

Are You Listening?

Sermon - May 21, 2017

Why is listening so important in a relationship?

There is an increasing number of persons saying that they feel dislocated — a disconnection from the world they live in. These days more and more people report that they are disconnected from those with whom they spend years or decades as couples or partners. There are more and more disconnections between partners, between parents and their children, between siblings, and between friends. People feel disconnected and dislocated which means that they live in the same household, under the same roof but the moon seems to be closer to them than their partner or their own children. They don't talk, they don't do things together, and they just tolerate each other's presence. The root of this problem is in lack of communication. They don't communicate because they don't know how to communicate anymore.

The key of communication is LISTENING. Not yelling, screaming, putting the other person down, not repeating his or her mistakes day by day as a broken record, but LISTENING.

Jesus often said that we are not listening because there is greed and selfishness rooted in every human heart that must be blotted out through individual conversion. To be greedy and selfish is a SIN. Jesus was very plain spoken in saying that the universal problem of man is that the sin of selfishness has released in all of us a toxic blindness that leads finally to death—a death that cannot be avoided: death of disconnectedness and dislocation.

Being a good listener is one of the most important skills we have to master if we want to advance in our marriage, relationships with our children, friends and relatives. Only as good listeners can we build meaningful relationships. When you REALLY listen, you demonstrate your interest in what is being said and you show your respect for the individual saying it. Listening is a magnetic force that draws people to us.

Did you ever have an experience when you were talking to someone about a very important topic, maybe about yourself or your pain, when you poured out your heart, and then you noticed that the person was not really listening to you? How did you feel in those moments? Maybe you felt unimportant, disrespected, or even insulted. Please recall those feelings now, and don't be afraid to re-experience those bad feelings. Keep this in your mind and heart. Please remember those feelings. Be careful and mindful to ensure that people never feel the same way when they talk to you from now on.

Would you like to be called a great listener? Would you like to be a person with whom people like to meet because they can quickly bond and connect?

The reason why some people can attract others is that they show a genuine and sincere interest in others. The lasting connections always start with LISTENING. The American writer, Dale Carnegie, said that, "You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you."

How do you know if you are already a good listener? I think you will know when you realize that people enjoy your company: they are enjoying talking to you, are asking for your advice, and want to see you more and more often.

There are at least ten pieces of advice I have learned throughout my career as a minister and psychotherapist. Some of these lessons I learned from my parents, and some from my teachers. Very often, my wife and my children taught me to implement these in my practice.

Today, I will have time to present only the first three steps we should follow to maintain healthy communication. These can be summarized as LOOK AND LISTEN. On another Sunday, we will continue this topic.

1. Make Eye Contact

The first step in being a good listener is to make eye contact with people while they are talking. Eye contact is a non-verbal communication that can have profound influence on your social and professional interactions.

When you look other people in the face, your body language communicates that you are interested in what they are saying and that they have your full attention. That signals that you are receptive to their message.

Good eye contact demonstrates genuine interest in the person and the conversation. Eye contact also demonstrates that you are confident in this conversation. Looking at people and meeting their eyes is vital to your successful conversation. If you look into their eyes, they will find you a more interesting person to talk with because, by showing interest into the speaker, their self-esteem and confidence will be boosted by you, and they will feel good when they are talking to you.

If the person is not looking into your eyes and you have a sense that he don't want to talk to you, you can gently say: "Do you not have an interest in what I am saying? Ouch! That one really hurts!"

Try not to look away from the person who is talking to you, unless someone interrupts you. After that, as soon as possible, please return your eyes and attention back to the person with whom you were originally talking. If there are distractions in the room, you must make certain to maintain your focus and eye contact on the person who is speaking to you.

When you are the person who is talking, it is acceptable to occasionally look away in order to collect your thoughts.

Do not forget that your eyes send messages. Establishing and maintaining eye contact with people demonstrates confidence, respect, and genuine interest.

2. Be Present

Did you have moments when your wife or your husband was talking to you and you were doing something else? They asked you if you are listening, and you continued to type on your computer, and you said: “I am listening honey, just go ahead.” Did you have moments when you were looking into their eyes but, at the same moment, your mind was busy with the work you just stopped doing because they asked for your attention. And you said to yourself: “When is she going to stop talking to me so I should go back to continue my work???” I have to admit that I have been accused at times by my wife of not being present when she is talking, even though I am looking into her eyes. These are times when my mind is thinking about something other than what she is talking about. We have to be aware that people do notice if we are not really listening. And so we must focus on the discussion and not allow our minds to wonder. Sometimes, during couple counselling, I can see that, let’s say, when the wife is talking, her husband is not listening but thinking about what he wants to say next in order to defend himself. As an interaction, I ask the husband to repeat exactly what his wife just said. When you are listening, please listen carefully. Respect the people who are talking to you and honour them, and LISTEN not only with your mind but with your heart.

3. Give NO Sign You are Ready to Respond

When you are listening, please listen carefully. Do not interrupt the person who is talking to you. It is the biggest disrespect to interrupt a person who is talking to you. If you interrupt another person they will find it very frustrating and will dislike having a conversation with you. It is another sign of disinterest. If you interrupt the person who is talking to you, you give them a sign that you don’t really care for what they are saying, because you might think that you are more important than they are, and you think that what you want to say is more important than what they say to you.

When the other person is talking please do NOT try to give any clues that you are ready to respond. Do NOT point your finger and do NOT open your mouth. When I talk to people and I see that they are waiting on pins and needles to respond, I know they are no longer listening because they are more concerned with how they are going to respond than with listening to what I have to say.

“One of the most sincere forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to say”.
Bryant H. McGill

“Change happens by listening and then starting a dialogue with the people who are doing something you don’t believe is right”. Jane Goodall

“Prayer is when you talk to God. Meditation is when you are listening.” Kelsey Grammer