

Nehemiah 2:1-5; Psalm 31:9-24

*“The Seven Desires of Your Heart: Being Heard”*¹

Bill is one of my oldest, closest friends. We grew up in the same neighborhood and spent months and months at play. We knew each other as well as anyone from separate families could know one another. After I had been in ministry about ten years I received a message from Bill that he was going through a divorce. I could tell he was very sad and disappointed for letting his relationship get to that point. His wife was leaving, and I didn't have any details, but I felt encouraged to followup with a message, sharing what I was learning about marriage.

I reminded him that we marry in order to have a relationship with one another. I knew that as a lot of men get started in their careers they can relax with their home relationships while giving more time to the people around them at work. Maybe he had been doing that. And at the same time, if his wife was feeling disconnected with him, she may have found someone in whom to confide. Sometimes, in our work environment, that “someone” with whom we confide is the opposite gender who takes time to listen, to sympathize – and she feels heard, perhaps for the first time in a long time.

Feeling heard is the same as feeling important. Feeling heard makes the one who is heard feel valuable again. Countless affairs have been started when one spouse found another person who, at least on the front end of the relationship, was willing to listen. The workplace is especially a breeding ground for that; as is Facebook, as people hook up with old high school sweethearts.

I. Today we're looking at one of The Seven Desires every person has. And the first desire is to be heard and understood! We all have a need to be heard and understood!

If we feel we are not being heard, a) we can shut down and not even try talking – or b) we can search for others who will listen. One or the other. But this is exactly what happened in Bill's marriage. His wife no longer felt valuable to the most important person in her life.

Bill was really moved by the message I sent him. He understood the dynamics of how his relationship had wilted, and he found in that message the way to restore his marriage. And with time, his marriage was restored!

Is there someone in your life who really listens to you? And another question, a bit like that: Is there some significant person in your life who cuts you off, who quiets you down, who tells you “You shouldn't think like that,” “You shouldn't say things like that,” or “I don't have time for you right now...”?

We are born to communicate. We have a lot of things to say. We want to be known and understood by the significant people in our lives. And yet so often we feel that we're not being heard. You may know the feeling – you've tried for the umpteenth time to tell your spouse about some frustration or need, and the other one just doesn't seem to be listening.

¹ The resource used for this series is *Seven Desires* by Mark & Debbie Laaser; Zondervan; 2008

They don't get it.

II. Problems Being Heard. We run into real problems being heard! Tommy was one of five children. He was the third born and as often happens, he got rather lost in the shuffle of a busy family. Early on he tried to talk, but either no one listened or he was told that they would attend to him later. Sometimes others told him that it was stupid or immature to talk the way he did or to think the way he did. Even in school there were lots of kids competing for attention. Gradually Tommy became quiet and withdrawn. He had given up on talking. What good did it do anyway?

A need we all have is to be heard and understood! Tommy was only trying to do what he was born to do. But he was being "trained" by those in his home, those of his family, and people in school, that he wasn't important enough to hear! When our desires are not met, we may come to believe certain messages – certain lies – about ourselves. The ideas that take shape about ourselves become our *core beliefs*.

It is possible to have positive core beliefs about ourselves: "I am a good person and God does love me. I am capable – and I can do something if I really put my mind to it. I am smart. People like me." But some experiences from the past create negative core beliefs: "I will never get it right. I'm not very smart. I will never get a chance. It seems people don't want me around."

Now you begin to see how all kinds of potential problems in conversations can happen! The defective self-image that takes shape serves as a filter by which we take information from what we're being told about ourselves in a variety of places – and interpret what it means. And many people interpret what they hear through fractured experiences.

A client of a counselor had been tragically abused as a child. The way he understood himself, his core beliefs, were filled with shame. One day as he came into his appointment he stopped at the coffee pot and took out the coffee filter full of used coffee grounds. He showed it to his counselor and said, "If you pour the purest of water through this filter, what comes out looks like, tastes like, and smells like coffee. You've been talking to me about the living water of Christ's love for me, but when I pour that living water through the filter that is my brain, it comes out sounding like I'm a bad person. Not even Jesus could love me."

Have you ever felt someone listened to you – but didn't really listen or understand you? It could be that person heard what you were saying but made a meaning out of it that you didn't intend because their filters were filled with other *junk!* You didn't understand that at the time. Think about a time when you tried to compliment someone who just couldn't take a compliment.

Start with what you learned about yourself when you were very young. (Now if you've never given this any thought, this can be hard.) But in general, our core beliefs and what we hold to be important were being shaped by our fathers or step-fathers, by our grandfathers, uncles, brothers and male friends, as we were equally influenced by our mothers or step-mothers, our grandmothers, aunts, sisters and female friends.

And for the most part, we were being shaped by people just like us. If you are African

American, your ideas and perceptions were shaped from out of your African American heritage. If you are Asian American, your values and perceptions were being shaped from out of your ethnic experience. And if you are white Americans, the same thing.

In some of our cultures, we were shaped with the idea that you were to stay away from ...what? Catholics, or Blacks, or Whites, or the poor, or the uneducated, or the rich and wealthy. You get the idea! So now, we are unable to genuinely “hear” and “understand” someone born into that *other* group because we’ve been trained, right? We’ve been trained by false data – not to trust them; not to hang out with them; not to associate with them because, in some way, they are not important!

And it is within all people to be heard and understood. To be loved and accepted. And how can we carry out the great commandment to listen, to accept, to love all people ...if we’re unable to get past our distorted core-beliefs?

III. Inability to Articulate. A key for healthy connections is to listen for and understand feelings!

I was reading with a men’s group about accountability, and one of the potential conflicts for accountability groups is that we are not in the habit of sharing about our feelings. Consider the number of times we never genuinely answer the common greeting, “How are you doing?”

“Well, I’ve been really sad today.” Nope. We don’t admit to that. In fact, we may not even be aware of our feelings. And so it can be really hard to be satisfied with this need to be heard and understood.

Yet at any given time we may actually be experiencing a variety of feelings. So what do we do with those feelings? Typically, we ignore them. And when we don’t share our feelings with those whom we love and those we want to be in relationship, it keeps us isolated and distant. Isolation creates a loneliness – and many of us have been experiencing that loneliness long enough that it has become our “normal.” It is our default way of life.

To summarize; we can be poor listeners – but we can also be poor communicators.

As a way to encourage the accountability group to be more open and expressive, I made an assignment to come back the following week ready to share “one feeling.” We had a good chuckle about that, but it was the kind of ironic chuckle that we realized, “We may have trouble with this.” The reason we may have trouble is because we stopped listening to ourselves, too! (We surround ourselves with a constant flow of music, radio, TV, excess noise) But this is the starting place for us; listen to yourself; get to know what you are feeling! If you ever have a chance to take part in a spiritual retreat and get away from the constant *hum* of your world, do it!

Nehemiah. In the first reading, (Nehemiah 2:1-5), we found Nehemiah, a servant to the King of Persia. It appears Nehemiah had never been sad in the presence of the King, his master! King Artaxerxes could tell Nehemiah was sad. Nehemiah wrote, “I was terrified, but I replied...” Perhaps he was terrified because the King didn’t allow for any negativity in his presence. Just one more example of suppressing the feelings of people around you.

But because Nehemiah was able to express his feelings this time, he received the desire of his heart: to return to Jerusalem and begin a great building campaign that would serve as protection for the people of God! But his whole story would not have unfolded if Nehemiah hadn't taken a risk and expressed what he was feeling.

Many of us have not expressed ourselves to anyone *in years* to the point that we don't even realize we are lonely.

It is better by far to get in touch with your feelings – for your sake and in order to hear and understand others better!

IV. How We Can Express Ourselves Better. To summarize, it is important for people to be heard and to be understood. You need to be heard and understood, as does your spouse, your partner, your children, your parents, your co-workers, friends and strangers, too.

1) In order to be understood, you first need to know what emotions are; 2) know what you are feeling. And as you take time to identify your own feelings, you will be able to understand others who are trying to express themselves to you.

So how can we learn to express ourselves better? It's not always as easy as you may think. Most counselors tell us that very few people in their practice have the skill to identify, much less share, their emotions. But listening to others is more than just understanding facts or issues. Listening involves hearing the heart of someone, hearing their feelings. This can take some practice, but learning to listen and to share your own feelings will increase your intimacy with others.

Here are some simple pointers:

3) Review and keep a list of feelings handy until you feel like you are mastering the variety of feelings you or your family members experience.

4) Review your day at the end and take some deep time to discern the feelings you experienced. Label at least 5 emotions from the day.

5) Take time to read through the Psalms or the Book of Job in the Old Testament. You will find an honest expression of many emotions you might not expect to find in the Bible.

V. Being Heard by God. Finally, we want to spend a little time with the need to be heard by God! God wants us to talk to Him and we want to be heard by Him! We want to be understood by Him!

But will you hear and understand what He has to say to you first? You were fearfully and wonderfully made, a beloved child of God, made in His image, brought into this world not to be harmed but to prosper. St. Augustine, from the 3rd century said it well for us: "Our hearts are restless until we find our rest in Thee!"

We are restless for the seven desires of our hearts: the need to be heard and understood; affirmed; blessed; safe; touched; chosen; included.

But our experience in this world leaves us far from being fulfilled with these needs. All parents are imperfect and the world is not a perfect place. Our desires do not always get met. And early in life we learn how to cope with the fact that they don't get met. But those

who are awakening spiritually will look to God to find these needs met. Those who haven't been shaped by false stories about God being an angry God, untrustworthy, or unreliable – can look to God for help!

Our last reading is from Psalm 31. Listen and identify the references to feelings or emotions! [READING Psalm 31:9-24]

For our purposes, verses 17 and 22 are KEY for us.

- ¹⁷ Don't let me be disgraced, O LORD, for **I call out to You for help.**
- ²² In **panic** I cried out, "I am cut off from the LORD!" But **You heard my cry for mercy and answered my call for help.**

vs. 17 is our need to be heard, "I call out to You for help!" and vs. 22 is acknowledgment that God fulfilled our deepest need: "You heard my cry for mercy and answered my call for help!"

You see, it is in God and God alone who is our ultimate provider and sustainer in all things! We place unfair expectations on our spouse, on our children or our parents to FULFILL what they are unable to provide! They are, like us, imperfect people! Your heavenly Father continues to invite you to come to Him so that you learn to depend on His ability to give you all that you need and desire and so that you can live into the truths He has defined for you. In Him we find our identity as His child – and with that, complete satisfaction: You are a child of God and He has moved heaven and earth in order to bring you to Him for the blessings that were meant for you from the beginning of time!

Will you come to the Father who will never let you down? He is the One who knows you, who listens to you, who understands you – and He wants the best for you!

Will you come to Him, trusting that He is *all* of this, and more? This is your place to step toward Him in faith!