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Shut up and Listen!

Through the day we talk over various issues, at different wave-lengths, to many — to the nobodies and the somebodies. Studies show that an average human uses around 50 words per hour. While we talk so much, how much and how well do we really listen? Apostle James encourages us to “be quick to listen and slow to speak” (Js 1:19). Communication is a two-way process. If people only talk to each other, the quality of relationships would be shallow and often causing damage.

Many of us may have erred in listening to God. We pray so loudly in the pharisaical style with preoccupied thoughts and with ‘an idol in our hearts’ (Ezek 14:3-9) that we fail to listen to what God might want to say to us. The Holy Spirit cries out His loud whispers within but we quieten it because that’s not what our ears want to hear.

Listening is an art. We need to practise it to perfect it. In spite of our desire to listen correctly, we may miss out

on the core issues, but I assure you, decide to listen in the way you should and you can minister to hearts quietly, yet powerfully.

Don't wait for a formal situation, like a counselling session, to listen. Begin it in encounters with your maid, milkman, other vendors at your doorstep and then go on to intimate relationships like your spouse and children. When you are talked to, look at the person in the face. Make eye contact. (Don't stare!) Listen to what is being said and what is not being said. Be alert to assumptions. Listen to the feelings that are not being verbalized—feelings of anger, hurt, rejection, revenge. Communication is 80% body language and 20% verbal. It helps to set aside the work on your hands for that moment. Let it wait. Can anything be more important than people? Deep and real listening enlarges vision and understanding. This understanding is what oils rusted relationships and cements broken ones. Reflecting and clarifying the understanding should follow. Listening blows in life and allows growth and maturity in human relationships. Would you agree with me that a mature person talks less and listens more? Most marital conflicts and discords have their roots traced to misunderstanding because of superficial listening. Introverted personalities can be helped to surface their bottled-up issues with gentle and unprobing listening.

Just listening, without saying anything, till the person is justly finished with the airing, gives security to the person talking. Probing and quick advices block the flow of communication and makes the talker guarded (Prov 18:13).

Spouses! How much time do you spend listening to each other? (Lay behind talking to each other for now!). Ask yourselves this question. Don't answer as yet. Resisting the urge not to pronounce your judgment is a task. So often we wrong the other by saying what goes across our minds, in the wrong time, in the wrong way. While your spouse is sharing, your job, your only job is to listen, not talk. Words sometimes are not needed at all. Women are emotional, and men are rational and physical beings. They are wired so by the Maker. Just being there for each other, and listening with an empathetic ear, heals. One of the needs in us, most often unmet, is to being listened to. We shouldn't miss ministering to each other by the strong front that is seen.

Parents! Your communication styles are being closely watched by your children. Your kids will carry these learned behaviours into adulthood. I have seen sad scenarios where children desperately try to get their parents' attention while the parent would be busy with his newspaper or glued to the television. Parents sincerely 'do' a lot for their offsprings but children cry for 'YOU.'

Behaviour problems like temper-tantrums, throwing things, bad language, disobedience and attention-seeking behaviours follow poor parental listening. Parents wake up with a shudder after these misbehaviours occur. Negative behaviours oftentimes are a cry for parental attention and listening. Neglect is subtle abuse. Beware!

Every stage of development from infancy to adolescence to late adulthood has unique issues which need timely resolving. Stop and ask your heart now. Do you know

what your adolescent is thinking of now? Do you know if your teenager is being bullied at school? Do you know if your preschooler is happy away from home during those few hours? How would you ever know if you don't make time for them? Why would they want to share if you wouldn't listen, really listen? It's dangerous to be in the dark about your kids. Children prematurely drift into unhealthy relationships because their need for being listened to is being met there, though by an immature or unsafe peer. Parents share a huge responsibility.

Mobilephones are a blessing and a curse. The person on the other end becomes more important than the person in front. Make time to listen. Let them talk. Don't curtail open sharing (sometimes may sound too much for their age). Go for quiet walks, watch only programmes that are absolutely necessary, prioritise priorities, delegate and listen to people.

Shall we decide today, parents, spouses and colleagues, that we would meaningfully listen to each other, so our relationships would be one of mutual respect? Soon it will become your second nature. You will draw many towards you as a greatly loved people-helper!