

12. Creativity and Effective Listening

If we are sensitive to His leading and walk through the doors He opens for us to minister to others, Christ will use our God-given creativity to help us make a great impact in the lives of others. One of the key things Christ uses to help us become more creative is helping us learn to become more effective listeners. The more accurately we hear what a person is saying, the more effective we can be in ministering to that person.

In James 1:19-20, we read, “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” The word that is translated “hear” means, *to attend to, to consider what has been said, to understand or to perceive the sense of what is said*. The same word is used, in 1 John 5:14-15, to talk about the way Christ hears our prayers. Those verses say, “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.” We know that Christ hears and answers our prayers when we pray for the things the Bible says are His will.

In order to answer our prayers, Christ listens to us and understands what we are saying in our prayers. He knows exactly what we have said for two reasons. First, He is God and knows all things. Second, He listens carefully, because He loves us and is concerned to answer our prayers. Careful listening is one of the results of love, because it is essential in knowing how to most effectively minister to others.

Christ showed that He was already a careful listener very early in His life. When Christ was twelve years old, His parents took Him to Jerusalem, and then left the city without Him. When they realized He was missing, they returned to Jerusalem. Luke 2:46-47 says, “Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers.” First, we see that Christ listened carefully. Second, Christ asked questions. Only then did Christ begin to share with those who were gathered there. As a child, Christ was able to be an effective teacher to adults, because He had focused on listening and asking questions.

Years later, Christ showed the disciples the importance of listening as He carefully listened to them throughout His ministry. In fact, Christ even listened to the questions people asked His disciples. In Mark 2:16, we read, “And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, ‘How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?’” Verse 17 shows that Christ both heard, and answered, this question. “When Jesus heard it, He said to them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.’” Christ did not spend all of His time talking. Here, we see that He chose to listen to the scribes and Pharisees talk with His disciples.

Christ also chose to listen carefully to the disciples as they reported what they said and what they did. Christ sent the twelve to minister. When they returned, Mark 6:30 says, “Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught.”

Christ showed love by asking them to tell what they had done. He showed love by asking them to tell what they had taught. He gave them as much time as they wanted to talk about what they had said and done. He even took them aside so they could rest and talk together some more. Mark 6:31 says, “And He said to them, ‘Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.’ For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.”

Christ also chose to listen carefully to others when they talked with Him. In Mark 12:28-34, we see that a scribe asked Christ what was the first commandment of all. After Christ answered, the scribe said, in verses 32 and 33, “‘Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.’” Christ listened carefully to what the scribe said, because verse 34 tells us, “Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’ But after that no one dared question Him.” By the answer he gave, Christ recognized that this was one scribe who was thinking carefully about the teachings of Christ.

Luke 24 tells us that Christ also chose to listen carefully to His disciples after the resurrection. Christ showed two disciples that He wanted to listen to them, by the question He asked in Luke 24:17. That verse says, “And He said to them, ‘What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?’” By listening carefully, Christ recognized both their words, and their feelings. One of them answered in Luke 24:18. “Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, ‘Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?’”

Although Christ knew exactly what had happened, He chose to listen carefully to the two, so they could tell Him how they felt about what had happened. Christ asked a second question. Luke 24:19-24 says, “And He said to them, ‘What things?’ So they said to Him, ‘The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see.’” Christ chose to listen carefully and then answered them from the Word of God.

Christ teaches a key lesson about careful listening. If we listen carefully, we can share the appropriate Scriptures that will meet the needs of a person. Luke 24:25-27 says, “Then He said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” Christ chose to answer them by sharing the Scripture. We see the results in Luke 24:32. “And they said to one another, ‘Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?’” By answering from the Scriptures, Christ built a fire in the

hearts of these men that burned for the rest of their lives.

In fact, these men show that Christ caused them to become creative, so they could share with others what they had learned. Luke 24:33-35 says, “So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, ‘The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!’ And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread.” Because Christ had taken time to listen carefully to them, they became creative witnesses for Christ.

James shows us, by the way he listened, why he had become the leader of the church in Jerusalem. In Acts 15, the Jerusalem Council came together to discuss the question of whether or not the Gentiles had to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses. There was not an immediate agreement on this issue. In fact, Acts 15:6-7 says, “Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: ‘Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.’” Here, we see that there was much dispute before any of the leaders even spoke.

Then, Peter spoke and told what had happened at the house of Cornelius. Paul and Barnabas told what God had done among the Gentiles. Finally, James spoke and summarized everything that had been said. He then showed that the Old Testament prophets were in agreement with what Peter had said. Only after doing all of those things did James suggest a creative solution to the dispute.

Acts 15:19-22 says, “‘Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.’ Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren.” James listened carefully to everything each person said, shared the Scriptures that applied, and presented a creative solution that pleased everyone. The entire leadership team reached a creative solution that still impacts the church today.

The Lord wants to use your creativity to help others grow and mature in their own spiritual lives. That will happen increasingly as you continue to develop your listening skills, so the Lord can use you to teach Biblical principles and help people find creative solutions to the things they face in their lives. May the Lord richly bless you!