

Selected Scriptures—Listening in Communication—9/13/26

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Today we continue studying communication as we share together in this vital effort in relationships & I appreciate your feedback on this.

After a 1st week of unearthing the root of communication conflict, last week we covered non-verbal communication.

As I've said, this material draws from studies decades ago by Wayne Mack & the pastoral staff of Grace Community Church in California.

This is different from my normal exposition of one text as I'll reference & quote a host of passages focusing on application.

Today we study the receiving side of communication—listening.

Recall that part of thinking rightly about communication is rightly defining it—it is not merely speaking your mind.

That's a one-way street that may lead to nowhere because no one may hear you or no one may understand what you say.

Last week we defined communication as a process of sharing information so the sender's message is understood as intended.

Communication is conveying meaning between speaker & hearer.

That takes work from everyone involved because it involves sending the message clearly & also receiving it accurately.

So listening is vital because effective communication involves both properly sending the message AND accurately receiving the message.

All of us could give examples when we thought we had sent a message clearly, but others did not receive it accurately.

We can also think of times when someone else said something to us that we partially or completely misunderstood.

And by the way, thank you for being gracious with me because I'm sure you see ways I fail to practice faithful communication.

This teaching brings us all under greater scrutiny as we learn together & pray for growth & for grace & patience with each other.

So it's obvious then that we should want to be good listeners, to cultivate the heart of a listener & the discipline of listening.

To do so, we'll ask & answer 3 questions to outline our thoughts & the slides will note all the verses I'll mention so we can move quickly.

Let's start with question #1—Why is good listening important, why should we be concerned about being good listeners?

And we start with an important answer that may escape our notice—we must note 1st we want to be good listeners because GOD IS.

Among God's attributes that we may study or list, we often forget that listening is one of His gracious & faithful ways.

And since we are made in God's image, we want to experience all He intended for us & we can be like Him by being good listeners.

Just think: 1st Peter 3:12 says, "His ears attend to our prayers."

Psalm 34:6 says "the LORD heard" a poor man's cry & saved him.

God is present everywhere so He hears everything & He does not have physical ears, but this is relational language.

God has revealed Himself as gracious, caring, involved, & available.

God's listening leads us respond as Psalm 116:1, says, "I love the LORD, because He hears My voice & my supplications."

If you take away 1 verse today, I love that one as a reminder to listen.

God does not need us & yet He has loved us & He shows His condescending kindness in hearing our prayers & praises.

The Lord's listening moves Him to welcome His people's prayers as in Jeremiah 33:3 by saying, "*Call to Me and I will answer you*".

In His omnipresence & omniscience He always pays attention, but God also says He cares for what is said by His people.

And God the Son, our Lord Jesus, is also a faithful listener, as John 14:24 & 15:15 say He responded to all the Father said.

Jesus also listened to people like Nicodemus & the Samaritan woman at the well in John 3-4.

The Holy Spirit is also a listener because Jesus said John 14:26-27 & 16:13 that "*whatever [the Spirit] hears, He will speak*" to the disciples.

So the biblical reality that our 3-in-1 God listens carefully should motivate us to listen & to work at listening.

Just think—Psalm 139:4 says, "*Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all*"—& yet God still listens.

That's amazing—God knows what we'll say & yet He listens!

And He really knows—He doesn't just assume He knows like we do.

So listening is important 1st, because God is a faithful listener & we want to convey His care to others as He has toward us.

We can be amazed & thankful that He listens & then let that motivate us to listen even if we think we know what's coming.

2nd, we can be motivated to listen because God commanded us to be good listeners.

We know it's important 2ndly because God commanded it in verses like James 1:19: "*be quick to hear, slow to speak & slow to anger*."

In an appeal to listen obediently, Jesus said in Luke 11:28: "*blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.*"

Jesus also said repeatedly in the Gospels, "*He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*" [Matthew 11:15; Mark 4:9, 23; 7:16; Luke 8:8; 14:25]

Passages like Revelation 1:3 even promise blessings on those who hear & heed the words of that prophecy.

Revelation 2-3 repeatedly says, *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*. [2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; also 13:9]

So if you want God's blessings, first hear His call to listen.

In Isaiah 55:2-3, God said, "*Listen carefully to Me ... Incline your ear & come to Me. Listen, that you may live.*"

It is characteristic of a true believer to listen & follow Jesus because He said in John 10:27 that **His sheep hear His voice**.

And even in human relationships, many Proverbs encourage listening.

Turn to Proverbs 19 as I'll have you follow along with me in several Proverbs today—so let's read 19:20 & 27. [READ]

Listening leads to wisdom; but not listening leads off that path.

Young people—Proverbs especially exhorts you to listen to parents & those who have more experience walking with God.

Proverbs 13:1 says, "*A wise son accepts his father's discipline, But a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.*"

The Proverbs emphasize that listening leads to wisdom, which is skill in living life as it's designed to be lived, doing it well.

So that can be a 3rd answer to why listening is important—because good listening can lead to God's blessings.

We listen because God is a good listener & God commands it, & also (3rdly) because it can lead to God's blessings.

That's true in relationship with God because Romans 10:17 says, "*faith comes by*"—what?—"*by hearing*" the Word.

Ephesians 1:13 says we believed by listening to the message.

Promises for blessing I already noted also make this point.

And NT commands offer comfort & encouragement for one another in verses like in 1st Thessalonians 4:18 & 5:11.

Hebrews 3:13 says that regular encouragement protects us against being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. [cf. 10:24-25]

We receive such grace & help by regularly listening to each other.

Look also at Proverbs 18:1 for another warning about not listening by separating from counsel—Proverbs 18:1. [READ]

In contrast to that isolation from counsel, read another promise on listening & another contrast in Proverbs 15:31-32. [READ]

We listen to gain wisdom from reproof & discipline & counsel.

Similarly, Proverbs 12:15 says, "*The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel.*"

So listening can lead to grace & wisdom & blessings from God.

Then 4thly, good listening can lead to good speaking.

When Ephesians 4:29 mentions having words fitting the need of the moment, we must listen to know what to say & when.

Only Jesus knew what was in men's hearts as John 2:24-25 show, but He still asked questions & listened as He spoke.

And turn to Proverbs 18:13 & 17 to read 2 examples. [READ]

It is a protection from folly & shame to be a good listener.

We don't want wrong understanding that feeds wrong answers.

Read Proverbs 20:5 for a picture putting this together. [READ]

Good listening facilitates drawing others out, fostering openness because people don't want to talk to someone who does not listen.

You don't want to share your heart with others if they don't really show that they care & want to listen, right?

So listening can help others share & inform what to share in response.

In that way, good listening makes a difference not only for good speaking, but also for promoting good relationships.

Again, these all are related & intertwined, but 5thly, we should value good listening because it can lead to good relationships.

As we read earlier in Psalm 116:1, the writer expressed his love for the Lord because the Lord heard his voice & supplication.

For marriages to flourish, spouses must learn to listen to each other.

Strong marriages are anchored in the partnership of all of life, of continually building that intimate friendship God designed.

Among the powerful protections against unfaithfulness in a marriage is the pursuit of good listening to grow & guard that oneness together.

In a different way, Proverbs 23:7 says we listen to learn what others think in their hearts, so we don't needlessly offend them.

Otherwise, you may eat of a man's delicacies & not know that he does not want to share, for example, as Proverbs 23:6-7 warn.

To accomplish that, we must be open & listen openly because 1st Corinthians 2:11 says only a man knows his thoughts.

Proverbs 23:22 parallels listening to your parents with not despising your parents so again that highlights the love shown by listening.

And listening is really a basic way of serving others, isn't it?

Jesus modeled & commanded that we serve in passages like Mark 10:43-45 where the greatest is the slave of all.

There are many ways to serve, but one often neglected or unappreciated or overlooked way to serve is simply to listen.

That's what Job wanted from his friends in Job 21:2 when he said, "*Listen carefully to my speech, & let this be your way of consolation.*"

What he needed at that point was not a lecture attempting to convict him of some sin that he did not commit.

What he wanted was not a philosophical diatribe on the ways of God with the wicked & the righteous & trends of prosperity & adversity.

What he needed & wanted was a friend simply to listen to him.

So that's the why of listening—because God listens & God commands it & it leads to God's blessings & good speaking & good relationships.

Hopefully that motivates us to feel the need & desire to listen.

We must value good listening so that we want to work at it & improve.

So now let's consider the 2nd question—what IS good listening?—what does it involve?

1st, good listening involves your whole person.

That makes sense after considering non-verbal communication.

1st, good listening involves listening with your whole person.

As it's said—lean into it with your whole body & posture as verses like Proverbs 2:2 say to "*make your ear attentive.*"

Since communication is partly non-verbal, we can listen with our eyes & eye contact & facial expressions.

We also listen with our mind & heart engaged, with thoughts & emotions connecting with & processing what's shared.

Proverbs 18:15 says "*The mind of the prudent acquires knowledge, And the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.*"

That fully engaged effort is needed as Romans 12:15 calls us to rejoice with those who rejoice & weep with those who weep.

So that's mental readiness to learn & emotional readiness to respond.

To practice that requires self-control so that's a 2nd point—good listening involves self-control & discipline.

It is something to be worked on—it is not automatic or natural—but since it's commanded by God, then we must respond.

We can't make excuses with labels for a lack of self-control.

Yes, it may be harder for some of us to sit still & listen—I'm like that.

But that does not excuse any of us from seeking the fruit of the Spirit that includes self-control in love.

When Proverbs 5:1 & 22:17 say to "*incline your ear*" & 19:20 says to "*listen to counsel*", we know we control those choices.

Those are pursuits that require self-denial & thought & prayer & dependence on the Spirit to help us.

We want to stay focused & not be distracted so that we can process what's said with accuracy & compassion

Disciplined listening can restrain inappropriate reactions.

If you are still in Proverbs, read Proverbs 29:11 & 20. [READ]

Losing your temper is what fools do—fools also speak hastily.

Though we've all sinfully done it, there's no caveat if you understood my side & there's no excuse for foolish fast responses.

Read Proverbs 25:28 for another picture. [READ]

In contrast to that dangerous & sad scenario, realize how self-control can portray wisdom even when a person lacks it.

Read of that in Proverbs 17:28. [READ]

So at least having the self-control to guard what we say can keep us from letting the foolishness of our hearts coming pouring out.

That means we should not give in to the temptation to respond too quickly or to react to what someone said.

Don't jump to your own defense against criticism or correction & don't ignore it or assume it's wrong or start to rationalize.

The root behind that self-control must be the belief that we CAN learn something, that listening is desirable.

So 3rdly, good listening involves a humble desire to understand.

When James 1:19 calls us to be quick to listen, there's a heart behind it that does not delay or listen begrudgingly.

It's having the humble heart of a learner who wants the mirror of God's Word to show what we look like so we can change.

That's the context of James 1:19—to desire to be a doer of the Word, to be someone eager to hear & act.

Turn to Proverbs 8:34 for a picture of that. [READ]

That pictures a longing that shows up to watch & wait to learn, not waiting to be called to learn, but already there to learn.

That means not hiding or isolating or avoiding or being unavailable, but instead taking initiative to learn.

The book of Proverbs has many verses that emphasize the difference between pride and humility in reference to listening.

We already read Proverbs 12:15 & 15:31-32 so we'll turn to the NT to Philippians 2:3-4 to ponder that in light of listening.

Read Philippians 2:3-4 & apply it to listening. [READ]

Listening is considering others as more important by wanting to know what they think & what they have to share.

Listening looks out for others' interests & desires.

And to do so faithfully, we must want to gain understanding.

Verses like Proverbs 2:2 equate listening with understanding.

Proverbs 4:1 calls sons to hear & give attention to gain understanding.

And Proverbs 5:1 says to give attention to wisdom & incline your ear to understanding.

Proverbs 19:20 says to listen so that you may be wise.

We need to pursue what our definition of communication said.

We said communication is sharing information in such a way that the sender's message is understood in the way he intended it.

So good listening seeks to grasp what the speaker intended, the full meaning by accurate, attentive hearing.

That leads to another part of active listening & that's asking questions.

To gain understanding & also to show love & interest & care & desire to learn, we must ask questions.

And I don't mean questions that try to prove our point or show where the other person is wrong so that we can defend ourselves.

It may be appropriate to ask questions that show inconsistency of thought or action or to help others examine themselves.

But we must first have the heart of a learner who values others & wants to grasp exactly the meaning they intended.

That involves understanding their feelings as Jesus modeled in John 11 when Lazarus died.

Though Jesus knew the exact plan for Lazarus to die & be raised again, Jesus still listened to each person at each stage & even wept.

He modeled that caring about people's feelings is important.

We don't want to our responses to be out of place like Proverbs 25:20 describes, *"Like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar on soda, Is he who sings songs to a troubled heart."*

When someone says, "You don't understand", they are often referring to feelings, not bare facts.

To effectively listen & communicate, we need to understand that part.

That's not unmanly or unnecessary—it's valuing people.

We may even be able to refute error of unbeliever or to correct our children, but we can do so with patience that tries to understand first.

By understanding how others process information & respond, we can learn & be better equipped to minister to them.

This is how a husband lives with his wife in an understanding way & honors her lest his prayers be hindered, as 1st Peter 3:7 says.

We show love & grow love by listening like the Lord does.

Again we can all recall Psalm 116:1 that I read earlier—*"I love the LORD, because He hears My voice and my supplications."*

As we say all this, we must admit that these principles can be wrongly applied & even weaponized to rationalize speaking too much or monopolizing conversations or whatever else.

But as listeners, we can humbly desire to understand others.

Just think of the number of ways the answer 'fine' can be taken or intended if you are asked how you are doing & say 'fine.'

It could convey anger or isolation or retreat or contentment or rest or relief or numerous other things.

The goal of listening is to understand what is meant by 'fine.'

Since good listening involves all these levels of understanding, it is obviously not easy & yet it is so important.

So then lastly, let me answer a 3rd question—how can good listening be developed?

It's like any other area of change—it involves repentance & faith & applying the Gospel for hope & encouragement & direction & power.

And be sure you know the Gospel, the Good News how God forgives our failures to love Him & to love others as He said.

God communicated His love in His Word & in Jesus—He said & showed that He forgives all who turn from sin to trust & follow Him.

He will do so, not because we get so good at communication or anything else that we earn His acceptance.

No, rather God paid the penalty for sin when God the Son, Jesus, died as a substitute sacrificed for the sins of His people.

So God offers free & full forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ & He sends His Spirit to give power to live a new life.

That's a summary of the Gospel that most of you know & we want to be sure all of you know because it's necessary for any real change.

So to develop good listening, 1st, confess your need for change both in your heart & in specific ways you need transformation.

Have the attitude of Philippians 3:13, not thinking we have laid hold of Christlikeness yet, but pressing on toward the goal.

And always remember 1st John 1:9 & confess your sins with the glad assurance that God forgives us in Christ.

Then make becoming a better communicator a matter of prayer.

We cannot do any good on our own, as Jesus said in John 15:5.

So we pray—we ask for wisdom & James 1:5 says God gives it.

As James 4:2 says, we tell God our desires & let Him answer.

Then we can approach it as an area of training.

Hebrews 5:14 says, “*solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.*”

We need to have our senses trained & that takes practice & effort like memorizing verses & planning to apply them.

Then involve others & ask for their help because relationships in the body are God's tools in our sanctification.

And practice communication—work at it & learn to reflect back & clarify what others are saying by asking questions & restating & not assuming you get it before they say you do.

Melanie & I did this when we were dating & it was transformational for us to grow in understanding one another.

One of us would share something & then the other would try to explain it back in our own words.

So I'd try to explain back to her what she said, for example, & then she'd agree with some of it & correct or clarify other parts & then I'd try again until she agreed that I really understood.

And then she'd do the same thing for me & that prayerful work on communication was so helpful for us.

But remember that it is a process, not an event.

And we are all growing in that process with each other in each day through each situation.

So don't lose heart & don't give up & also don't get frustrated or be impatient with others.

Since that can be overwhelming, we again praise God for the Gospel.

We thank God for His gracious promises both of forgiveness in Jesus Christ & of power to change by the Holy Spirit.

In that life of grace & with this high standard of love in this area, we press on as people of prayer always seeking the Lord's help together.

So let's pray together now as we close.