this prayer: "Lord, make me teachable where I have been defensive. Help me hear what I need, even when it challenges what I want."

QUOTE:

"The answer you need may arrive in somebody else's voice. Stay humble enough to hear it and wise enough to act."

Father, thank You for Your Word and for the people who help us understand what we have missed. Expose our blind spots without allowing shame to drive us away from correction. Help us examine our feelings, tell the whole truth, and receive sound counsel. Give us discernment to recognize wisdom and courage to act on it. Teach us to listen patiently to the people You have entrusted to our care. Where we have dismissed someone, help us return with humility. Make our conversations places where truth can be heard and love can be practiced. In Jesus name, amen.