

200. Relationships #3 – How To Improve Your Hearing

By Arland Steen

We're in a series on Building Better Relationships. I want to talk to you about one building block that is very important – listening. Probably the #1 complaint you hear from people about relationships is:

“He never listens to me.”

“She never understands what I say.”

“He doesn't value my opinion.”

The source of many of our problems with other people in relationships is we just don't listen.

You're going to spend about 40% of your waking hours listening the rest of your life, so it is a skill you need to learn to develop. Most of us listen at only about 25% efficiency.

I know that if we improved our hearing, we would have fewer arguments, make more friends, be a lot wiser and even be healthier. Doctors have proven that every time you listen your blood pressure goes down. Every time you speak it goes up.

James 1:19 defines listening. (Good News Bible): *Remember this, my dear brothers and sisters! Everyone must be quick to listen, but slow to speak and slow to become angry.*

An individual who is quick to listen and slow to speak is slow to get angry.

What is listening? It is more than hearing words and sounds. It's more than waiting your turn to talk!

Why is listening so important? Because it satisfies a deep need in human beings.

We need to be appreciated and we need attention. When you listen to someone it shows you care about them. That you desire to understand them. That you think they are important. I have a hunch that it is impossible to overemphasize the immense need of human beings to really be listened to. So, if you desire to improve your relationships, you must learn to improve your hearing.

Three Hearing Blocks

1. Presumption

Proverbs 18:13 (New International Version): *He who answers before listening— that is his folly and his shame.*

(Good News Bible): *Listen before you answer. If you don't you are being stupid and insulting.*

How many misunderstandings or botched projects or arguments have you gotten into because of something you assumed? We do it all the time. When you assume, you are not listening.

4 Assumptions That Are Always Wrong

- a) There is only one way to see things.
- b) Everybody thinks like you do.
- c) People never change.
- d) I can figure out your motives.

Some people do not want to be confused with the facts because they have their mind made up. Presumption blocks hearing.

2. Impatience

When you are impatient you are not listening. Expert's say the average mind can listen to about 650 words a minute but the average person speaks only 150 words a minute. That leaves a 500 word per minute boredom factor. While I'm speaking you can be talking about your golf game because you can assimilate much faster than I can speak.

How do you know when you are being impatient with someone?

- a) You interrupt. This means you are pushing them along because you're being impatient with them.
- b) You jump to conclusions. That gets you into trouble.

Proverbs 29:20 *Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.*

When we get impatient, we jump to conclusions.

Here's an example. A new employee of a large insurance company walked up to a paper shredder, stood before it looking confused. The senior secretary came by and offered help. “Yes, how does this thing work?” “It's simple,” she said as she took the fat report from her colleague and fed it into the shredder. “See?” “I see,” he said, “But how many copies does it make?” Jumping to conclusions.

Proverbs 19:11 (New International Version): *A man's wisdom gives him patience.*

If you are not patient with people you are unwise. Wisdom shows patience. And when you listen you are wise.

3. Pride

Pride makes us defensive and unteachable.

Proverbs 12:15 *The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But he who heeds counsel is wise.*

You can learn from anyone if you're willing to ask questions. Most of us would rather appear smart than be smart. So, we tend not to ask questions. There's no such thing as a dumb question. The only dumb question is not to ask! We say, "I learn from experience." We ought to but it is wiser to learn from the experience of others. The way you do this is by laying aside pride, being teachable and being open.

Proverbs 20:5 (Living Bible): *Though good advice lies deep within a counselor's heart, the wise man will draw it out.* Everybody is ignorant in certain subjects. We've all had different experiences. Each of you could teach me something, if I knew how to draw it out of you. Wise people learn to listen by learning to ask questions. (You know there are two perfect ages: 4 and 14. At 4 you know all the questions; at 14 you know all the answers). Learning to put down your pride and ask questions is the secret of listening.

Proverbs 15:31 (New Living Translation): *If you listen to constructive criticism, you will be at home among the wise.*

Learn from the advice of others. It's one thing to be open to ask for advice. It's another to be open to advice that wasn't asked for, when people offer their criticism. Constructive criticism can be very enlightening.

A pastor preached his very first sermon at church. He said, "I want to be a better pastor, so if you ever have any comments about my message, please be honest with me."

After it was over a man said, "Pastor, that sermon stunk!" Pastor said, "Oh, What was wrong with it?" Man said, "Three things were wrong with it. Number one, you read it. Number two, you read it poorly. Number three, it wasn't worth reading in the first place!" So, he's feeling low Another guy walks up and says, "Pastor, don't listen to Joe. He just repeats what he hears everybody else say!"

There are three hearing blocks: presumption, impatience and pride. Those things are killers and will ruin relationships. One man who talked to me was shocked to find that his wife left him. She had been telling him for years but he was too busy working for God to hear her or see the signals. James says everyone should be quick to hear and slow to speak. God gave you two ears and one mouth. You should listen twice as much as you talk.

Three Hearing Aids

These three aids are seen in the life of Jesus.

1. Listen with your eyes

Approximately 80% of all conversation is non-verbal. Gestures, facial expressions and body language are all important.

Mark 10:21 (New Living Translation): *Jesus felt genuine love for this man as he looked at him.*

If you love people, you'll look at them. It is a gift when you look people in the eye. It says, "You have my undivided attention. You are valued. You are significant. You are worth listening to and I'm going to prove it by looking you in the eye."

Parents, when was the last time you got down on your knees and looked at your child, eyeball to eyeball and let them talk to you? Or got up on a footstool and looked up to your kid? They need your undivided attention.

The same can be asked of husbands and wives. It's been so long for some of you that you would almost be embarrassed to do it. The fact is, people need this. It said, *Jesus felt genuine love for this man as he looked at him*

2. Listen with your heart.

A good example of this is in the gospel of John where Jesus is with the woman at the well. She is trying to get Jesus off on all kinds of doctrinal speculations:

Which mountain should we worship on?

Our tradition says this, your tradition says that.

Jesus cuts straight through the veneer and ministers to her real need – bad relationships.

“You’ve been married five times and the guy you’re living with now isn’t your husband.”

Jesus was listening with His heart. He was looking beneath all the words and was listening for the hurt. You can do that by listening with your heart. Begin practicing this on your mate.

Why is this so important? Because the #1 cause of affairs in Ventura county is that some married person found someone with a sympathetic ear who is not their spouse. Most affairs do not begin with sexual attraction. They start because someone found a sympathetic ear that they didn’t find at home. And they found someone who would look them in the eye. It’s been said that a man is already half in love with a woman who will listen to him.

Listening not only builds strong marriages but listening keeps your children on track. Before they go off the deep end, if you’ll look back you will find subtle little signs all along the way but you weren’t listening. So, listen with your eyes and listen with your heart.

3. You make time to listen

Schedule it. Calendar it in your schedule. Experts tell us that the average couple in America spends 26 minutes a week in serious conversation. I wonder if we in Ventura county even do that much. I would say the majority of our population have both husband and wife working. With 43% of our population having four-year degrees – roughly double the national average – you know we are doing something with those degrees. With over 40% of area employees commuting at least 30 minutes or more, we come home for bed and breakfast and a kiss goodnight. We live separate lives together in the same house.

I challenge you to date your mate. Do something that makes you talk to each other. Practice this with your children also. Do something that makes you talk to them.

But the most important question of all is “How well do you listen to God?”

Matthew 17:5 says *This is My beloved Son, hear Him*. Circle “hear Him.”

The #1 priority for a Christian is to listen to God. It’s the most important thing you can do. You need to set aside daily time for this.

How does God speak? Jesus said *Whoever hears my word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be condemned*. God speaks through this book. If you never hear God speak, you’re not reading this book.

Luke 8:18 *Therefore, consider carefully how you listen*.

This refers to listening as if God were speaking - not just a man speaking.

Jesus Himself would encourage people to do this when He spoke.

There is a verse that says *Don’t cast your pearls before swine*.

In other words, don’t put something of value before somebody who doesn’t appreciate it. If you put a Bible in front of a dog, he’ll tear it up. If you put pearls before swine, they trample them. Why? They don’t value them.

Pastor Rick Warren said that God told him, “You don’t even care enough when I speak to you to write it down.”

The minister has his basket of pearls that he’s dug out all week from mining God’s Word and God causes you to hear His voice from the sermon but you forget it because you don’t write it down.

Hebrews 3:7 *Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, TODAY, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts*.

Don’t tune Christ out of your life. We can get so busy hearing the TV, radio and sports news that the switchboard’s jammed. God can’t get through to you. We need to clear our ear-waves and listen to God because that is the key to building a better relationship with Him as well as others.