

3. Learning How to Be Good Listeners

Many people, including many Christians, talk much more than they listen. However, a very important part of our ministry to others is learning to really listen. Unless we really hear what a person is trying to tell us, we will not be able to share the Biblical principles that will really help that person in his or her life. For that reason, a key part of our ministry, to our physical and spiritual children, is to help them learn how to become effective listeners. The second part of our topic today will help us to learn Biblical principles for becoming a good listener.

In our previous topic, we saw that God does not tempt us to sin. We saw that we sin when we yield our lives to our own sinful desires instead of yielding our lives moment-by-moment to the Holy Spirit. Instead of God tempting us to sin, James 1:16-17 says, “Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” James wrote to the Jewish Christians that were scattered in various countries. He wrote to them as beloved brothers. He did not want the Jewish Christians to be deceived by their own choices or by anyone who might say that God caused sin to happen. He wanted these Jewish Christians to understand that God gives us the things that are good instead of inviting us to do evil.

As we come to verse seventeen, we see that every good gift comes from God. The word that is translated “good” speaks of something that is *good in its character and beneficial in its effects*. The first word that is translated “gift” speaks of *the act of giving*. Here, we see that everything that is good in its character and beneficial in its effect is given to us by God. As a result, we cannot boast about anything that we do that is beneficial because we are just doing what the Lord has gifted us to do for the benefit of others. The second word that is translated “gift” speaks about *the kind of gift that God gives to us*. The word that is translated “perfect” speaks of *the fact that every gift God gives us is complete or perfect*. God gives us good gifts and the gifts that He gives us are complete.

We see that these gifts that are given come down from the Father of lights. God is called the Father of lights, because He is the Creator. God said, in Genesis 1:3-5, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw the light, that *it was good*; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day.” Here, we see that the very first thing that God created was light. Then, in Genesis 1:16, we read, “Then God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. *He made the stars also.*” Here, we see that God is also the Creator of the light bearers.

However, God is more than just the Creator of physical light. He is also the Creator of spiritual light. The Lord also gives spiritual light. In John 8:12, we read, “Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.’” Then, God told Paul, in Acts 26:17-18, “I will deliver you from the *Jewish* people, as well as *from* the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of

sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.” John 1:9 says that Christ is the true Light who gives light to everyone who comes into the world. Because He is the true Light, there is no variation or shadow of turning in Him.

James 1:18 goes on to say, “Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.” Here, we see that it was by His own will that the Lord brought us forth. We see that Christ determined to bring us out of our spiritual darkness and into His light. Christ caused us to come to faith through the word of truth. Psalm 119:160 says, “The entirety of Your word *is* truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments *endures* forever.” Then, Romans 10:17 says, “So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” As Christ prayed, the night before He died, He said, in John 17:17, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.” In these verses, we see that the Word of God is both the way we come to faith in Christ, and then, the way that we continue to grow as Christians.

God chose us, by His will, because He chose us to be the firstfruits of His creatures. The firstfruits are the first of the crop and the best of the crop that a farmer gathers from his crops. In Romans 8:23, we read, “Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.” As Christians, we have a much greater privilege than the Old Testament saints, because their sins were only covered until Christ came. In contrast, our sins were taken away, at the moment of salvation, and we received the Holy Spirit as the down payment and guarantee of our salvation.

It is also the Holy Spirit who gives us the power to listen, and speak, in a way that will bring glory to God. That is why James 1:19-20 goes on to say, “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.” Many people in the world never really listen to others. Christ wants us, as Christians, to be different. The word that is translated “hear” means *to listen carefully so that one understands what is really being said*. The first requirement to hear, in this way, is to be quick to listen.

Many people never listen, because they want to give their own opinions. Proverbs 18:2 says, “A fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart.” In contrast, Proverbs 17:27 says, “He who has knowledge spares his words, *and* a man of understanding is of a calm spirit.” Here, we see that a wise person takes time to carefully listen to what others are saying. We want to show our children, by our example, the importance of taking time to carefully listen to what each person is saying. A person who has true understanding will also have a calm spirit. We will have a calm spirit if we give others the opportunity to give their opinions but do not take those opinions personally.

That is why James says that we are to be slow to speak and slow to wrath. Proverbs 15:1 says, “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” People will seldom listen to an angry person who speaks harsh words. People who are angry often speak harsh words. In contrast, Proverbs 16:21 says, “The wise in heart will be called prudent, and sweetness of the lips increases learning.” If we help our children learn to speak with sweetness, other people will listen to them,

and they will have the opportunity to teach others as a result.

If we really listen and are also slow to speak, that will help us to be slow to wrath. This is very important, because we see that wrath does not produce the righteousness of God. The word that is translated “wrath” can speak of *anger or temper* or *it can speak of the punishment that a person gives because of his or her anger*. This means that it is very important to distinguish between punishment and discipline. We will punish if we are angry at the person. In contrast, discipline is for the purpose of correction and is done with love. Galatians 6:1 says, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” Here, we see that even when a person is caught in the very act of sin, our goal is to restore the relationship of that person to the Lord in a spirit of gentleness.

True discipline of our children will happen most effectively if we help them understand their choices and the consequences of those choices. We help them to understand that if they make wise choices, there will be good consequences. We help them to understand that if they make sinful choices, they will reap the bad consequences of those sinful choices. In Joshua 24:15, Joshua told the people of Israel, “And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” Here, we see that Joshua told the people they had three choices. Then, in Joshua 24:20, Joshua told the people the consequences if they chose to serve foreign gods. That verse says, “...If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good.” They could serve God and be blessed or serve foreign gods and experience judgment.

James encourages us to make wise choices, in James 1:21, where we read, “Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” We are encouraged to make the choice to lay aside filthiness (things that defile) and the overflow of wickedness (law breaking). These will bring evil consequences. Instead, we are encouraged to make the choice to receive the Word of God with a gentle spirit. That will produce a good consequence, because, as we receive the Word of God with a gentle spirit, it will save our souls. John 10:10 shows the results of this choice when it says, “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.” We help our children learn how to show others that they have a choice. We help others understand that we want to offer others the same choice Moses offered the people of Israel, in Deuteronomy 30:19, where we read, “...I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live...” May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to be good listeners and make wise choices.