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I Can't Hear; I'm Talking!

1103-B

**Series: Why Do You Run When I'm Crying
(The Caring Church in a Hurting World)**

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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The room was a beehive of activity. In one corner were the “Buffet Buzzards”, those quiet, mild-mannered characters who suddenly turn into ravenous wolves at covered-dish socials. You know the type. They hover about the food table as though they had just returned from six weeks in Ethiopia, devouring whole casseroles as though they were chips and dips.

In another part of the room were the “life-of-the-party” types. These are the guys who simply must tell the same story again and again, boring you with endless details, or else give a blow-by-blow account of something nobody wants to hear about, just to maintain an audience.

In the kitchen were the “Busy Betty’s” in the crowd. These are the women who spend the whole time they are at a party cooking, serving, cleaning and, in some cases, hibernating from social contact. It was the monthly class social of the adult Sunday school class of the Betterway Bible Church, and as usual, it was predictable who would be where doing what. They had tried games, but they were only dominated by the same somewhat gregarious crowd-pleasers. The wallflower types seemed only the more embarrassed by it all.

In one corner, and predictably so, was Mildred Anderson. She had always been somewhat quiet, but these last few months she seemed to have withdrawn into her shell until nobody quite knew how to reach her. So, the bulk of the people just scratched her off their list as socially peculiar and pressed on. But Mildred wasn't peculiar. Mildred was hurting. Inside, she was about to burst with anguish and fear and discouragement. She had been wrestling with deep issues in her marriage, with deep issues in her walk with God, and with deep issues at her job. But it wasn't easy for Mildred to talk. She had almost no friends, and because she seemed to have so little to give, people just walked around her, or nodded with a polite smile, or said, “Hi, Mildred, how are you?” without ever waiting for an answer.

Tonight, however, you could see what appeared to be almost a look of desperation in Mildred's eyes. You could, that is, if you took the time to look. It was about eight o'clock, and most of the

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folks were out at the pool when Mildred made her move. With all the courage she possessed, she walked up to Frances Johnson and began a conversation. Frances was Mildred's group leader in the class and had, on occasions, called her to see how she was.

"Frances", Mildred began, "Do you ever get...desperate...for some answers? Do you ever wonder if it's all worthwhile?" Fran's eyes darted about the room. "Oh, brother," she thought, "not a philosophical discussion of depression at a Sunday school party!" She had been on her way to the pool and was dying to hear Benny Fromm do his "mimic-the-pastor" routine. "Mildred, dear, the answers are all in the Book," Frances retorted, "Of course, it's worthwhile. Even Job was blessed in the end. Have you ever read Job? You really ought to do that. And memorize, Millie, memorize the Bible. It'll really help you. Sure, it's worthwhile, Millie, 'greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world,'" she concluded with a somewhat dramatic flair. "I'll be praying for you, dear," she added, "and please, excuse me, love, I think my Harry needs another sandwich." Happy to be free from such heavy conversation at such a fun party, Fran ran as fast as she could to the pool and to where the real Christian fellowship was happening.

Fran was right proud of herself. She told her husband on the way home that she had, amidst all the festivities, found time to "counsel" one of the girls who seemed to be discouraged and give her Scriptures to hold onto. "Makes it all worthwhile," she muttered self-righteously. "Makes it all worthwhile."

Mildred never returned to that class or to that church. It wasn't the teaching; that was good. It wasn't the fellowship; that was okay. But inside, Mildred was crying. Her husband had been unfaithful, the company she worked for was going bankrupt, two of her children were starting to rebel, and she had just learned that her mother had cancer. Her world had caved in. And suddenly she needed someone to talk to. She needed someone to put their arms around her and care. She hadn't been a bother before, she thought, but now she had to talk to someone. She had called the pastor's office but he was booked up for the next week. She had called her neighbor, but her neighbor just recommended a book called "Tough Times Never Last".

So she gathered all the nerve she had and approached Fran. What was wrong? Why didn't she get the help she needed? At

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least three things were wrong. First of all, no one was looking around for hurting people or they would have seen in her eyes that she was on the brink of collapse. Secondly, no one had stayed in contact with her and developed a line of communication for a time of need. Because she wasn't fun to be with, no one wanted her for a friend. And thirdly, when she finally did reach out, no one was there. Oh, Fran was there, but Fran did not have the gift of hearing. Her ears were okay. But she was always too busy talking to hear what people were really saying. And what Millie was really saying was, "I am desperate. I cannot go on. Please help me." But no one heard. Six months later, Mildred committed suicide. "I always knew she was a strange bird," her sanctimonious former classmates whispered. "I tried to tell her to memorize the Word," Fran, the super-saint, added. And so they chalked it all off as another "hopeless" case and went on to their next social.

What Millie had said was, "Please don't run, I'm crying." What Fran had said in reply was, "I can't hear you, I'm talking." And the disease of spiritual deafness had claimed another life. All about us, people are crying. But most of the time, most of us don't even hear. Why? Because we don't know how to listen. Jesus did. And Jesus in us, still knows how to listen when people cry.

So we come to the midway point in our study of the caring church in a hurting world. The first seven lessons were designed to illuminate the problem. The lessons to come are designed to illuminate some solutions. Let's look quickly at where we've been and where we're going.

Lessons one and two gave us an overview of the issue. The fact that people are crying and we don't listen was covered in lesson one. We saw that when people cried, Jesus listened in lesson two. The next few lessons went on to some specific groups of people who are really hurting in our world. Crying children were covered in lesson three. Hurting husbands and wives were covered in lesson four. Hurting senior citizens were covered in lesson five. The hurting handicapped were covered in lessons six and seven.

We've taken a Biblical look at a hurting world and at how Jesus responded when people were crying. Now we turn to the positive perspective and take a look at seven things we can do to become God's men and women in a hurting world. We're going to

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look today at how to listen, how to love, how to be a friend, how to minister, how to search for hurting people, and how to pray for hurting people. We not only need to stop running when they cry, we need to prepare ourselves to have something to give them when we stop.

Our title for today is: "I Can't Hear; I'm Talking!"

Our outline:

I- Practical Problems

II- Scriptural Solutions

III- Learning to Listen

I- PRACTICAL PROBLEMS

I have become convinced, the longer I live, that what we Christians need if we are to be effective in this world are spiritual eyes, ears, nose, and throat specialists. Our basic senses have become ineffective as a result of the disease of sin. Self-centeredness has reduced the effectiveness of our basic faculties.

The ear, which was designed by God to hear the heartbeat of others, for instance, has been dulled and often it misses the whispers of discouragement and often it tunes out the frequency at which others cry.

The eye has become dulled over with the cataract of worldliness. Without some corrective lenses it tends to look right at hurting people and never see a thing.

The tongue seems to work in an uncontrollable fashion. It often says things that, as James puts it, "would set a forest on fire, and is set on fire by hell itself."

Still another unusual medical phenomenon that has become increasingly apparent is that the ear fails to function when the tongue is in gear. In other words, we can't usually hear while we're talking. The sound of our own voice seems to drown out the cries of others, so unless we hush long enough to be still and quiet, in all likelihood, we will miss entirely what others are saying. We will still run when they're crying.

I must be honest. I have set about for the past three months to watch this phenomenon in action in my own life and in the lives of others. Being one of those closed-mouth kinds of people who doesn't like to "share" what's going in my own heart, I have always tended to hold it inside when I hurt and when anyone

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asks just answer with some pious platitude that lends an air of super spirituality, sort of the “Harry Hypocrite” routine.

But as I mentioned in an earlier lesson, these past few months I have experienced perhaps more warfare and more discouragement than at almost any time in my life. It's been good for me in terms of ministering, for God has been working into my life a deeper understanding of how others feel. But I've also been doing a study, albeit a subjective study, on how those around me responded when I tried either to imply or overtly admit that I was struggling. The results of my survey only further proved to me several things:

1- We don't want to know if people who are visible in the church or in Christian work are struggling. We would rather construct little imaginary idols in our minds of these solid-state saints who roll with every punch without ever thinking a negative thought. Yet the amazing thing about the Bible is that God painted the struggles of each of His saints in such vivid tones in the Word that they simply highlighted the reality of His grace the more.

2- I am convinced that most of the time when people ask how you are doing they are not prepared to respond if you answer, “Not so well, thank you.” They often really don't want to know. So they will either a) assume you are kidding, and make light of it; b) preach some quick sermonette with a verse glued to the finale and run; or c) excuse themselves or change the subject as though you either hadn't said a thing, or didn't mean a thing you said.

3- The greater possibility, however, is that they never really heard you in the first place. Oh, they heard your words but they didn't read your heart. They didn't really hear you. It is this issue that we address in this lesson: the problem of hard-of-hearing Christians, Christians who do not listen when others are crying. I can remember a friend calling me one day asking me how I was. It had been the worst day of my life. I answered, “I must admit, I am down for the count of nine.”

“Boy, you should have heard what happened to me last night,” he responded. He then launched into a ten minute discussion of an incident in his life that he thought was humorous, and it may have been, but I thought to myself, “He didn't hear me.” So I waited for a lull in the conversation and tried again. This time I got one sentence further and he began telling me about someone he had seen in church the Sunday before. This is a good friend.

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He cares. But he doesn't listen.

So I decided to run a test. I called another close friend of mine with whom I had the level of friendship that involves honest sharing, and I mentioned how difficult a time I was having. Instead of asking me how or why, he handed me a verbal prescription on the phone for a problem I wasn't even having, and basically told me, "Buck up and get on with it." I thanked him and hung up. I went home that night and told my wife, "I think I just saw myself in action. I think I know now how I respond to hurting people. I don't listen. I don't dig until I find why or how they are hurting. I hand out plastic pills and tell them to take two a day and call me next March."

God was beginning to get my attention. I won't bore you with the rest of the story, but suffice it to say I am beginning to realize that when people are hurting the one thing they want the most is for somebody to listen without judging them, without interrupting them, without correcting them, and without ignoring them. They want somebody to care enough to hush long enough to hear what they're trying to say. They are tired of people who talk when they're crying.

II- SCRIPTURAL SOLUTIONS

The Bible, believe it or not, has a lot to say about hearing problems. It addresses the issue in two ways: 1) it addresses the negative part of the problem by describing the dangers of the tongue, and the advantages of listening, 2) it addresses the positive side of the problem by demonstrating how God, the perfect listener, responds when His people call out for help.

The great reason most of us do not hear what others are saying is because we are too busy talking about ourselves to listen. It doesn't make sense. The Bible tells us that the best thing we can do with our tongue is bridle it. Put it in harness. Bring it under such control that it never says anything but what is good and edifying and for the good of others. That means we'll stop broadcasting endless signals of extraneous information that's of no value except to see that we maintain control of the conversation or appear to be important. Most people don't care what Johnny or Susie said last week. Most people don't care about the enchiladas we had at the restaurant last night. Most people aren't impressed that we are painting our living room purple. We're not telling them to help them. We're telling them to

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control the conversation. In so doing, we may be robbing them of sharing something of real value.

James, you remember, had a lot to say about bridling our tongues. The Living Bible paraphrases it this way:

If anyone can control his tongue, it proves that he has perfect control over himself in any other way.

(James 3:2 Living Bible)

(It would appear then, that the opposite is true as well.) The passage goes on:

We can make a large horse turn around and go wherever we want by means of a small bit in his mouth.

And a tiny rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot wants it to go, even though the winds are strong.

So also the tongue is a small thing, but what enormous damage it can do. A great forest can be set on fire by one tiny spark.

And the tongue is a flame of fire. It is full of wickedness and poisons every part of the body. And the tongue is set on fire by hell itself, and can turn our lives into a blazing flame of destruction and disaster.

(James 3:3-5 Living Bible)

Suffice it to say, the tongue, when not totally bridled by the Holy Spirit, has great potential for evil. It is a tool in the devil's hands equivalent to a hydrogen bomb in the hands of a small child. Every one of us has experienced the trauma of unkind words, harsh words or insensitive words. These words destroy marriages, topple political kingdoms, and wound tender hearts. These words build walls of anger and bitterness. They unnecessarily destroy churches and homes and relationships which will never be the same again.

This lesson is not so much about the vicious misuse of the tongue as it is the unnecessary use of the tongue. The problem is we just use it too much. It wags when it ought to be sitting still.

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

(James 1:19)

The Amplified Bible phrases it like this:

Understand [this], my beloved brethren, Let every man be quick to hear; (a ready listener), slow to speak, slow to take offense and to get angry.

The word "swift" or "quick" in this passage is a word that means literally "poised for action." It signifies someone whose

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very nature is characterized by the excitement of hearing what someone else has to say. (A ready listener, as the Amplified Bible words it.) This passage applies both to our listening to the Word, and our listening to people. The interesting thing is that James understood that in order to be a ready listener we had to be “slow to speak.” This phrase does not indicate one who is “slow of speech” but rather someone who has something to say, yet holds on to it cautiously and only says it when it will benefit someone else and when it is of the most good.

In other words, God is saying that the tongue let loose is like an uncontrollable explosive. The best way to control an explosive is to use it sparingly. You don't use a bomb to play baseball just because it's available. It's too dangerous. So the Scriptural picture of a believer in control of his life is a photo of one who speaks sparingly, listens abundantly, and controls his temper accordingly.

But God knew we would need a better example than that if we were to really get the picture. So He gave us a perfect example. He showed us what it means to be a ready listener. He painted a picture of Himself. There are several things about how God hears that we ought to understand.

The first principle is that when God's people are hurting, God always listens:

The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles.

The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the Lord delivers him out of them all. (Psalm 34:17 -19 NKJV)

The second principle is that God's ability to hear is never the result of a breakdown at His end. The only time He does not hear us is when, by choice, we choose to build a wall of sin.

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear.

But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear. (Isaiah 59:1,2 NKJV)

The third principle concerning God's hearing-aids is that God has a special ear to the needs of the needy and afflicted.

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For the Lord hears the poor, and does not despise His prisoners. (Psalm 69:33)

So that they caused the cry of the poor to come to Him; For He hears the cry of the afflicted. (Job 34:28)

For He looked down from the height of His sanctuary; From heaven the Lord viewed the earth,

To hear the groaning of the prisoner, To loose those appointed to death, (Psalm 102:19, 20 NKJV)

The fifth principle is that when God hears us, we know it.

Father I thank You that You have heard Me; and I know that You have heard Me. (John 11:41c NKJV)

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

For that reason, we as His children, ought to expect to be heard when we have a need. (I John 5:14,15 JKVJ)

Hear, O Lord when I cry with my voice! Have mercy upon me, and answer me. (Psalm 27:7 NKJV)

Hear, O Lord, and have mercy on me; Lord be my helper. (Psalm 30:10 NKJV)

Hear my cry, O God, attend to my prayer.

From the end of the earth I will cry to You, when my heart is overwhelmed; Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

For You have been a shelter for me, (Psalm 61:1-3 NKJV)

I trust you see the connection. If that's how the ear of God works when the heart of man is hurting, don't you see how Christ in us will respond, if we will but let Him?

1- It means that when God is being God in us, and people cry, we will always have time to listen.

2- It means that we will especially be available to listen when the afflicted or perpetually hurting cry: the lame, the needy, the prisoner.

3- It means that not only will we listen, they will know we are listening and they will know we care.

4- In fact, if they know we are in fellowship with God, they will expect us to stop and listen when they cry.

III- LEARNING TO LISTEN

So this lesson is designed for those of us who simply do not

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know how to stop talking long enough to listen. It is for those of us who never stop thinking of ourselves long enough to listen. It is for those of us who never stop wanting to be the center of attention long enough to listen. It is for those of us who never hush long enough to hear or care long enough to respond. Beloved, that is the very first step in solving the problem of meeting the needs of a hurting world. Unless we stop long enough to hear them, we'll never be able to meet their needs.

So, Beloved, here is our assignment for this week. Be "slow to speak, quick to listen, and slow to get angry." To implement that, I am going to ask each of us for seven days to do the following:

1- For one week, never interrupt another's conversation, no matter how trivial we may think it is. Never means never.

2- Before you go home from work each day, or go to a fellowship or a Bible study, write out on a piece of paper a series of questions you plan to ask of others to draw out what's really going on in their lives. Memorize the questions and use them.

3- If you have children at home, do nothing for one week but listen to what they are saying, what they are really saying.

4- At restaurants, in the office, or in the neighborhood, wherever you go this week, strike up conversations with people who look like they are hurting and then listen. Christ in you cares that they are crying.

5- Purpose never to talk about yourself this week. Do not talk about your accomplishments or about your failures. Do not talk about yourself period. Purpose to listen instead.

6- If you know of people in your church or in your circle of friends who are going through difficult times, make yourself available to them, just to listen. Don't pry. If they don't want to talk, don't make them feel uncomfortable. But if they need a hearing ear, be one.

7- Spend some time this week thanking God that He always listens when we cry. Ask Him, in you, to do the same whenever others are hurting.

There are a lot of Mildred's who pass through your life and mine every day we live. Some of them will seek us out and try to reach out for help. We simply must listen. Some of them are waiting for us to reach out to them and let them know we care. We simply must.

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The issue is one of letting God be Himself in us. God in us always listens, always hears, always cares, and always lets us know that He hears and He cares. Always.

If you and I are going to have an impact on our world, we're going to have to stop using our tongues to advertise our self-righteousness and begin using our ears to demonstrate our godliness instead. That means shutting our mouths long enough to give our ears a chance to function and give our hearts a chance to listen to what's being said.

The future of our ministries may well be at stake. The effectiveness of our witness may well be at stake. The reaching down to soothe the hurts of crying Christians around us may well be at stake as well. For if we are quiet long enough to hear what they are saying, then they are less likely to ask:

Why do you talk when I'm crying?

Why don't you hear what I say?

Why is it every time I cry out

You tell me about your day?

Why must you talk when I'm crying?

Why can't you just hear me through?

Why don't you just stop and listen?

And let me see Jesus in you...

Let's pray.

Father, silence us this week. Give us the grace to turn down the speakers of our tongues, turn up the amplifiers of our hearing aids and listen to a world about us—our own homes, in our own neighborhoods, in our own places of employment—wherever we go, a world in which people are weeping and hurting and crying, and needing Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ in us wants desperately to listen, and we don't give Him a chance. May we surrender this week to the hearing ear of God that He may be Himself in us.

In Jesus name, Amen.

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