



Week 1, Day 1:

*Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. **James 1:19 (NLT)***

Talking and listening involves a unique relationship in which two people are constantly switching roles. In any conversation the speaker and the listener are jockeying for position, with the needs of one competing with the needs of the other. If you doubt this, try sharing a personal problem with someone and see how long it takes for them to interrupt you – either with one of their own problems or in order to share a similar story or to offer you advice. Nothing hurts more than the sense that the people close to us aren't really listening to what we have to say. It sounds so simple to say that a conversation involves one person talking and another person listening, and we so easily take it for granted. And yet it can often feel as if those closest to us aren't really listening.

Listening is a Skill that We Can Learn

The need to communicate touches every area of our lives. Everything we do in life requires communication with others. In the first years of life, we learn to speak and this is an important developmental milestone and a sign that a child is developing normally. However, listening is an equally important skill that we need to learn. When we don't learn to listen, we often witness a breakdown in communication and we feel the frustration and discouragement that are the residual results of such a failure to listen.

What does it take to become a good listener? Where can you begin if you want to improve your listening skills?

Over the next few days we will explore some steps you can take to become a better listener to others.

How Well Do You Listen?

The quality of your listening skills powerfully affects your potential to increase the quality and the quantity of your spiritual conversations. Complete the following statements as honestly as you can. When others are talking to me...

- I find myself finishing their sentences.
__ rarely __ occasionally __ often __ usually
- I give my opinions before hearing them out.
__ rarely __ occasionally __ often __ usually
- I get restless and impatient.
__ rarely __ occasionally __ often __ usually
- I lose track of what is being said.
__ rarely __ occasionally __ often __ usually
- I fidget with objects.
__ rarely __ occasionally __ often __ usually
- I mentally rehearse what I'm going to say next.
__ rarely __ occasionally __ often __ usually
- I take control of the conversation.
__ rarely __ occasionally __ often __ usually
- I interrupt with frequent comments or questions.
__ rarely __ occasionally __ often __ usually
- I am suspicious of hidden agendas.
__ rarely __ occasionally __ often __ usually
- I try to immediately diagnose their problems.
__ rarely __ occasionally __ often __ usually
- I worry about how to respond, instead of listening.
__ rarely __ occasionally __ often __ usually
- I tell them how to fix their problems.
__ rarely __ occasionally __ often __ usually
- I listen briefly and then begin talking.
__ rarely __ occasionally __ often __ usually
- I tend to contradict what has been said.
__ rarely __ occasionally __ often __ usually
- I misinterpret what has been said.
__ rarely __ occasionally __ often __ usually
- I answer before gaining real understanding.
__ rarely __ occasionally __ often __ usually

If you answered "often" or "usually" to three or more of these questions or if you answered "occasionally" to eight or more, you could benefit dramatically by improving your listening skills.

Prayer:

God, thank you for the relationships You have entrusted to me. Help me to become more patient and to listen attentively to others in a way that points them toward You!