

Fourth Quarter Strategies – Saturday, January 6, 2018

If we'd only listen – I mean really listen - we'd all be better off in this world! Listening is an art. I can still recall the impact one of my Junior High School teachers had on my listening skills. He challenged his students to truly listen to every word conveyed in his US History class and I took him to task. Over the next few weeks I focused on every fact and concept he conveyed and amazingly found that I retained much of the material taught and aced future exams with only minimal preparation. Before that class, I would often let my mind wander like most teenagers. Over the years I have slipped in honing my listening skills. These days, there are so many distractions that can draw us away from our full attention to conversations that we may even tune out to what is being conveyed in our business as well as our personal lives.

I often hear men joking about how they selectively don't hear what their wife has to say. I certainly hope they are only joking. My wife Janet often becomes irritated by my asking her to repeat for a second or third time whatever she wants to tell me. Frankly, my hearing isn't as good as it was when I was younger, yet I ask her to repeat herself since I really want to hear what she has to say. I refuse to revert to rhetoric like "*Yes Darling.*" When someone speaks to us, we should give them our undivided attention. In my business, I always strive to listen intently and even repeat back what my clients are saying to ensure I've heard what's important to them. After all, we're discussing their financial plans and their desires for the future.

Poor communications can lead to poor family dynamics and I imagine many marriages have ended for that and numerous additional faults. Listening is a learned skill that we can all achieve. The dying art of interactive communication is one of the most important skills we can learn to be successful in life.

I've always been intrigued by the Pacific Northwest Indian tribes' custom of passing a *talking stick* (sometimes referred to as a speaker's staff) during tribal meetings to control the conversation and ensure everyone has the opportunity to speak. The custom keeps a few from usurping the time and ensures all voices are heard. In our society, the parliamentarian attempts to ensure all sides are heard as well. Unfortunately, many voices are not heard these days. The silent majority does not seem to have much voice any more. Horizontal listening is one thing. Now, let's talk about vertical listening.

God does not verbally speak to us these days as He did in the days of Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses, but He continues speaking to us indirectly through His written word and those who are called to preach His Word. In 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul tells the younger Timothy "*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*" You see, the Bible is a living, breathing document that speaks the Truth that we all would be wise to heed. Are you listening?

Our study of God's Word must not be limited to hearing one or more preachers casting a few morsels of bread upon the waters. We need to actively listen by opening the Bible with others of like-minded faith to dig deeper into what He has for each of us. We would be wise to also devote time in reading commentaries or better yet opening the original text and doing our own self-study. We simply need to spend time each day, preferably in the early morning, conversing with our Heavenly Father.

God wants our devotion. He deserves our devotion. Listen to what He has to say to you this day forward and experience the joy that comes from the living water that will fill you the rest of your days!

Passages to Ponder: 1 Chronicles 28:9; Job 5:11-14; Proverbs 1:5; Ecclesiastes 11:1; Isaiah 38:2-6; Ezekiel 33:31-32; 2 Corinthians 11:3-6

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1 Chronicles 28:9 New International Version (NIV)

⁹“And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches every heart and understands every desire and every thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever.

Job 5:11-14 New International Version (NIV)

¹¹The lowly he sets on high,
and those who mourn are lifted to safety.
¹²He thwarts the plans of the crafty,
so that their hands achieve no success.
¹³He catches the wise in their craftiness,
and the schemes of the wily are swept away.
¹⁴Darkness comes upon them in the daytime;
at noon they grope as in the night.

Proverbs 1:5 New International Version (NIV)

⁵let the wise listen and add to their learning,
and let the discerning get guidance—

Ecclesiastes 11:1 New King James Version (NKJV)

11 Cast your bread upon the waters,
For you will find it after many days.

Isaiah 38:2-6 New International Version (NIV)

²Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, ³“Remember, LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.
⁴Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: ⁵“Go and tell Hezekiah, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life. ⁶And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city.

Ezekiel 33:31-32 New International Version (NIV)

³¹My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to hear your words, but they do not put them into practice. Their mouths speak of love, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. ³²Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice.

2 Corinthians 11:3-6 New International Version (NIV)

³But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. ⁴For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.
⁵I do not think I am in the least inferior to those “super-apostles.” ⁶I may indeed be untrained as a speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way.