



FAMILY

LESSON 2

HOW TO TALK SO PEOPLE LISTEN
AND LISTEN SO PEOPLE TALK
(Part 1)

HeartLine
CROSSLINE COMMUNITY CHURCH





Get Healthy: Family

Lesson Two: How to Talk so Your People Listen, and Listen so Your People Talk (Part 1)

Looking Back: 10 Minutes

1. Last week examined what healthy families do. We explored the relational, emotional, and spiritual needs a healthy family meets for each of its members, and we pinpointed areas in our own family that might need improvement. Share one tangible way you put what you learned into practice this week. What did you do to address areas of weakness? How did it go?
2. Did you pray for your family members each day? Did you pray for yourself? Share why you did, or did not. Do you find praying for your family members easy or difficult? Why? Do you find praying for yourself easy or difficult?
3. Did last week's lesson raise any questions for you? If so, what?

Looking Forward: 50 Minutes

"I feel like no one really listens to me".

Can you guess who said this? Was it a mom? A teenager? An empty nester? A millennial?

In truth, it could have been any of one of them. Or all of them.

Today, methods of communication have never been more plentiful, but authentic conversation—the kind where people talk and listen in a way that forges bonds, understanding, respect, and intimacy—has never been more lacking. It's a lonely, frustrating way to live.

Life was never meant to be this way. You were born to connect. Genuinely connect. So was every member of your family. Somewhere along the way, though, many of us failed to learn how. Or forgot why it's important. Or became too distracted to care.

This week we're turning the tide on ineffective communication as we learn how to talk so our people listen, and listen so our people talk.

1. When most people think of communication, they think of talking. Actually, the most vital part of communication is listening. So, we'll start there. Read James 1:19-22, and 25-26, (written below) and answer the following questions.

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says...

...whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do. Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless.

- a. What three pieces of advice does James instruct us to take note of, according to verse 19?

- b. Who should do this?

- c. Why? (Verse 20)

- d. James gives us a kind of biblical math equation:

Quick to Listen + Slow to Speak = Slow to Anger

The opposite equation is equally true:

Slow to Listen + Quick to Speak = Quick to Anger

In your opinion, how does listening well diffuse conflict—or help people avoid it altogether? How does not listening well intensify conflict—or cause conflict, in the first place?

2. Let's delve a little deeper into why and how listening affects our ability to connect with our loved ones in a healthy way. Which of the following do you experience if someone doesn't listen to you? (Check all that apply)
- I don't feel valued
 - I don't feel important
 - I don't feel respected
 - I don't feel understood
 - I don't feel connected
 - I don't feel appreciated
 - I don't feel known
 - I don't feel wanted
 - I don't feel unified
 - I feel like my opinions/thoughts/ideas aren't needed
 - I feel frustrated
 - I feel angry
 - I feel hurt
 - It makes me want to manipulate the situation until I my opinion is heard
 - I stop talking
 - I withdraw
 - I stop caring
 - I stop trying
 - I lash out
 - I ask the other person to listen
 - Other

Did you notice how this list corresponds to the emotional, spiritual and relational needs of a healthy family, discussed in lesson one? Needs like connection, value, appreciation, bonding. When our needs go unmet, we feel it. And here's the thing: if we feel these emotions when we aren't listened to, our family members do, too.

Listening is the most undervalued, most attacked, component of creating and maintaining healthy family relationships. Everything—about our culture seeks to destroy our ability to connect with our family by listening to each other. Cell phones and social media promise to keep us connected, but leave us more disconnected than any generation in history. Family dinners have become a thing of the past. We binge watch Netflix, and neglect one another. Factor in our own inability to listen to others without interruption, or their unwillingness to listen to us, and you've got a recipe for major family friction. Or isolation.

3. On a scale of 1 – 10 (1 being low, 10 being high) how well do you listen to your family members? Do you think your family would rank your listening skills the same way?

It might be interesting to ask them. Or would it?

If we ask, we need to listen to their answers—without interruption, explanation, or defensiveness. Oh my. Now we're not just talking about listening; we're talking about *listening*.

Hearing is not the same thing as listening. We hear with our ears, but we listen with our heart and mind. Hearing implies knowing; listening implies understanding. We hear words, but we listen for meaning behind the words.

Most people think talking is active, and listening is passive. Not true.

While it's true that hearing is passive (I hear the words you speak), listening is active (I sense the feelings you feel, I understand what you want me to know, I respond to what you are saying). This is why eye contact, body language, clarification when we aren't sure we've understood correctly, and affirmation are vital parts to listening well.

This is also why multi-tasking deals a deathblow to real listening. Anyone who's ever tried to have a conversation with someone who constantly checks her cell phone knows what I'm talking about.

But we can't listen if we don't hear. And in our ever-increasingly isolated culture, many families don't hear what's going on in each other's lives, much less listen.

4. Which of the following prevents you from hearing your family members (check all that apply)?

- Cell phone
- Social media
- Work
- Busy schedules
- Habit
- Social life
- TV, computer, books, or other entertainment
- We're rarely together
- We've pretty much stopped talking and live separate lives
- Other

a. How often do the distractions you checked affect your communication?

- A few times a month
- A few times a week
- Daily
- Several times a day

5. Which of the following prevents you from listening to your family members?
- I get defensive
 - I'm impatient. I want them to hurry up and finish talking
 - I don't know how
 - I like to talk more than I like to listen
 - I don't have the time
 - Our family never really talks about anything other than surface stuff
 - I interrupt
 - I get distracted
 - My family member(s) have a hard time opening up
 - I offer advice or give input before they finish speaking
 - I lose interest in what they're saying
 - I often think of what I'm going to say before they've finished talking
 - Other

Congratulations! You have just identified your first two roadblocks for healthy family communication: what prevents you from hearing, and what prevents you from listening. Now that you know your roadblocks exist, you can course-correct.

6. We course-correct when we replace unhealthy habits with healthy ones. Consider your answers from question 4 and fill in the blanks below:

- a. In the past, I have allowed _____ to prevent me from hearing my family members, but starting now, I will _____.

Consider your answer from question 5, and fill in the blank below:

- b. In the past, I have allowed _____ to prevent me from listening to my family members, but starting now, I will _____.

7. Read James 1:22, written below. What are we not to do? What are we to do?

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says...

I can't tell you how many conversations I've had with women who want to know how to improve their relationships, but simply won't do the work to put what

they learn into practice. When I offer suggestions, they're quick to respond (Ummm...pretty sure the Bible says "be slow to speak") with "Oh, I already know that!", as if knowing what you're supposed to do is the same thing as doing what you're supposed to do. This is the very definition of deception.

But we're not going to be that girl—the one who knows what to do, but doesn't do it. No, sir. We're going to put this stuff into practice.

8. Re-read James 1:25-26, written below and answer the following questions.

...whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do. Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless.

- a. God's Word is the perfect law. What does it give?

- b. Describe how your life would be different (I'm talking really different) if you and your family members were free from toxic or ineffective communication? Does it sound like freedom? (Yep. Thought so.)

- c. What four things must you do to be blessed in what you do?

It's easy to start healthy communication habits, but the key to blessing is to "continue in it" and "not forget"

- d. How do you think "keeping a tight rein on your tongue" could help your family members open up to you more?

9. Listening to your people is only one side of the equation. It's equally important for your people to listen to you. Look up the following verses and note what they teach about children listening to parents.

a) Proverbs 1:8

b) Proverbs 4:1

c) Proverbs 4:10

d) Proverbs 19:27

e) Proverbs 23:19

10. I'm sure you noticed how often the words "Listen, my son" were repeated in this small sample of Proverbs. Why do you think the author repeats these words so frequently? What does this tell you about teaching our children to listen to us?

If you were to peek inside the home of a healthy family, you'd see people listening to one another: spouses chatting openly, parents listening to kids. But you'd also see kids listening to parents, heeding what they say, because they've been taught how. Listening is a hallmark of respect. It's impossible to have a healthy home without respect. Which means it's impossible to create a healthy family if parents fail to teach their kids to listen. It's also impossible to create a healthy family if spouses don't listen and respond to each other's needs.

11. On a scale from 1- 10, how well do your children (or other family members, if you don't have children) listen to you? (Note: listening implies a response to what was said.) Why did you choose this number?

a. If parents fail to teach their child to listen and respond to them, how do you think that might influence how the child listens and responds to God, later in life?

12. If your family's listening skills leave something to be desired (in other words, you feel like you're talking to the wall about 50% of the time), why do you think they don't listen to you?

I'm guessing this week's lesson has been eye-opening. I'm certain it's raised a question or two about how to help your family members open up, and talk. It's probably made you wonder how to help them learn to listen (and respond!) when you talk. I hate to leave you hanging but know this: next week we're going to find the answers you need to help your family have healthy communication.

For real.

Life Application:

1. Review your answers to question 6. Write down what you will do this week to hear and listen to your family. Be proactive about being an active listener. Be ready to share with your group next week.
2. James 1 instructs us to keep a tight rein on our tongue. Make a conscious choice to practice this skill this week. Take note of how it affected your communication.

Optional: Further Reading, Reflection and Bible Study

1. In the Bible, God repeatedly tells His people to listen. Listening isn't only an essential part of a healthy human relationship; it's an essential part of a healthy spiritual relationship. Look up the following verses and note what they teach you about listening to God:
 - Deuteronomy 26:16-18
 - 1 Samuel 3:1-10
 - 2 Kings 17:13-15
 - Luke 9:34-36
 - Luke 10:38-42