

Family Talk

Listen So They'll Talk and Talk So They'll Listen

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Course II – Unit 7, Lesson 2
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“If any person be in Christ, he is a new creature...”
(2 Corinthians 5:17)

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In this lesson we will look at the importance of listening and what makes a good listener. The communication process is more than just talking, sending a message. It also includes listening to the message that has been sent. If the sender does not think that his message is being received, he will stop sending. Communication stops.

Before continuing, please write three or four sentences describing what characteristics make a good listener. **Write your thoughts on the enclosed Response Sheet and then put it out of your sight until the end of this lesson.** Next, we recommend that you read the entire lesson through once without looking up any of the scriptures. Finally, go back for a more in-depth study before completing the Response Sheet.

I. Introduction

Carl Rogers said, "Man's inability to communicate is a result of his failure to listen effectively, skillfully, and with understanding to another person." When we fail to listen to what others are saying, we are telling them that they are not important and that what they are saying is not important. It makes a person feel ignored, worthless, and unloved.

Being treated this way is hard on adults, but on children it can be devastating. Treating children as if they are worthless and unloved is a form of emotional and psychological abuse. It destroys their self-esteem and opens the door for hostility and hate to enter their lives.

Parents have a responsibility to listen to their children. By listening to what their children have to say, parents let them know that they are loved and important. Positive self-esteem grows out of this love and sense of importance. In healthy families the parents are active participants in the lives of their children.

Throughout time, God has provided parents rules on how to guide their children's development. Parents are to be their children's first and most important teachers. They are to teach their children the ways of the Lord and the skills needed to live and work in human society. They are to model a healthy Christian life to their children (Deuteronomy 6:5-8; Ephesians. 6:4; Col. 3:21).

Parents' communications with their children are to be in gentleness and kindness. Angry words and attitudes on the part of the parent make an angry, aggressive child (Proverbs 15:1).

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Children are not the possessions of their parents. They have only been placed in their parents' care for a short time. This is the time in which they are to grow and develop into autonomous and independent people. This time of growth and development is the most important part of peoples' lives. It is the time in which they discover and shape values, attitudes, and morals. If parents guide them in developing values, attitudes, and morals in a God-ward way, then they will follow God (I Samuel 1:20, 27-28).

Parents are the most important people in the lives of their children. Children see them as almost godlike. They are big, powerful, smart, and the source of what is good and also the source of what is punitive. Because of this, children want to gain their parents attention and approval.

II. Key Principles of Listening (James 1:19)

A. Be Quick to Listen

James said that communication is a two step process. Step 1 is to listen. Step 2 is to reply. Then he tells us how to do them.

A story is told about a young man coming to Socrates to be taught public speaking. As soon as the young man was introduced, he began to talk in a constant flow of words for some time. When Socrates could get in a word, he said, "Young man, I will have to charge you a double fee." "A double fee, why is that?" asked the young man. The great philosopher replied, "I will have to teach you two sciences. First, how to hold your tongue, and then, how to use it." Socrates was telling the young man that it is more important to listen than it is to speak. The same problem that affected this young man affects most people today. We do not listen, or more correctly, we do not know how to listen.

Listening is vital to the process of human communication. When we do not listen to what is being said, we misunderstand or do not receive the message that is being sent to us. Only when we stop what we are doing and actively listen to what is being said, can we know how to reply.

Being quick to listen is hard to do. It means that we have to pay attention. It means that we do not interrupt the speaker. It means that we have to learn patience.

B. Be Slow to Speak

Have you ever noticed how frequently people interrupt each other when they are speaking? Too often, we just cannot wait for them to finish what they are saying,

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before we put in our two cents worth. When we interrupt, we miss the speaker's point. If we let him finish, we might discover that we agree with him.

Instead of being slow to speak, we speak so fast that often we get ourselves into trouble. We do not take the time to think about what we are saying. We let our emotions do our speaking. There is nothing wrong with communicating how we are feeling. However, we need to take the time to think about how we are going to communicate those feelings. There is a big difference between an angry outburst of emotions and one that says, "I am angry with you, because...."

Remember the old saying, "Think before you speak."

C. Be Slow to Anger

Anger is a human emotion. There is nothing wrong with it. When a person is unable to express his anger, he will eventually develop psychological problems. What makes anger wrong is how it is used.

James tells us to be slow to anger. We should not let our anger have a hair-trigger. Violent outbursts of anger create more problems than they solve. We need to learn to express our anger so it solves our problems, not creates more.

Solomon wrote, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." (Proverbs 15:1-2) When we tell someone, "I am angry with you because..." we are expressing our anger and using a gentle word. There is enough anger and ill feelings in the world today without our adding more to it. When we use a gentle word, we decrease the amount of anger in the world.

D. Be Quick to Nurture and Slow to Admonish

Children learn faster when taught with love and understanding. When parents provide a nurturing environment, children grow up to be healthy, well-adjusted adults. A loving, nurturing environment provides for admonishment and discipline. It is a part of the "child raising tool kit." When used in a positive way, it helps in a positive shaping of the child's growth and development.

All children need discipline, admonishment. The amount and type depend on the individual child. There is a right way and a wrong way to provide it. When a child is constantly corrected or punished, he loses sight of the positive. All he is taught is negative. He sees a world of big people taking advantage of their size and strength to control little people. He carries this idea with him throughout life. He tries to become one of the big people so he can control others.

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III. Ways to Build a Positive Relationship With Your Mate, Your Children, and Others

A. Giving Quantity of Time

A relationship cannot be built and maintained without spending time and effort. Willard F. Harley, Jr. says that a husband and wife need to spend at least fifteen hours a week together without the children. Also, each parent needs to spend time each day with the children, individually and as a group.

B. Giving Quality Time

This is the idea of time spent helping and understanding each other. It is devoted to maintaining a relationship. One of the big myths of the past twenty years is that parents can get by only giving ten to fifteen minutes each day to the children as long as it's "quality time." There is no quality in it if there is not quantity in it.

C. Doing *With*... Not Just Doing *For* Others

Relationships can only be built when people spend time together. The more time they spend together, the stronger the relationship grows. It is important to do for others, but it is more important to be with them.

D. Showing Respect for Actions, Feelings, and Thoughts

Members of a healthy family show respect for each other. Showing respect lets them know that they are valued and loved. Showing respect for each other is a great self-esteem builder.

E. Respecting Their Maturity Level

Our maturity level is constantly changing, especially in our first twenty years. As a child grows, he needs to be given the responsibility and respect that is due someone at his stage of development. It is as bad to treat a child as if he were an adult, as it is to treat him as an infant.

F. Show Empathy and Appreciation

Nobody likes to be taken advantage of. We all like and need to be appreciated. By showing appreciation to each other, parents model it for the children. Empathy is feeling what others feel. When others are sad, be sad with them. When they are happy, be happy with them. It shows that you care for them.

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G. Touching Them Physically and Emotionally

The exchange of a tender, loving physical touch is an important part of a relationship. We all need to be touched. Studies have shown that infants will die if they are not touched. Our emotional needs are as great as our physical ones. Just as we need healthy physical contact, we also need healthy emotional ones.

IV. **Ways to Listen so They'll Talk**

A. Pay Attention With Your Entire Body.

One sign of a good listener is that he avoids distractions. He ignores outside and background noises, does not play with jewelry, pens, fingernails, paper clips, or pocket change, and does not keep looking out windows or at other people. He does not slouch. His posture is alert, and his eyes and interest are concentrated on the speaker.

B. Relax Your Defenses.

A good listener is not always on the defensive. He does not feel that he is being threatened. He is secure and at ease with himself. He can relax and be himself.

C. Keeping Your Mind Open for New Ideas and Change.

Nobody knows it all. When we listen to others, we are exposed to new and different ideas and subjects. This does not mean that we have to accept everything that is said. Also, it makes others feel good that we have given them the courtesy to listen. As the old saying goes, "Always listen to the opinions of others. It might not do you any good but it will them."

D. Do Not Project Your Own Feelings and Thoughts on the Speaker.

If the speaker says something with which you disagree, do not become irritated or overly excited. Relax. Learn why he thinks and feels as he does. When you react emotionally, the message gets lost.

E. Do Not Draw Premature Conclusions.

Wait for the speaker to complete what he is saying. Let him draw his own conclusions. You might think you know what his conclusions will be, but you will never know until he finishes. Do not jump to conclusions; you might be wrong.

F. Allow Others to Finish Without Interrupting Them.

This is much like jumping to conclusions. When we interrupt others, we are telling them that they are unimportant and what they have to say is worthless. Listen to what they have to say. Be kind to them. Also, interrupting others is rude. We do not like it

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when others interrupt us. The Golden Rule tells us to treat others as we want them to treat us.

G. Listen for Feelings and Not Just Words.

Words are only a small part of what a person is communicating. Without an emotional context, it is difficult to understand what is being said. Depending on the emotional context, a little word like "no" can have many meanings. It can express such feelings as anger, disappointment, concern, and disbelief. The feelings behind the words are more important than the words.

H. Confirm Your Understanding of Their Words and Feelings.

We misunderstand what is being said for several reasons. One is that the speaker did not make himself clear. Another, is that we did not understand what he said. By asking such questions as, "you feel that..." or "you think that....," we can confirm what was said. If we misunderstood it, he will correct us.

I. Ask Who Did What, When, and Where...But *Never* "Why?"!

These questions focus on the specifics. They describe. They are thought provoking, define terms, and explore alternatives. Asking "why" is judgmental. Too often, "why" questions are looking for somewhere to place the blame.

J. Show Confidence in the Speaker.

By your actions, let the speaker know that you have confidence in him. Let him know that you consider him and what he says important.

V. **Ways to Talk So Others Will Listen to You**

A. Listen Before You Talk.

Listen to what he has to say. If you do not understand what he has said, ask him to explain it. Do not jump to conclusions. When you understand what he has said, then you reply to it.

B. Talk About Their Concerns.

Talk to your children about things that are important to them. A kindergartener does not want a lecture on politics. He wants to talk about his friends, what happens in school, and why things work. It is the same with teens. They do not want to know what you or your parents did. They want to know how to live and survive in their "modern" world.

C. Allow for Interruptions.

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Nobody likes to be interrupted. As adults we expect other adults to respect our right to complete a thought without interrupting us. Children are still in the socialization process and do not understand or take time before they speak. Allow for them to interrupt you, but also point out that they should respect your right to finish speaking. The best way to teach them not to interrupt you is to model it for them. Therefore, do not interrupt them. Let them complete what they are saying.

D. Express Your Feelings With the “I” Statement.

Own your feelings. Say "I feel...." or "I think...." When you use "you" statements, you are blaming them and making them responsible for what you feel and think. Only you are responsible for what you feel and think.

E. Express Yourself in as Few Words as Possible.

Children, especially younger ones, cannot follow and understand long-winded and complicated speeches. Be concise; help them to understand what you are saying.

F. Complete Each Subject Before Starting Another One.

If you are having a specific problem with your child, discuss that problem completely. Make sure that you understand each other and that you have reached a solution. Do not pull out old problems and rehash them. Do not get into the habit of saying, "And another thing that makes me so...is...." Handle one problem at a time. That is all we can do anyway.

G. Remember Who *You* Are, and Who *They* Are.

You are the adult, the parent, the responsible individual. ACT LIKE ONE. They are children. They are still growing and developing. It is your job to help them grow and develop into mature, responsible, loving adults.

H. Remember Your Ultimate Goal.

A parent's ultimate goal is not to win arguments with the children. It is to help them reach their potential.

I. Remember That You Are Modeling.

Children learn by watching us and imitating our behavior. If you want your children to develop into kind, caring, responsible people, you have to act like a kind, caring, responsible person. Remember, "Monkey see, monkey do!"

VI. Conclusion

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Parents are not their children's pals or playmates. They are their children's leaders and example. The way we are is the way they will become.

Most of the time, the only parenting skills that people learn are those they learned from their parents. If we are good parents, they will be good parents. If we create an unhealthy family environment, they will create one for their family. The way we treat our children is the way our grandchildren will be treated.

Now, please return to the enclosed Response Sheet and write your answers to the study questions about this lesson.