

How to Listen

Many people are silently screaming, "Nobody ever listens to me!" That quote was in a Columbus Dispatch article entitled the "Art of Listening Involves More than Meets the Ear." The Bible says the same thing. For many years I have been interested in this subject because until recent years very little has been written or said about listening.

How many of you have had years of education on how to read, write, and speak? All of us. How many of you have had classes on how to listen? Very few. We are taught how to talk, read, and write, but not how to listen. What percent of communication is listening? At least 50%!

Did you know that 75% of what we hear is heard incorrectly and that 75% of the remaining 25% is forgotten within weeks. That is from a study by Donald Caudill at the University of North Alabama. Listening is the cornerstone of all communication.

What is the difference between listening and hearing? Read **James 1:22-25**. **Hearing** is simply to perceive sound or apprehend noise by the ear. It is no more than the anvil, hammer, and drum transmitting sound. **Listening** is to pay attention to sound with thoughtful understanding. That is a big difference. For example, you may hear a request but you have to listen to comprehend. Also, you may hear a conversation but that is different than listening attentively.

Why is it imperative to listen as well as hear?

- People are hurt when we don't listen to what they say, especially children. John, "Daddy, listen to me!"
- People are important. We show interest and respect by listening.
- Listening is how we find out what others are thinking and feeling. We need to seek first to understand, then to be understood. Dean Rusk, a former Secretary of State said, "One of the best ways to persuade others is with your ears - by listening to them."
- Listening prevents misunderstandings and needless arguments. Pause to reflect before you react. Stop and think before you speak.

We have two ears, but only one tongue. Perhaps we should listen twice as much as we talk. Listen twice before we speak once. You can't talk and listen at the same time. Read **Proverb 18:13**.

The first step to effective listening is empathy.

The deepest level of listening by its very nature has to be empathic listening.

We understand what we hear only to the extent that we share the meaning, spirit, and feeling of the communicator. We must listen for feelings as well as words.

Jesus listens to us with complete and perfect empathy. Read **Hebrews 4:15-16**.

What is the difference between empathy and sympathy? It is a little preposition.

Sympathy means to feel sorry **for** someone.

Empathy means to feel **with** someone.

Sympathy is not empathy. Which do you prefer when you actually know the difference? Do you really benefit from a pity party - the pity poor little ole me syndrome? Most people want empathy, not sympathy.

Empathy and sympathy are greatly different. A little girl was sent to the neighborhood store to pick up something for her mother. She took longer coming home than normal and her concerned mother asked what happened. Julie said that her friend down the street dropped her doll on the sidewalk and it broke. Mother asked, "Did you stop and help her fix it?" "No Mom," Julie replied, "I sat down and cried with her." That's empathy - **your** hurt in **my** heart. That describes how Jesus felt when Lazarus died. Read **John 11:31-38**.

An EMPATHY acrostic creates a good definition of empathy. **Each Man's Pain And Thoughts Harmonize with Yours**.

Helping people learn God's Word requires empathy. Remember how it was when you were first learning something new. Try to understand how others feel when you are helping them learn. Empathy can open their minds and hearts to make them more receptive to accepting the teaching of the Scriptures. Empathy shows

people that we really care and are sincerely concerned about their best interests. People don't care how much we know until they know how much we care.

Test your empathy.

Are you genuinely interested in others or do you tune them out?

Do you really care how other people feel and what they want, need, and say?

Do you feel that others are very important people with value, dignity, and worth?

Do you search for the untapped and unrealized potential to be discovered and developed in each person as you listen to them?

The second important step to listening is eye contact.

How can you listen with more than your ears? Read **Proverb 20:12**.

Listen with your eyes and your ears hear more. You can focus on listening with eye contact. Eye contact shows the other person that you are really listening to them. Eye contact increases your attentiveness and enlarges your comprehension. The eyes of the Lord look on us as He listens to us. Read **1 Peter 3:12**. Shouldn't we listen to other people as well as God listens to us?

Eye contact is powerful. Read **Luke 22:61**. Eyes have power. Eyes are the mirror of the soul. They can win love, flirt, express anger, gain control, save a life, and administer discipline. When our sons were young, sometimes all I would have to do is give them a certain look. Dorene told me that if looks could kill, our boys would never have reached manhood.

Eye contact can save lives. A Viet Nam war veteran told this story after returning home and enrolling in Abilene Christian College. He was on their 1973 football team the year they won their conference. He told his story during a leadership training program that year about how eye contact saved his life on the battle field.

Eye contact and empathy are a powerful team to help anyone more effectively listen. It is difficult to give total firm eye contact without also caring and giving empathy.

The third step to prove that you are listening is to take action.

What does it mean in **James 1:19** to "let every man be swift to hear?"

The Greek word "swift" is only found this one time in the New Testament. It refers to being fleet of foot, quick, and speedy. In this context it urges a fast and attentive mind with a ready disposition to listen.

It is likely that these words of James primarily refer to hearing the Word of God. We are to be eager and anxious to hear the message from God's Word. In a secondary sense they are also applicable to our listening to other people.

Let's go back to **James 1:22-25**.

Some people listen to and accept the parts of the Bible they like and agree with and forget the rest.

We all know people who hear, read, and study the Bible and do nothing about it.

Listening involves doing something about what you just heard.

Matthew 7:21-27 makes it clear that just hearing God's Word without obedience does not please God.

This is like listening to your Doctor, refusing to take his advice, and hoping you will get well on your own.

In **Luke 11:28** Jesus said that we must keep His word to be blessed.

In **Romans 2:13** even Paul said that we must do what God says to be justified.

We need to listen to God if we expect Him to listen to us. Read **Proverb 28:9**.

God tells us what to do to be saved. You can hear the good news of Jesus over and over. But hearing it won't get you to heaven unless you do something about it. Felix heard the Apostle Paul teach concerning faith in Christ but he refused to accept it. Read **Acts 24:22-25**.