



Proverbs
navigatelife
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Calvary Church

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Listen Up
Sermon Supplement

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Listen Up

PROVERBS

Often when we think about the concept of listening, we think about listening as a means of caring for someone as opposed to a means of us growing in wisdom. When a friend is hurting they want a “listening ear,” not necessarily someone who will solve all their problems. What about that kind of listening?

Interestingly, Proverbs doesn't really address that kind of listening. If you look up all the times the English word “listen” is used in Proverbs, none of them refer to that type of situation. Proverbs thinks about listening as a way of growing in wisdom. So how can we think about being a good “listening ear” in light of Proverbs' teaching about listening?

Let's begin with Proverbs 27:9 which says, “Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel.” Proverbs doesn't know about a friend who only listens and never provides counsel. It is true that those who are listening to provide counsel often violate Proverbs 18:13 “he who answers before listening – that is his folly and shame.” When someone says to you, “I don't want you to solve my problems, I just want you to listen” what they are essentially saying is that you have not done enough listening yet and/or you have chosen the wrong kind of counsel. A wise person who is listening to a brokenhearted person will listen as long as necessary. But, while listening itself is an act of grace, rather than simply leaving the matter alone the wise person may simply offer a word of encouragement, a suggestion about how to think about things differently, a word of consolation, or a prayer for help. The wise person may choose to do an act of love that speaks to value of the broken hearted person. But the point is that a friend never says or does nothing. After all, when we pour out our hearts to God in prayer, he doesn't just listen to us. He provides

a word of encouragement, an action, a kind correction or a gift of blessing.

I said in the sermon that listening allows us to grow in wisdom and it is true that in these situations listening allows us to grow in wisdom to be able to know how to best help our friend. To that end, the principles about being a better listener do apply to these situations. If you are going to be a good listening ear, you must have humility. Sympathetic listening requires a recognition that you are no better than the person you are listening to. The “I don't want you to solve my problems, I just want you to listen” might be a sign that there is a lack of humility on the part of the listener. Likewise if you are to listen to those in distress, silence is important. If you are always talking you will never hear that the other has a great need. Patience is critical as well. No care and comfort can be offered in brief snippets of time. If you are in a hurry, you will not be able to offer the kind of listening that brings comfort. Job's friends sat with him for seven days and seven nights before they spoke to him and then only after he addressed them first. This shows great patience. Speaking too soon when you are supposed to be listening is foolish according to Proverbs. Finally, to be a listening ear for those in distress requires that you give them your undivided attention.

Why doesn't Proverbs talk more about this kind of listening? I think it is because those who are good at listening to God for instruction, advice and rebuke will be good at listening to friends who are suffering. I believe that those who are not good at listening to others who are hurting, ultimately are not good at listening to God. My hunch is that Proverbs thinks that learning first to listen to God will teach you to be the kind of listener that others want to share their problems with.