

Listening and Doing

Sermon - November 14, 2021

Scripture reading: Ephesians 4: 17-32 & James 3:13-18

Golden Verse: *Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.* James 1:19/b

Our God and Creator blessed us with an amazing ability to communicate. He gave us each a mouth and tongue, brain and heart to express our thoughts and feelings, and to put in words what we would like to share as information.

Animals don't have this awesome ability to speak. We can have a sense if they are happy or sad but we have a hard time finding out what they really want.

The two most important types of communication are between man and God and between human beings. Communication is more than just our ability to talk, but also to listen.

As a minister and psychotherapist, I noticed that one of the deepest needs of our human heart is to be understood. People desperately seek to be respected and valued for who they are. To be respected and valued is our own expectation as well.

Why do you think James, the brother of our Saviour Jesus Christ, said: "*Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak.*" (James 1:19)

I think because, even 2,000 years ago, people had the same problem as today. People were, and are, quicker to speak and slow to listen.

We all like to help people. Right?

However, often it is our tendency to solve people's problems by giving them advice before we know or understand what their real problems are. As a result of our quick jump, we can find ourselves judging instead understanding them. This is why often they say to us: "You don't understand what I am saying", or "You don't understand me," or "You don't know how I feel in this situation".

If we really want to help, first we should ask: "Help me please to understand your situation and then tell me how I can help you. What would you expect from me? What would you like to hear from me?"

Unfortunately instead of providing active, empathetic listening, we show poor listening. In the next few minutes, I will give some examples of how SHOULD we act and how we SHOULD NOT act.

To understand someone, we must first listen to them.

Somebody could say that the easiest thing is to listen. You don't have to do anything, you just have to stay in front of a person and you have to listen, or you can hold the phone and listen. However, this is not true. Listening is an ART. Listening is a gift. Active listening is a sacrifice. Our daily life shows that many people don't know HOW to listen effectively and in a constructive way.

In the 21st Century, somehow in this busy, and fast-running world, we are losing our ability to listen to each other. When people are talking to us, we seldom listen because we are usually too busy. If we want to quickly get over a conversation, we say things like: "This is not my problem. You have to deal with it"; or "I am sorry I don't have time to deal with it now"; or "If I have time I will help you", or to save time we say "Let me think about it and I might get back to you". In the worse cases, I saw when people did not want to listen or to help. For this, they judged the other person, knowing that in that way the person will turn away from them because nobody wants to be judged or criticized.

Typically, there are a few poor listening styles, which we can discover in us. May God's Holy Spirit help us now to recognize these poor listening styles in us, and may we learn how to make changes.

- Spacing Out is when someone is talking to us, but we ignore them because our mind is wandering off into another galaxy. I am sure we all had some experiences when we tried to talk to somebody, but the person ignored us. They did not listen to us, because their mind was busy with something else.
- We all met Pretend Listeners. We all had moments when somebody came to see us with one of their important questions. Because that was an important question for them, and they needed an answer or help right away, they interrupted us. In this situation, we pretended that we cared for them and were paying attention, but really we did NOT pay almost any attention to them. Pretending that we were listening, we said things like "YEAH" or "SURE" or "UH-HUH" or "SOUNDS GOOD TO ME".
- Selective Listening: I assume we are familiar with Selective Listening. We all had moments, when we were talking to someone and we noticed that they paid

attention ONLY to the part that interested them, and their comment focused only on a few words we said, and not on our whole sentence. For example, someone is talking, and you zone out but hear the word “army” and then tell her how you are interested in the army but haven’t heard the rest.

- Word Listening – How do you feel in a moment when you are talking to someone and they are only listening ONLY to your WORDS, and not the emotional composition behind your words? Let me give an example. You say: “Yesterday I did a lot of work and last night I could not sleep well because my mind was still racing.” The other person’s reaction is: “Oh, so yesterday you accomplished a lot.” And then from inside you are screaming loudly: “I just want to say that because I could not sleep well that this morning I am tired, and I need another coffee.”
- Self-Centred Listening - Self-centered listening happens when we see everything from our own point of view. Instead of standing in someone else’s shoes, we want them to stand in ours. For example, we say, “I know exactly how you feel.” This assumes they feel exactly like we do.
- Judging – We all experienced moments when we shared our feelings or stories with others seeking support and understanding, but instead of receiving support, they started to judge us. They were not listening, they were not supporting us but they put us down, judging our feelings and actions.

I heard about a very hardworking student, who got 85% on her exam. She could not wait to share with her parents her success. However, the parents started to yell at her: “What? Why were you not able to get 100%? You were lazy and you did not work hard enough. What is 85%? NOTHING. Do you think you can please us with 85%? You are a BIG NOBODY.” And they were going on and on with their judgmental criticism, instead to acknowledge how much energy their daughter invested in her studies to get 85%.

How much truth is there in Proverbs 15:2: *“The tongue of the wise adorns knowledge, but the mouth of the fools pours out foolishness.”*

Probably King David already knew 2,800 years ago what psychology is teaching us in the 21st Century: *“May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock, and my Redeemer.”* Psalm 19:14

Dear beloved, these examples are showing us that we all, including myself, should learn more about active listening, and we have to make all efforts not to be poor and inefficient listeners.

If we are honest with ourselves, we have to admit that, most of the time, we are not very good at listening.

Again, we have to understand, that listening is the most fundamental component of communication skills. *“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak.”* (James 1:19) Listening is not something that just happens, listening is an active process in which a conscious decision is made to listen to and understand the messages of the speaker.

Active listening is also about patience, listeners should not interrupt with questions or comments. Active listening involves giving the other person time to explore their thoughts and feelings, they should be given adequate time for that.

We, God’s children, should constantly examine our communication. We should daily pray with Psalm 143:3: *“Set a watch O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.”* We should consider the tone of newer forms of communication such as email and text messaging. We should never allow the world, the ungodly people to lead us to harsh or ungodly words toward others. We should consider our body language and facial expressions toward others as well. We should be very careful that our words or our body language should not communicate disdain, anger, or hatred toward another. When engaged in conversation, as we prepare to speak, we should ask ourselves these questions:

-Is it true? *“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.”*

Exodus 20:16

- Is it kind? *“Slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.”* Titus 3:2

- Is it necessary? *“The Lord detests those whose hearts are perverse, but he delights in those whose ways are blameless.”* Proverbs 11:20 Amen