

The Power of Listening (Part II)

“I never learn anything while I am talking”

Dr. Robb Brandt

A doctor listens carefully through a stethoscope for abnormalities in a patient’s chest cavity. He continues to ask questions, hoping that the patient’s answers correspond to what he suspects is a correct diagnosis. The doctor refuses to form conclusions without learning all that can be known about the patient. He recalls that failing to listen has led many a doctor to erroneous conclusions.

Listening is hearing. I have been accurately accused of appearing to listen without actually hearing my wife, Lois. Her definition of listening assumes that true listening requires at least some connection between the auditory functions of the ears and the receptors in the brain. Looking like you are listening while you are preoccupied with unrelated thoughts does not count as listening.

That reminds me of a church building committee chairman who happened to be an engineer. You have to understand that I often joke about engineers because God has often surrounded me with their kind. I am an organizationally challenged person who desperately needs their meticulous minds for details. Anyway, I called the building committee chairman before leaving town one day. I wanted to make sure that he was mindful of an important aspect of the big picture.

After I described the situation to him, he replied, “Oh that’s interesting, I will keep that in the back of my mind,” and hung up. About an hour later I thought, *I didn’t call him so that he would put my words in the back of his mind. I called so that he would keep what I said in the front of his mind.* How true of all relationships. If a person is expending the energy to tell you something, he or she is probably doing that so that you will become very mindful of what is communicated, especially if you are married to the person.

The same is true of parents. Without listening, parents really don’t know their children. We may *think* we know them because we are older, wiser and more experienced, but we really don’t know them as children of all ages want to be known.

Years after the tragic car accident that took the life of his eight-year-old firstborn son, Surgeon Robb Brandt wrote a challenging book about busy fathers making time for their children. In *You Deserved a Better Father*, Dr. Brandt has this to say about the importance of listening to our children:

One Monday night it struck me that I never learn anything while I am talking, and that it’s critical to listen carefully to my kids. More than once I had arrived at my Monday night rendezvous with my fathering gun loaded with an agenda, perhaps including something from their card, only to discover that they had something

*important on their minds, and they needed to talk. On my good days, I'd seize the moment to show them that I was vitally interested in what matters most to them.*¹

Ministers make the same mistake by assuming to know best what parishioners need and want without sincerely listening to them. Wise is the pastor who starts his call to a church by visiting small groups composed of cross sections of the congregation. Such meetings are arranged so the minister will understand the people and be careful not to disrupt what God has been doing through the local congregation in the given community.

All too often, ministers begin their call to local churches in a manner described by Henry and Richard Blackaby:

*Today, leaders often assume they unpack God's plan, along with their office furniture Sometimes a new pastor seeks to develop an approach to ministry different from his predecessor's, just to be different. These pastors arrive with a comprehensive set of plans and directions for the church, without ever considering how their agenda integrates with all God has done in the church already.*²

The dominating characteristic of a lop-sided relationship is where one person does all the talking and the other all the listening to the satisfaction of the talker's need to be heard. Is this a true friendship? Hardly! If you ever hope to have true friends, you are going to have to learn how to listen.

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¹ Dr. Robb Brandt, MD, *You Deserved a Better Father* (Healthy Life Press: Roseland, Florida, 2010) 106-107.

² Henry and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership, Moving People on to God's Agenda* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001) 186, 187.