

Devotional for Married Couples for Sunday October 25th

by Dennis and Barbara Rainey

The Value of a Listening Ear

James 1:19

But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger.

Paul Tournier, the Swiss psychiatrist, advised husbands and wives to be preoccupied with listening in their marriages. Unfortunately, unlike our text, we are usually slow to listen, quick to speak and even quicker to become angry. Most of us don't need hearing aids; we just need aid in hearing.

The first step to really hear each other is to focus on the person speaking. Sometimes my kids are waiting for me when I come home after a hard day's work, and they try in vain to get my attention. Finally, Barbara will say, "Children, it would be better to talk to your dad in a few minutes, but not right now. He isn't home yet."

"Yes, he is," they'll exclaim. "He's right here."

"Yes, we know he's right here, but he doesn't know it yet. Be a little patient with him."

And sure enough, she's right. After I have a few minutes to relax, I can usually give focused attention.

Active listening helps to focus. To practice active listening, try sending back messages of empathy that let your spouse know you are trying to put yourself in his or her shoes. Don't try to evaluate or offer a lot of advice. Just reflect what you hear being communicated, showing that you're interested in what your spouse is feeling.

Once you establish communication with your mate through focused attention and active listening, you can seek clarification by asking questions. Questions are like crowbars that dislodge thoughts and emotions from another person's heart. But you have to use those crowbars deftly and gently.

Asking the right questions is particularly valuable if you're married to a person who is reserved and has a hard time opening up. And when you're disagreeing at even the mildest level, use questions to focus on clarifying valid points rather than defending yourself against what you feel are incorrect accusations.

Focus on finding the truth rather than gaining indictments. Ask questions to gain understanding, not to make judgments.

Prayer: That you and your family can maintain a healthy balance between speaking openly and focused listening.

Discuss: Pick a topic that's begging for discussion, and spend 5 or 10 minutes talking about it while practicing the listening skills outlined above. Then evaluate how you think the discussion might have been improved.

