



# The Art of Listening

September 18, 2022

*James 1:19: "Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger."*

Ask questions and listen to your neighbors' stories. Engaging in meaningful conversation will be more productive than simply broadcasting your message, it communicates that you value them.

## Six Lessons in Good Listening:

### 1. Good listening requires patience.

*Proverbs 18:2 — "A fool does not delight in understanding, but only in revealing his own mind."*

*Prov 18:13 — "He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him."*

*"A kind of listening with half an ear that presumes already to know what the other person has to say." This, he says, "is an impatient, inattentive listening, that . . . is only waiting for a chance to speak." —Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together*

*"Unfortunately, many of us are too preoccupied with ourselves when we listen. Instead of concentrating on what is being said, we are busy either deciding what to say in response or mentally rejecting the other person's point of view." —Janet Dunn, How to Become a Good Listener*

Good listening is attentive and patient. Externally relaxed and internally active.

We tend to be people who are quick to speak, it takes Spirit-powered patience to be quick to hear and keep on hearing.

### 2. Good listening is an act of love.

Poor listening rejects; good listening embraces. Poor listening diminishes the other person, while good listening invites them to exist and to matter.

*Philippians 2:3-4 — "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."*

And good listening flows from a loving heart.

*1 Corinthians 13:4 — "Love is patient, love is kind..."*

### 3. Good listening asks perceptive questions.

*Proverbs 20:5 — "A plan in the heart of man is like deep water, but a man of understanding draws it out."*

### 4. Good listening is ministry.

Sometimes releasing emotions is all that is needed to solve a problem. The speaker may neither want nor expect us to say anything in response.

*“put more emphasis on affirmation than on answers. . . . [M]any times God simply wants to use me as a channel of his affirming love as I listen with compassion and understanding.”* —Janet Dunn

*“Often a person can be helped merely by having someone who will listen to him seriously.”* —Dietrich Bonhoeffer

At times what our neighbor needs most is for someone else to know.

## **5. Good listening prepares us to speak well.**

Sometimes good listening only listens, and ministers best by keeping quiet, but typically good listening readies us to minister words of grace to precisely the place where the other is in need.

*“We should listen with the ears of God that we may speak the Word of God.”* —Dietrich Bonhoeffer

While the fool *“gives an answer before he hears”* (Proverbs 18:13), the wise person resists defensiveness, listens from a nonjudgmental stance, and trains himself not to formulate opinions until the whole story has been heard.

## **6. Good listening reflects our relationship with God.**

*“Our inability to listen well to others may be symptomatic of a chatty spirit that is droning out the voice of God. He who can no longer listen to his brother will soon be no longer listening to God either; he will be doing nothing but prattle in the presence of God too. This is the beginning of the death of the spiritual life...”* —Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Anyone who thinks that his time is too valuable to spend keeping quiet will eventually have no time for God and his brother, but only for himself and for his own follies.

Good listening may be one of the hardest things we learn to do, but we will find it worth every ounce of effort.