

# Permission to Speak Freely: The Art of Listening

by Ken Wilson Jan. 13-14 2007

Summary: **We receive permission to speak freely in the secret chambers of prayer; there we learn to grant others the same permission; thus we become a community that learns to "speak the truth in love" and brings that freedom into the world.**

Hearing is the hallmark of biblical revelation

- + God created through utterance: material reality is response to God's voice
- + Isaiah's call began with vision, but led to hearing, "Whom shall I send?"
- + Elijah on Mt. Horeb: began with visions, but led to hearing still small voice
- + Current examples

Because fellow humans bear the image of God, we progress on the learning curve of hearing God as we learn to listen to each other.

"My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: **Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry**, because our 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." (James 1: 19-21)

## 1. Listening begins with keeping your mouth shut.

- + the difficulty breathing in and out simultaneously
- + what listening requires: love, fruit of Spirit (see Gal. 5: 22-23)

## 2. Listening means "lowering the pricklies."

- + Anger: fight & flight emotion make us alert, mobile, agile, and dumb
- + Anger like a sharp knife: sometimes necessary but use with caution

How do we slow our anger response in order to listen?

Look for the good, not just the bad in what the person is saying

Don't jump to conclusions or judge hastily

Go the extra mile in listening when you disagree with the speaker

## 3. Listening calls for the well placed question.

Jesus was the master of the well placed question: "Do you want to be healed?"; "What do you want?"; "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

When you don't agree with someone's perspective, ask how they came to see things that way. Behind every opinion or point of view is a story. Can't understand opinion until you understand the story.

#### **4. Listening involves the whole body.**

We listen with the eyes not just the ears because "the eye is the window of the soul" (Proverbs)

Our body language express and affects what's in the mind.

#### **Fruit of good listening: people more likely to listen to you!**

Recent discovery: "motor neurons" in the brain

A mirror neuron is a **neuron** which **fires** both when an animal performs an action and when the animal observes the same action performed by another (especially **conspecific**) animal. Thus, the neuron "mirrors" the behavior of another animal, as though the observer were itself performing the action. Some scientists consider mirror neurons one of the most important findings of **neuroscience** in the last decade. (see Motor Neurons, [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com))

God has wired us with mirror neurons so the posture we adopt toward others powerfully affects posture they adopt toward us.

This is the physiology behind the proverb: "a gentle answer turns away wrath."

#### **Conclusion**

Implication: learning to listen well is part of the prophetic edge of the gospel in our day. In age of marketing, people develop sophisticated defenses against barrage of messages they receive on a daily basis. More than ever, culture is wired to view the church as a religious propaganda machine.

In fact, we're meant to be a love machine. What makes us think we'll be able to effectively communicate our message without getting good at listening as well as at proclaiming?

Suggested spiritual discipline to aid our listening to God and others:

Grow capacity for listening to God & others by practicing the spiritual discipline of stillness and silence. "Be still and know that I am God"

Add to your night prayers: an intentional time of stillness & silence.  
Start with a minute and build it from there.

Mind running wild? Calm it down by adding a simple prayer to your breathing: (e.g. "Abba, Father"; "Lord Jesus"; Jesus Prayer (see Ken's Corner)

Over time your capacity for inner stillness increases. And that capacity can be used when you're listening to others; you learn to still your own thoughts in order to focus on theirs.