**The Wisdom of Actively Listening**

(Dr. Bill Richardson 3/4/20)

My son, if you receive my words

* and treasure up my commandments with you,
* making your ear attentive to wisdom
* and inclining your heart to understanding;
* yes, if you call out for insight
* and raise your voice for understanding,
* if you seek it like silver
* and search for it as for hidden treasures,

then you will understand the fear of the Lord

and find the knowledge of God. Proverbs 2:1-5 ESV

Note the highly active language in the verses, above: making your ear attentive, calling out, seeking and ***searching as if for riches and hidden treasure***, etc. In the strongest possible way this highly active language tells us that acquiring wisdom is far from passive, to the contrary it is a most active endeavor. The process of wisdom is an active form of listening. Energized, active listening is a way of being toward our God. Listening is the ***way of*** wisdom and the ***way to*** wisdom, i.e., a wise person is a listener *par excellence*, and wisdom is obtained and enlarged by the very act of listening.

First and foremost, listening is endeavoring to hear our God’s instruction (note the Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4-6, below\*). However, it is also a general way of living in the midst of God’s creation and among God’s image bearers. Fervent attentiveness is a fundamental way of being for which we are made and to which we have been called. A wise person listens to advice (Proverbs 9:9\*\*). A wise counselor listens before answering (Proverbs 18:13). We are commanded to be quick to hear and slow to speak (James 1:19).

***\*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the Lord is one [****or “the LORD alone is our God”****]. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.***

***\*\* Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser…***

Of course, we are all also called to be teachers, wise guides, “disciplers” of one another. We are called to give answers. This too is a fundamental relationship process; a basic way of being, not toward our Father, but toward his children. Yet, the order of these two fundamental relationship activities is never in question, ***“If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.” Proverbs 18:13*** Teachers must be listeners first thereby obtaining wisdom or they will have nothing to teach. Teachers must first listen to their students thereby learning what their students know and lack and how to best communicate at a level intelligible to them.

(Consider Deuteronomy 6:7. Immediately after the mandate to hear our LORD, love our LORD, and retain his word, we are told to teach our children his word. How can we possibly, effectively teach children of different personalities and different cognitive developmental abilities? It is by listening carefully to them that we know how to teach them.)

**The two types of listening**

1. Student listening – the posture of a child with our Father and the posture of sitting at the feet of a loving and loved teacher who is an image bearer gifted to us by our Father, i.e., listening to God.

This kind of listening is a primary theme of the book of Proverbs, woven through it from beginning to end. (See Proverbs 1:5, 9:8-9, 10:8, 12:15, 15:31, 18:15, 19:25.)

1. Teacher listening – parenting, pastoring, discipling (evangelizing), counseling, i.e., listening like God.

This brings us to our topic of the day, “Listening as Act of Love.”

**Listening as an Act of Love**

**Listening Type 2 Defined**

Endeavoring to understand what it is like to be the other.

**Listening Type 2 Explained**

**Like Listening Type 1:**

1. It is active, not passive, often requiring great expenditure of energy.
2. It requires time.
3. It involves seeing and hearing, i.e., it has a posture that includes eye contact.
4. It involves temporarily suspending words and temporarily suspending rapid assumptions.

Consider the value of recognized ignorance, i.e., humble curiosity. *[Example will be given, here.]*

**Unlike Listening Type 1:**

1. It is a necessary precursor to helpful instruction, i.e., it always precedes helpful answers. (Proverbs 18:13)

Aslo consider Proverbs 18:2. A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.

1. It is a necessary answer to a fundamental human need and a necessary antidote to a fundamental human pain
2. It is not good for man to be alone. Genesis 2:18
3. The heart knows its own bitterness, and no stranger shares its joy. Proverbs 14:10
4. The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry. Psalm 34:15
5. When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them... Psalm 34:17
6. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Psalm 34:18

(This is not just about physical proximity, consider John 11:35 and Romans 12:15.)

1. I have no doubt that human non-physical pain is more profound than the physical. And human non-physical pain always involves relational loss and isolation.
2. It requires an attitude of servanthood, i.e., laying aside the privileges and prerogatives of personhood. Therefore, it is a demonstration of that superlative love of our God and Savior.
3. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. *[…worthy of preferential treatment. F.F. Burce]* … Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, *[laid aside the privileges and prerogatives of diety. F.F. Bruce]* by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death… Philippians 2:2-8
4. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. I John 3:16
5. When you truly listen to understand you temporarily lay aside those concerns that are at the forefront of your own lives, *de facto.* In so doing you are laying down your life for another. You are loving another with God’s love.