

# How to listen so others will talk

Message for Sunday, January 19, 2020  
by Bruce Fraser

James 1:19-20, Today's English Version:  
Remember this, my dear friends! Everyone must be quick to listen, but slow to speak and slow to become angry. Human anger does not achieve God's righteous purpose.

**Scripture:** James 1:19-20

## Children's Message:

The Bible says that it's important for us to listen. I wonder why that is... Any ideas? *Listen for responses.*

Did your Mom or Dad ever say to you, "Don't touch the stove; it's hot!"? What would happen if you didn't listen? Or maybe you did listen, but didn't obey? *You'd get burned when you touched the hot burner.*

So it's a good thing to listen to your parents. They're telling you things because they love you. Even when you have to sit in a corner because you've been bad, they do that because they love you. They're trying to teach you to be good.

That's why we read in the Bible: so we can learn from God. God loves us and wants to teach us to be good.

## Message "How to listen so others will talk"

Leo Buscaglia was an author famous for his books about loving and caring for others. He was getting on an airplane one day when the stewardess shouted with delight. "I've wanted to meet you for such a long time. May I talk with you later?" she asked.

When she got a break, she sat next to him and frantically told her story—a cheating husband, a disturbed child, a feeling of despondency and helplessness, a fear of being unable to cope.

After a long while she stopped in mid-sentence and sighed deeply with relief. She wiped her tears and sat up in the seat. "Oh, Dr. Buscaglia," she said, "you've helped me so much."

The interesting thing is that Buscaglia had not said a word!<sup>1</sup> What a tremendous ministry it is just to listen. That's what I'm going to focus on in today's message.

"Everyone must be quick to listen, but slow to speak." Maybe you've heard the saying which comes down to same thing: "God gave you two ears and one mouth. You should listen twice as much as you talk."

OK, so we already know this. You aren't going to learn anything new in this message. But the primary purpose of preaching isn't to teach information. The primary purpose of preaching is to bring people to an awareness of God's presence, God's love, God's promises and God's commandments, and to encourage people to respond.

So I just want to show you a few things from the Scriptures about listening, and then leave it to you to put these things into practice.

## 1) Listening means caring

Dale Carnegie sold millions of copies of his book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, all based on the incredibly simple premise: the key to getting people to like you is to listen to them.

The reason this works is that in a typical conversation, neither person is listening closely. Instead, each one is thinking, "What am I going to say next?" This is especially true if you're arguing; all listening has ceased, and your attention is focussed on coming up with a winning rebuttal.

What a refreshing difference it can be, then, to be in a conversation where people are really listening. It's a sign that you think the other person is important. It's a sign of respect. It's a sign that you care about that person.

Romans 12:9-10, New Living Translation:

**Don't just pretend that you love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Stand on the side of the good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honouring each other.**

Real listening means... well, *really* listening, not just pretending. Here are some examples of people

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Leo Buscaglia's book *Bus 9 to Paradise*.

who may act like they're listening, but the truth is they're not.

Here's the situation. You notice that an friend looks upset. You ask, "Is there anything wrong?" The person looks at you, to see whether you're really interested or just making conversation, whether it's safe to open up to you. He or she then says, "My dog who has been my companion for 10 years got hit by a car yesterday. I had to have him put down. And the driver of the car didn't even stop." How do you respond?

Here are nine different ways you might respond to your friend. Most of them are not helpful.

Style	Example of response
1. Denial of feelings	"Hey, come on—it's only a dog! It's not like your child died. You shouldn't get so upset over that."
2. Discuss philosophy or religion	"Well, that's how life goes. It must have been his time."
3. Give advice	What you need right now is to go and get another dog to take his place. It will help you get over it. I'll come with you, if you'd like.
4. Ask questions	Did you get the licence number of the car? What type of car was it? What exactly was wrong with the dog? Couldn't the vet operate?
5. Defend the other person	The driver was probably in a hurry. Why wasn't the dog on a leash, anyway?
6. Pity	Oh you poor thing. I'm so sorry. Isn't that awful! Here, have some chocolate.
7. Amateur psychology	That's normal for you to feel sad. According to Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, the next stage of grieving you'll go through will be anger. Are you starting to feel angry yet?
8. Let's talk about me!	That happened to me once. I had this beautiful grey Persian cat—her name was Whiskers, because she used to rub her chin up against my face, and her whiskers would scratch me—

	well, one day I was outside playing with her, we used to play this game...
9. Empathy	I can see why you're upset. It sounds like your dog was a real close friend.

The last response is an example of empathy. Empathy communicates that you're listening, *and* that you understand. It doesn't mean that you have the same feelings (that's what sympathy means). It's not like that ultimate insult, "I know just how you feel..." It means, "I hear you, and I'm trying to understand. I care." When you listen, it means that you care.

## 2) Listening means patience

The book of Job in the Bible tells the life of a person named Job: a person who loved God and lived for God, yet who was hit with a series of tragedies. His whole life seemed a disaster.

Job 2:11-13, New Living Translation:

When [Job's friends] heard of the tragedy he had suffered, they got together and travelled from their homes to comfort and console him. When they saw Job from a distance, they scarcely recognized him. Wailing loudly, they tore their robes and threw dust into the air over their heads to demonstrate their grief. Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and nights. And no one said a word, for they saw that his suffering was too great for words.

The point here is simple: listening takes time. Sitting in silence for seven days sounds kind of extreme to me. But it just shows all the more how absolutely important it is to take time to listen to someone.

Let's say I'm visiting you, and I've already been there an hour. You're telling me something very important about your life, but it's a very long story and I have something else I was supposed to be doing by now. Maybe that other thing isn't so important, and I can throw my schedule out the window. But sometimes we have commitments that we need to honour. Have you ever been in that situation, where you need to get away, but it's awkward?

Let's say I casually stretch my arms, and when I bring my left arm back down in my lap, I casually turn it so my watch is facing up, so I can casually

glance down at it to take a peek. Uh oh! I'm already ten minutes late, and you're just getting warmed up. I become aware of my breathing, how long each breath seems to take. Your voice becomes a drone. You see what's happening? The more conscious I become of the time, the less conscious I am of you. I'm not really listening any more. And if I think I can do all this without you being aware of what I'm doing, what a fool I am.

Both of us are far better off if I interrupt and say, "Excuse me, please. I'm very sorry, but I have to go right now. You are very important to me, and can I please come back tomorrow or some other day to finish this conversation?"

### 3) Listening means love

The 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is often read at weddings, because it talks all about love. But the truth is, that passage has nothing at all to do with weddings or marriage. That passage is part of a larger section, chapters 12-14 which focus on relationships within the church.

I'm going to read that passage now, but everywhere that it says "love," I'm going to substitute the word "listen."

1 Corinthians 13:1-7, Today's English Version (with amendments):

I may be able to speak the languages of human beings and even of angels, but if I do not listen, my speech is no more than a noisy gong or a clanging bell. I may have the gift of inspired preaching; I may have all knowledge and understand all secrets; I may have all the faith needed to move mountains—but if I do not listen, I am nothing. I may give away everything I have, and even give up my body to be burned—but if I do not listen, this does me no good.

Listening is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud; listening is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; listening does not keep a record of wrongs; listening is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth. Listening never gives up; and its faith, hope, and patience never fail.

When you listen to someone, you are showing them, in a way that no amount of talking could ever express, that you love them.

### Next Steps:

- Pray: Thank God that he listens to you when you pray.
- But is the reverse true? Do you listen to God? When you read the Bible, or when you pray, or maybe at a random moment in the day, do you get a sense that God is telling you something? Do you listen and obey, or just shove the thought out of mind?
- Practise listening. Next time you're talking with someone, forget about the brilliant things you were going to say. Just listen, and follow the thread of the other person.