

Paying Attention

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A specific privilege exists in relationship that is often taken for granted. This privilege relates specifically to the ability to hear. Obvious to our relationships is the ability to physically hear what our loved ones are saying; the words they choose and the tone of their voice. Yet, the kind of hearing I am referring to is the hearing that takes place in our heart. Hearing from the heart may or may not be a separate experience. However, a distinction is necessary in that James described specifically how we are to be in response to the voiced expressions of others. It is a part of our ethical and moral conduct to participate in developing this trait. This trait becomes even more imperative in the face of disagreements.

James, describing the reality of trials existing in life, normalizes conflicts. He cautions his readers to be aware of how easy it is to follow selfish desires. The end result brings harm and distance in relationships. Not only is this true, but also, it keeps us from the maturity God desires. On that note, James continues by stating, "So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath." (Vs. 19)

Admittedly, being quick to hear the underlying concerns of a family member is not always easy. Yet it is the design of our Savior that we endeavor to strengthen this quality in our own conduct. Listed below are some thoughts that may be helpful when tempted selfishly to respond quickly and from a defensive position.

Maybe _____ is acting this way because he was operating on different assumptions or information than me.

Maybe _____'s behavior is partly due to my dismissing her in the past.

Maybe _____ had different expectations than I do.

Maybe _____ didn't have all of the information.

Possibly _____ had a lot on his mind that I am unaware of.

Maybe _____ feels threatened by me in a way I do not understand.

Its possible _____ has not felt like I care about her feelings lately.

What has _____ had on his mind the most in the past week?

How has _____ been blessed in her work?

What have been the important events in his life in the last few weeks?

What would you identify as being the things that are stressing her life right now?

What is he worried about for the near future?

What are his/her hopes and dreams for themselves and others?

What may he/she be learning in his/her relationship with the Lord?

Granted the thoughts and questions listed are minimal. Feel free to add to these suggestions. The statements and questions allow for the individuality God designs yet pursue togetherness. Growing in ability to pay attention requires practice, and God's grace extends to you and your loved one.

James has much more to say about the moral conduct of those following Christ. Underneath it all, the gentleness of His wisdom challenges us to repeatedly come back to a position of humility before God. It is in this position that we learn to pay attention...to His voice, and to the voice of our loved ones.

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