

## Weekly Devotional by Pastor Ken Nabi

June 21, 2010

### Be Quick to Listen

*Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak. . . James 1:19*

James opens his letter with challenging remarks to his readers. Just as he concludes his beginning remarks about how a Christian responds to difficult days (1:1-18), he shoots out this torpedo of application—“be quick to listen.” At first, these seem like two strange words to put together. Listen quickly? When one thinks of listening, we mostly think of a passive stance. But James wants his listeners to become what counselors call “active listeners.”

Active listening involves asking questions. To live a life that is “quick to listen” means that the person has their radar up looking for ways to connect with other people and understand what is going on within the interior of their soul. Being a good listener means asking good questions that allow a person to tell more of their story. Being an active listener often involves noticing elements of a story and picking up on the emotion or implied elements. Great listeners often help a person tell more of their story and tell it in ways that cause them to feel safe and heard.

Listening is a lost art in my opinion. In counseling sessions, it never ceases to amaze me how people can look at someone, watch their lips move and speak, and truly have no idea what the person has just said. The number one reason people do not “hear” what someone says flows from an internal dialogue that has already begun. We all listen and simultaneously begin to formulate a response from within our own experience and at that very moment, we cease to really listen to what the person is telling us.

It seems ironic that in a day of instant communication via texting, email, and cell phones that we rarely feel heard and truly understood. I think this is why blogging is so popular as it allows a person to speak and convey what they truly think and feel. Then, if anyone responds it is profoundly meaningful because there is sense of feeling heard. My wife reads a few blogs which are deep and rich with insight and life meaning. She loves to visit the sights of other women who love God and speak from an authentic heart.

James does not simply stop with active listening though. He commends that a person be “slow to speak.” A person who takes seriously the first admonition around listening will by default become a person who speaks less. Great listeners don’t dominate discussions, they facilitate them. The impulse to be heard is a strong one that does not go down without a fight. Young children push hard to be noticed and the center of attention in a home. It takes a maturing process in life that causes a child to understand that other people have things going on in their lives worth listening. Sadly, some little boys and girls grow up thinking that the world is supposed to only listen to them. These are sad people to be around because the conversation is only one way.

Do you dominate discussions and make most of the story telling about your self? Are you comfortable having a conversation that is all about someone else and developing deeper understanding of that person’s life? How would your friends rate your ability to listen and restrain speaking?

Proverbs 10:19 says that if words are many, so is sin. Where words are few, there is less of a chance to sin. Restraining your impulse to speak about yourself gives you freedom to make life about the betterment of someone else. I think deep down, this life effort of being slow to speak and quick to listen fundamentally prepares us for relationship with our Creator who wants to speak into our lives and give us direction on a daily basis. Yet, how many of us fill out prayer times with our side of the conversation telling God what we need most.

Steven Covey the leadership writer and speaker says “seek to understand, and then to be understood.”

I have been battling a pretty nasty case of laryngitis and the most difficult part is not talking and resting my vocal cords. But the discipline has been very good to challenge myself to not say everything I might think and to truly let the other person carry the conversation. For that struggle, I am grateful.

*Prayer: Lord, help me to see some of the people around me as opportunities to listen and understand. Ultimately, help me to show them the love of Jesus through a deep understanding that would allow truth to be spoke into difficulties. May I represent your listening ear to those desperate to be heard. Amen*

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