

## **Learning to love by listening.**

### **Biblical Tips for godly Listening that will bless others.**

1. Remember, all Christians need to learn to love and be enabled by Christ through the Holy Spirit to become godly listeners. Because of sin, it's not our default strength. James 1:19; Galatians 5:15-24
2. Godly listening communicates love to a person because it conveys their importance to you, and your desire to understand and bless them.
3. Godly listening is urgent and must be practiced as top priority in communicating with others. James 1:19
4. Godly listeners are focused understanding the heart of others, not revealing their own. Pr. 18:13
5. Godly listeners have the goal of listening to understand not just the issues that bother someone, but how it has affected their heart. Prov. 20:5; 1 Pet 3:7
6. Godly listeners don't wait to talk if they know the person is troubled but take the initiative to talk to others. Matt. 5:24-25
7. Godly listeners don't talk about themselves but the other person. Proverbs 18:2
8. Godly listeners, at times, wait to reveal their needs or desires so as to not minimize the importance of what the other person is sharing. James 1:19
9. Godly listeners keep from giving advice feedback or empathy before they know the person's situation and heart. Prov. 18:13

10. Godly listeners quickly seek forgiveness and communicate sorrow when they learn their sinful, or unwise behavior has offended the person. Matt. 5:24-25
11. Godly listeners are quick to forgive and affirm their love and compassion when they discover the other person's sins. 2 Cor. 2:7-10
12. Godly listeners don't draw premature conclusions about a person's motives or what they will say. Prov. 18:13; 1 Cor. 4:5
13. Godly listeners don't listen like an attorney but a physician. Therefore their listening is filled with questions for clarification, understanding and appropriate response to the other person's heart. Prov. 20:5
14. Good listeners don't get angry or defensive when being rebuked, but humbly respond to it. Galatians 6:1; James 1:20-21; Proverbs 15:1
15. Good listeners take to heart what they learn about others and respond with loving words, empathy and deeds appropriate to what the person is saying. James 1:22-25; 1 John 3:16-18; 1 Peter 3:7
16. Good listener's respond to angry people with grace. With compassion for those hurting; forgiveness for those offended; Grace for those weak; Encouragement and affirmation of those doubting your love. Prov. 15:1; 2 Timothy 2:24-35

**Homework Assignment:**

1. Go over the 16 statements above, reading the scriptures listed together. Talk about them. Put in your own words each of the statements
2. Circle the numbers of the above statements that you need to work on. Put a check by the ones you think you are doing OK in. Evaluate yourself and spouse (or friend) in this way and then compare your evaluations. Did they match up? What areas did your spouse not agree with your evaluation and why? Listen to him/her and write the specifics that you learn
3. Pick 2 of the specific Biblical Tips for Listening listed above that your spouse or friend thinks you need to work on. Ask them for specific examples that would encourage you in the way they listen to you. Ask clarifying questions. Ask forgiveness if you discover you have offended your spouse or friend. Talk for ten minutes each and then ask: "How could I have just been a better listener?"

to his grace, and follow him by faith. There is help and there is hope.

*God is our refuge and strength,  
an ever-present help in trouble.  
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way  
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,  
though its waters roar and foam  
and the mountains quake with their surging.  
(Ps. 46:1-3)*

## Getting Personal: Examining Your Confrontation Style

1. Critique the last time you confronted someone (spouse, child, or friend) using the *ENCOURAGE* model as a guide. In what ways did you follow a biblical model? In what ways do you need to change the way you confront others?
2. Where have you avoided confrontation, leaving issues unresolved and relationships unreconciled?
3. Are you harboring anger or bitterness toward anyone that can hinder opportunities for constructive confrontation?
4. What sin has God recently shown you to remind you of your ongoing need of his grace? Does this keep you humble as you consider the failures of others?
5. What Scripture passages help you face your sin and continue your fight with it? What are your God-given opportunities to share these with others?

## Chapter Ten

# On the King's Mission

God has given us  
the task of telling  
everyone what  
he is doing.

We're Christ's  
representatives.  
(2 Cor. 5:19-20)

AS he recounted it, I knew it was a story I wouldn't soon forget. It had all the ingredients of an ugly confrontation between a parent and an older child. There was the son's two-faced rebellion, a purposeful deception using his father's equipment to pull it off—all the typical stuff that sends parents over the edge. But this time things were different. The ugly scene didn't take place. More good than one would think possible resulted from something that started out looking terrible. What made the difference? Let me tell the story.

It was the end of an unusually busy day at work. Frank couldn't wait to get home, have a hot meal, and relax for a couple of hours before contacting some clients by e-mail later in the evening. As he drove home he muttered to himself, "I'm bushed!" But as he walked in the door, the smells of a great meal greeted him. He had time to read the paper before supper and a brief moment to relax afterwards. He was refreshed as he sat down at the computer in his home office. But when he checked the incoming e-mail, he was greeted with something that would completely alter his evening.

There was an e-mail for his son. He didn't usually read

Ryan's letters, but as he was printing it for him, Frank looked up and saw foul language in capital letters all over the computer screen. He stopped and read the letter. As he did, his heart sank. It was sexually disgusting, disrespectful, and hinted at events that, if true, made him wonder if he knew his own son.

He immediately began searching the computer for e-mails from Ryan to this friend. It wasn't long before he found the most recent letter. To his dismay, his son's letter was worse. It was so bad that Frank literally wept over its contents. He sat at the computer, stunned. "This filth was written by my son, who claims to be a committed Christian? How could he write this? How could he dare write it on the company computer? How could he put this trash out there for anyone to read?" The sadness quickly turned to anger. Red-faced, with e-mail in hand, he went to look for Ryan.

It was an act of God's grace that his son wasn't home. God had something good in mind for both of them. Frank called his wife, Ellen, to come into their bedroom. He stuck the e-mail in her face and said, "Take a look what our sweet little boy has been up to!" Like Frank, Ellen wept as she read what her son had written. "Where is he? I want to talk to him now!" Frank demanded, only to be told that Ryan was out studying. He would not be home until quite late. "I can't believe it! The one time we have to talk to him and he's not here!" Frank stormed. "Maybe it's for the best, dear. It will give us time to think," Ellen replied. Truer words have never been spoken.

As they began to talk, their perspective began to change. In a conversation that consumed most of the evening, Frank began to see the issue not so much as a personal affront but as an opportunity to minister to his son, who was clearly in the throes of great temptation and sin. Ellen was able to move beyond the goal of de-escalating Frank's anger to step back and take a more thoughtful look at the situation.

Together, they were impressed that God loved their son enough to expose his sin. The fact that Frank had needed to

use the computer that evening, the fact that the e-mail "just happened" to come in from Ryan's friend, and the fact that Ryan was not home when things were uncovered were all part of God's plan of rescue. God the Redeemer had reached down to stop Ryan from continuing on the path he had begun. And God was calling Frank and Ellen to be part of what *he* was doing in Ryan's life at that moment.

This realization filled Frank and Ellen with joy and hope even in the midst of their hurt and sadness. These perspectives gave them a whole new set of things to say to Ryan, and a completely different way to say them. They imagined what the scene would have been had Ryan been home when Frank discovered the e-mails. Frank would have exploded in anger, Ryan would have exploded back or retreated into defensive silence, and none of the good that God had planned would have taken place.

The next morning Frank woke up and sat on the edge of the bed as he spoke to Ellen: "It hit me this morning, honey. None of this is about us. This is God's moment; we are just here as his instruments. I was thinking as I was lying here that Ryan really isn't ours. He belongs to God. God placed him in our hands so that we can be God's tools in his life. I'm hurt and I know you are too, but this is a wonderful opportunity to talk to Ryan about the most important things in life. Maybe this will sound funny, but it hit me that this is a *redemptive* moment. That's what God is doing in Ryan's life. He's working to rescue Ryan from sin and death, so he would not let Ryan be successful at his sin. He let it be exposed. God stuck it in our face, not so we would be depressed and discouraged, but so we would be his instruments of redemption in Ryan's life. It is so important that we handle this thing God's way! We can't let our hurt and anger get in the way of what God is doing. I am so glad we've had time to think and pray before we talked to Ryan."

They had their talk with Ryan that evening. And it didn't begin with Frank sticking the e-mail in Ryan's face and saying,

"How dare you do this to me, you sneaky little punk!" Rather, Frank started by asking Ryan if they could pray before they talked. Immediately Frank had Ryan's attention. He had never done this before! Frank then told Ryan what he had discovered. Then, very calmly, he told Ryan the two things he was feeling that night. The first was sadness at the thought of Ryan's deception and sin. The second was joy, because the whole situation pictured so clearly how much God loved Ryan and how actively he was working to rescue him from sin. He told Ryan that at the end of it all, he hoped Ryan would be overwhelmed with the love of God. It was a long conversation and a very late night, but a real turning took place in Ryan's heart that evening. And not only in Ryan's—there was a turning in Frank's heart as well.

When Frank later told me the story, he captured the change within himself very well. "For the first time, I began to think *redemptively* about the relationships around me. It hit me that if God was using this situation to do his work in Ryan, then he was doing the same in Ellen and our other children—and me. It's given me a whole new perspective on my family—and not just my family, but my friendships too. I realized that how I handle situations—what I say—is very important. Either I am taking control and handling things in the way that seems best to me, or I am responding in a way that makes me part of what God wants to do through the circumstance."

What a nice way to capture it! We all need a *redemptive perspective* on our relationships. Before we speak, we need to ask ourselves what the Redeemer wants to accomplish in the situation, and we need to be committed to be a part of it. We are meant to be on *his* mission. It is in the workroom of everyday life that God builds faithful, godly, and mature children, and we are the tools he uses. When Frank and Ellen got hold of this perspective, it completely transformed the way they dealt with their son's sin.

The lesson Frank learned is what this chapter is about. To speak as Christ's ambassadors, we must understand God's mis-

sion and how it offers us practical guidance for the things we face with family, friendships, and the body of Christ.

## It's Been His Mission from the Beginning

From the first moments of sin's existence on the earth, God's response has been redemption. This is clear in his words to the Serpent after the Fall.

So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,

"Cursed are you above all the livestock

and all the wild animals!

You will crawl on your belly

and you will eat dust

all the days of your life.

And I will put enmity

between you and the woman,

and between your offspring and hers;

he will crush your head,

and you will strike his heel." (Gen. 3:14-15)

In other words, God says to the Serpent, "I will not leave things as they are. Through the woman I will bring a Redeemer who will crush you and your work through his own suffering." God's response to Satan's lies and Adam and Eve's rebellion is not just to judge, but to redeem. Here God introduces the plan that unfolds throughout the rest of Scripture. The Bible is the story of God's work to redeem a people for himself, who will live forever to his glory. We are called to be part of this great work, which means that we must think about the events and people we encounter in a way that enfolds them (and us) in God's story of redemption. The only hope

*Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD. (Lev. 19:15-18)*

What does this passage say about our relationships? God is telling us that it is impossible for us to live as if sin doesn't exist. Because we are sinners and live in relationships with other sinners, sin will always be an issue. It is the inescapable reality of human life. The question is whether we are dealing with sin God's way (redemptively) or according to the desires and purposes of our own sinful hearts.

## Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

Perhaps the first, most fundamental thing to notice in this passage is that the command to handle the sins of others God's way is directly connected to the command to love your neighbor as yourself. Loving your neighbors as yourself means many things, but of one thing we can be sure: it means dealing with their sin in a disciplined and distinctly biblical way. It means recognizing that we have been called by God to be part of what he is doing in their lives. We *are not* free to handle difficulties in whatever way seems best to us. When we are wronged, the thing of highest importance is not that we feel satisfied or avenged, but that we respond according to God's plan and for his glory.

As we recognize this calling, we do not give in to the many sins of heart and tongue that are detailed in this passage, even though they are such a temptation when we have been sinned against. Remember, we are dealing with the sins of others all the time. It will be this way until the Lord returns. Until then, loving your neighbor as yourself has this redemptive quality to it. It means that you deal with sin not simply as a victim, but as a servant of the One who redeems.

Let's face it: it is hard for us to love our neighbor as our-

selves even when we haven't been sinned against! We are all prone to be self-centered, to want our will done our way, and to live for our own satisfaction and comfort. It's so easy to give in to irritation and impatience when in some way our will has not been done. I am not even referring to situations when we have encountered serious sin. No, we have trouble loving people who are only guilty of failing to please us!

Let me give you an example from my own life. One of the things I enjoy doing is going to bed at approximately the same time as Luella. She is my closest companion and my best friend, and I enjoy those final moments of warmth between us at the end of the day. Luella has a very melodic voice and I love having her voice be the last thing I hear before I go to sleep. These moments spent lying close to her and quietly talking are very precious.

One evening at about ten o'clock, I came up from our family room to head for bed, with the assumption that Luella would be heading in that direction as well. When I entered the kitchen, I couldn't believe what I saw! There was Luella, with a bucket and a brush, kneeling on the kitchen floor, getting ready to scrub it. Immediately I was filled with irritation. I couldn't believe she was doing this to me! Didn't she know that this was our special time? Did the floor have to be done *now*? It looked to me as if she was more committed to a clean floor than she was to her own husband.

Fortunately, I didn't say all the things I was thinking. But I did say, with an edge in my voice, "I can't believe you're doing this now!" as I went off to bed. I have thought about that scene many times since. What has hit me is not just my impatience, but the utter selfishness that lay behind it. As I looked at Luella, I did not see a loving and dedicated woman who also wanted to be in bed, but who had seen a job that needed to be done. I know what went through her head. That floor drives her crazy! With six people in the house, it always seems dirty. Here was an opportunity to get it done, because it was later in the evening and the kitchen traffic was light. Because of her

loving dedication to her family, she seized the opportunity without grumble or complaint.

But as I looked at Luella that night, that is not what I saw. I saw a wife who was *supposed* to be heading to bed with me! There was no thanks to Luella or God in my heart. I went upstairs irritated that I had to go to bed alone because Luella had chosen the floor over me. Ridiculous? Embarrassing? Yes, but perhaps this is the power of this example. We struggle with the *little* events of life. We struggle to communicate in the midst of them in a godly way, even when we are *not* being sinned against. We lash out with angry, unkind words when the bathroom is occupied, or when the car is being used, or when someone else has beaten us to the remote control or the last donut, or when the newspaper is not there when we want to read it, or when someone is making us late, or when we don't get the appreciation we think we deserve, or when someone butts in line in front of us, or bumps us in a hallway, or forgets to leave the door unlocked, or neglects to put gas in the car, or stays too long on the phone . . . the list could go on and on!

This is where we live every day. If we respond selfishly to the normal give-and-take of relationships, how will we ever respond redemptively in the face of *real* sin? If we are not loving our neighbors in the normal course of things, how will we ever do it when the stakes are much, much higher? Again, we need to be gripped by the grandeur of our calling and the demands it makes on our daily talk. And we need to hold onto the truth that God has already given us everything we need to do what he has called us to do (2 Peter 1:3-4)!

## How Will We Deal with Sin?

Since we are all affected by one another's sin in some way, we are all dealing with sin daily. The issue Leviticus puts before us is this: Are we dealing with it God's way or ours? Make no mistake, there is a stark contrast between the two.

Leviticus lays out for us the ways we can respond to the sin around us. In the center is the middle way of love, the road God has called us to travel in our relationships with one another. On either side are the valleys of hatred: on one side the passive forms of hatred and on the other the more active forms. We are commanded to stay on the middle road of love and not allow ourselves to fall off into either valley.

The valley of passive hatred includes inner attitudes of favoritism and partiality (Lev. 19:15), carrying hatred in your heart (v. 17), bearing a grudge (v. 18), and harboring desires of vengeance (v. 18). Clearly, none of these attitudes are consistent with God's call to love our neighbors as ourselves. Each reflects heart responses of self-love and anger against those who have not pleased us or satisfied our desires. Here our heart responses are shaped by our selfish expectations, not the glory of sharing in God's work on earth. There is no higher calling, yet it is one we easily forget in the press of life.

On the active side of hatred are things like treating people with favoritism and partiality (v. 15), judging others unfairly (v. 15), spreading slander (v. 16), and seeking revenge (v. 18). Again, these responses are the polar opposite of what God asks of us.

God does not want us to fall off the pathway of love on either side. Dwelling on someone's sin is an offense against God's calling to us. Desiring to see someone hurt the way we have been hurt is an offense against his calling. Keeping a record of wrongs is an offense against his calling. So is gossiping about someone's sin. Acting out any form of revenge is an offense against his calling. Yet if we examine our lives, we will find many of these responses present (see Matt. 18:15-19).

The wife who gives her husband the "silent treatment" when he has done something hurtful has responded vengefully and, in so doing, has forsaken her redemptive calling. The daughter who has been hurt by her parents and goes to her room, shuts the door, and recounts in graphic detail all the ways her family has failed her, has forsaken her calling.

The Christian brother who shares a juicy piece of gossip in the guise of a prayer request has fallen off the middle road of love and forsaken his calling. The husband who goes to work angry that his family made him late, who fantasizes how much easier life would be without them, has offended God's call.

How easy it is to fall off the road on either side! How hard and how high is God's call to love! Let's be humble and honest about our struggle to love one another in the way Leviticus depicts. Let's admit the many ways we fall off the pathway he has called for us to walk. Let's confess our shortcomings to God and each other, committing ourselves to specific acts of repentance.

## The Middle Way of Love

The middle way of love is not about being nice or benignly tolerant of those we see doing wrong. Love is active! God wants us to be his agents of rescue when we see another's sin. He calls us to judge our neighbor fairly and to rebuke each other in a way that is frank and clear.

Having said this, please recognize that we are *not* told to be self-righteously judgmental, or to act like detectives, hunting for all the sin we can uncover in other people's lives. Nor are we called to be verbally abusive, coloring the confrontation with name-calling and other unkind characterizations. Rather, God is saying that when *he* chooses to expose another's sin to us, we are to respond with self-sacrificing, redemptive love. We go to our neighbor and honestly and clearly confront him with his sin—not so that he would submit to our judgments, but so that he would submit to God's and seek his mercy and grace. We want God, his will, and his mercy to loom large in the conversation—not us.

Something else is radical about this passage. It says that if we fail to do this, if we love ourselves more than we love God and others, if we allow ourselves to fall into those valleys of ha-

tered, we will share in the guilt of our neighbor's sin! Yes, Cain, we are our brother's keeper (Gen. 4:9)! God's call could not be stronger. To fail to respond to another's sin with redemptive love is to share in his guilt. As God says through the prophet Ezekiel, if the watchman sees the enemy coming and fails to warn the people, their blood is on his hands (Ezek. 33:1-9). To be part of God's redemptive rescue is not only a high calling but a moral obligation.

We need the hearts of dedicated watchmen. The watchman's job is not to force people to respond to his warning; it is simply to give ample and timely warning. He is to make sure that his warning is understood and to entreat people to act upon it. Having done these things, his mission is complete. He has fulfilled his calling.

Our calling is to warn others to seek the protective, rescuing care of the Redeemer. Frank and Ellen didn't miss their calling. They entered Ryan's room as watchmen and their rebuke came as a loving warning that the Lord used to turn Ryan's heart. Everything they said flowed out of a heartfelt desire to be part of what God was doing. Don't miss the fact that before God could use their talk to work in Ryan's heart, he first had to work in theirs. And so it will be with us.

Finally, notice that this passage is punctuated twice with the words, "I am the LORD." God is saying, "This is the King speaking and this is *my* will for you. I am the LORD, and I am calling you to love one another this way. There is no room for debate or excuse or question. I am the LORD. Now go and be my instruments of warning and rescue to those I have placed near you."

## The Great Commission

One of the clearest calls to be part of the King's mission on earth is found in Matthew 28. After the resurrection, Christ asked his disciples to meet him on a mountain in Galilee.



Here he spoke words of commission with which every believer is familiar, yet I wonder if Frank and Ellen would have thought that this commission applied to what they were doing with Ryan. I wonder if we see its application to *our* daily relationships. I am persuaded that these words have lost much of their power because of the way they are typically interpreted.

Consider Christ's great mission call to his disciples and his church, and ask yourself, What is this ministry? What impact does it have on our daily conversations? What demands does it make on the world of talk?

*Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matt. 28:16-20)*

Christ stands before his disciples as the conquering King. Having completed his mission on earth and soon to be seated at the right hand of the Father, he lays claim to his authority and calls his followers to take his message to all the nations of the earth. We have all heard gripping appeals to be part of world missions based on this passage. Those appeals are appropriate and needed. But please notice that if we only interpret the passage this way, it leaves most of the church of Jesus Christ without a commission! That simply does not do justice to what is recorded here.

When God's people limit this passage to the world of foreign missions, they miss much of its meaning. The same thing happens when we limit the passage to a career ministry context. It becomes a passage about the full-time, career, foreign missionary who has accepted the call of the Great Commis-

sion! Certainly this passage *includes* these applications, but there is more here as well.

I believe that the church has been weakened by its tendency to neglect the second half of this commission. Jesus calls us not only to go and make disciples, but also to teach them what it means to live lives that are obedient to every command of Christ. It is a call to exhort, encourage, and teach so that we would be progressively freed from old patterns of sin and conformed instead to the image of Christ. The Great Commission is not only a call to bring people *into* the kingdom of light, but also a call to teach them to *live* as children of light once they are there. When we lose sight of this second half of the Great Commission ("teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you"), we lose sight of its claim on our everyday talk.

## The Great Commission as a Lifestyle

Now, it is important to ask whose ministry this is and when and where it will be carried out. The answer all over the New Testament is that this is the ministry of every believer, to be done wherever and whenever needed. It is not only a call to a career of ministry, but more fundamentally to a *lifestyle* of ministry. This commission keeps us from divorcing ministry from our normal, everyday lives. Where do we teach and learn to live as obedient children of God? Not just in the formal programs of the church, but in everyday life experiences, where we wrestle with the temptations of the enemy and the desires of the sinful nature. So the husband and wife relationship becomes a forum for Great Commission ministry. The parent-child relationship becomes a forum for Great Commission ministry. Relationships in the body of Christ become a forum for Great Commission ministry, a commission that is not only about justification, but about progressive sanctification as well.

# Worship Notes

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Thank you, your submission/order has been received

The following details were submitted:

## Details

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**Worship Notes Tip**

Grace Church of Napa Valley: Worship service at 10 a.m. Adult Sunday school classes at 8:45 a.m.; Children's Sunday School at 8:45 a.m. and Children's Church at 10 a.m. Nursery and preschool care available. Junior high and High school ministry meets Tuesdays at 7 p.m. at 3765 Solano Ave., Napa. 255-4033, GraceNapa.org.