



LISTENING WELL

A 6-Day Plan

Listening Well

6-Day Devotional

Do you have trouble slowing down your own thoughts hearing what others are saying? One of the unique ways we bear God's image is in our ability to listen to and understand others. Good listening fosters an environment in which others feel heard, understood, and loved. In this 6-day plan, we invite you to deepen your Kingdom impact by cultivating the skills to practice good listening every day.



If you enjoy this reading plan, we invite you to continue your journey with Michael Thompson's *The Heart of a Warrior*.

Day 1: Listening Well Honors Others

Scripture:

Romans 12:10 (NIV) Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves

Proverbs 1:5 (NIV) let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance—

Genesis 1:27 (NIV) So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Devotional:

One of the unique ways that humans bear God's image, shared by nothing else in Creation, is our ability to listen to and compassionately move toward the inmost heart of another person. In Romans 12:10, Paul encourages us to honor one another, to be devoted in love. One of the ways that we can honor and love those around us is through listening. The practice of listening well is an act of love and honor in any relationship, and can create a space where deep healing can take place.

Listening well goes beyond merely hearing the words spoken by another person. In the 2009 film *Avatar*, the indigenous Na'vi people have an expression: *Oel ngati kameie*, meaning *I see you*. The human protagonist must learn that "It's not 'I'm seeing you in front of me,' it's 'I see *into* you, I see you, I *understand* you.'" The difference between listening to and merely hearing another person's words is similar. When we listen well, we recognize a person's heart within or behind their words, and honor them—joining them in their story, weeping as they weep, sharing their joy, seeking to understand.

We each have a deep longing to be heard, understood, and still found desirable. And we each have a story that is uniquely our own that is worthy of good, wise, and kind engagement. Sadly, most of us are probably more familiar with being misunderstood or downright ignored than genuinely being heard. Have you ever been in a conversation with someone when it dawns on you that the other person doesn't seem to understand—or even care—what you are saying? Or, have you ever started sharing about something going on in your life, maybe with your small group, only to have another guy take over the story and make it all about himself? Doesn't feel good, does it? And, if you're like me, you've experienced those moments both as the receiver, and, regrettably, as the perpetrator.

Yet, how incredible when we share our stories with someone who listens and engages with compassion and empathy! This experience goes a long way toward redeeming painful, fragmented experiences and developing new, healthy, and whole stories—

regardless of what we have experienced. When we tell our stories, including the fullness of brokenness and blessing, pain and joy, to a caring person, we are literally experiencing the presence of the Kingdom of God. It can lead us to deeper understanding of others AND ourselves, interrupting entrenched, unhealthy, harmful patterns, and helping us to greater healing and life!

Listening is one of the most remarkable skills a man can ever develop. It helps to create an environment in which another person feels heard, understood, known, cared for ... loved. And when practiced by a man as a husband, or a father, or a leader, or a friend, good listening cultivates a sacred and brave space for others to experience God's heart toward them. This is the invitation of listening: you have the opportunity to partner with our Trinity God: Abba Father, Jesus, and Holy Spirit to honor, love, and encourage the hearts around you. This is one of the most powerful ways for a man to display the Kingdom and heart of God, here and now.

As you ponder all this today, consider asking God:

Father, where in my story have I felt honored by being listened to and engaged well? How can my experience inform how I can show honor and care for those around me?

Jesus, how might listening well display the light and presence of your Kingdom to those around me?

Holy Spirit, how are you around me and in me, present in every moment and every breath? How do you see me—and how do you see into my heart with compassion?

Day 2: Why (and How) To Listen Well

Scripture:

1 Peter 3:8 (NIV) Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.

John 8:12 (NIV) When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

James 1:19 (NIV) My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,

John 13:35 (NIV) By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

Devotional:

The year was 2021, and I was in a state of complete disorientation. As an early-thirties father of two young boys, I felt completely out of my league, and the social distress of the previous year caused me relentless stress and anxiety. I felt like I needed to put on my Iron Man armor before leaving the house each morning (once the office opened back up, that is), because I expected every single bumper sticker, yard sign, t-shirt, and billboard I encountered to tell me what I needed to think, why I needed to think it, and why anyone who thinks differently is the enemy. Even with my armor on, I would still come home from work feeling like I was two heartbeats away from going into full blown Hulk Smash mode. I had an enormous amount of pain and confusion bottled up inside me, with no place to direct it. My wife was paying for it, my sons were paying for it, and I was paying for it.

One night, after the Hulk finally settled into a rage nap once again, my wife, through tears, made it very clear that we *can't go on like this*. So, I reached out to a few friends, and quickly connected with a good counselor, and began a long string of conversations that were deeply healing for my heart.

When someone sits with you face to face, leans in, and listens wholeheartedly to what you are sharing—it might be loneliness, confusion, and heartbreak, as in my story, but it could equally be the nostalgic memory of your first major league game or why a particular song means so much to your heart—something deeply relational and healing takes place.

We embody the love and the heart of God for each other, when we are present to each other, honoring one another through our focused attention and attuned heart. This is true in your small group, in your relationship with your wife or kids, at the family

Thanksgiving table, even with a total stranger on an airplane.

As John 13:35 indicates, when we love those around us, especially through our listening engagement, we are reflecting the love of Jesus.

So what does this look like at a practical level?

Some tips for intentional, helpful listening:

- Keep your mind and heart open and curious. Ask questions to understand and honor someone, not to critique them, and respect what they share (more on this in Day 4).
- Give your undivided attention to the person you are listening to. When you are fully present and engaged, you are communicating that what they are saying matters, and that they are an important and valuable person.
- Engage them with your heart and body. Hold eye contact, and be mindful of your body language. Are you relaxed and at ease, or are your shoulders tense and your arms crossed? Engage your heart and emotions—allow what they are sharing to affect you, and seek to connect emotionally with what they are feeling.
- Offer them the dignity of being heard. Don't interrupt.

Every person has different styles of relating, different stories, different passions, and different viewpoints. Yet we can make a choice to listen to and be present with others in a way that brings care, honor, kindness, and compassion in ways that have the potential to facilitate healing and display the Kingdom of God!

As you ponder all this with God today, consider asking him:

Father, how do the ways that I have felt heard and unheard affect the way I relate to others? Where might I need healing through a listening ear?

Jesus, would you help me to be more aware of the moments in day to day life where I might offer good listening and attentive engagement to others?

Holy Spirit, would you cultivate in my heart a deep desire to display your presence to others through my words and countenance?

Day 3: Poor Listening Isn't Harmless

Scripture:

Proverbs 18:13 (NIV) To answer before listening—that is folly and shame.

Proverbs 12:20 (NIV) Do you see someone who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for them.

1 Corinthians 13:11 (NIV) When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.

Devotional:

If the experience of being listened to well displays the kindness and Kingdom of God, then it's also true that experiencing poor listening can equally display the kingdom of darkness. Remember my story yesterday of putting on my Iron Man armor every day, and still coming home like a raging Incredible Hulk? For me, the experience, for more than a year, of being talked at—even by people that I had no real interaction with—rather than talked with and listened to had a profound effect on me. It brought me into spaces of deep loneliness, but it also awakened my heart to an awareness that many people feel compelled to be passionately, even unpleasantly vocal about what they have to say because they so rarely have a chance to be genuinely heard.

At the time of writing this, my sons are eight and five. For my wife and me, it is an almost daily occurrence for us to mediate some kind of conflict or misunderstanding between them. It may be that they both want the blue cereal bowl, or whose turn it is to pick a bedtime book, or that (heaven forbid) they both have the same favorite food. They talk over each other and interrupt; they are so focused on speaking their piece that they literally can't hear what the other has to say. Then, when I try to step in, their body language and lack of eye contact makes it very clear that they aren't tuned in to me at all. In a cartoonish way, they present a great example of when poor listening goes unchecked: dismissive, disengaged, and sometimes destructive.

Now, my wife and I are doing a pretty good job coaching our boys through these wild wonder years (if I do say so myself). But, honestly, haven't we all experienced and even participated in similar situations as adults? Can you think of a time when someone talked over a story you were sharing, or took more time to tell you why you were wrong to feel something than in seeking to understand why you felt it? How did that make you feel?

In church settings, in small groups, in our work place, in our marriages and families, we may experience ways of listening that are overly aggressive and confrontational, or dismissive and aloof. Even well-intentioned advice or scripture verses that come at the

wrong time and in the wrong way can make someone feel more isolated than heard. Poor listening is not harmless. Every experience of feeling dismissed, misjudged, or unheard is another opportunity for the enemy to gain a foothold in our hearts—for resentment or shame to seep in.

It's no mistake that childish behavior seems ... well, childish. Because we're meant to outgrow it, and develop the skills for a more robust and honoring way to live. Nobody gets it perfect every time, and of course there will be times when you miss the mark. If you catch yourself exhibiting behaviors of poor listening, it's okay! Your story—your upbringing and life experience—might cause you to default into one of these unhelpful ways (or others), even as you learn and practice listening and engaging well. The good news is that God has more than enough grace to empower each of us to grow in offering good care.

If you do find that you've defaulted into one of these unhelpful ways of listening: pause, name it, apologize, and then re-engage with the other person with kindness and attentiveness. Each mistake is an opportunity to move differently and continue growing.

As you ponder all this with God today, consider asking him:

Father, please remind me of a time when I felt unheard or not listened to well. Would you help me remember what that felt like? How might this memory help me show empathy to others?

Jesus, would you help me to see where I react in some of these (or other) unhelpful ways of listening? What might be the cause for why I relate as I currently do?

Holy Spirit, where might I need to extend grace to myself for the ways I have not listened to others as well as I might have done? Would you guide me through the process of self-forgiveness?

Day 4: Curiouser and Curiouser

Scripture:

Luke 2:46 (NIV) After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

John 5:6 (NIV) When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"

Mark 10:51 (NIV) "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see."

Matthew 8:26 (NLT) Why are you afraid?

Matthew 9:28 (NIV) Do you believe that I am able to do this?

John 8:10 (NIV) Has no one condemned you?

Devotional:

In his book *The Heart of a Warrior*, Michael Thompson writes that a man who is walking with God and who is becoming more like Jesus is a man who lives with "nothing to hide, nothing to prove, and nothing to fear." When it comes to good listening, it is also helpful to adopt a posture of having *something to ask, something to learn, and something to gain*. This honors the person who is speaking, because it demonstrates that you believe they have something of value to contribute. And it often starts with the humility of being curious.

Being curious involves asking good, meaningful questions, which is paramount in listening well. Good questions are thoughtful, respectful, pertinent, and are often open-ended (open-ended questions cannot be answered with a simple 'Yes' or 'No'). These invite thoughtful responses, stories, and opportunities for the other person to express how they are feeling or to share more. On the contrary, questions that are judgmental or lead the other person in a particular direction can shut down conversation, causing them to retreat emotionally or to become aggressive and defensive.

For example:

- My wife might ask me "How was work today?" It's not a bad question. But, as often as not, I just lived through a day of work and I don't really want to talk about it. It's easy for me to deflect her question with a simple "Fine."
- BUT, usually she asks me something like "Did anything exciting happen to

you today?” or “Did you listen to anything interesting today?” These questions invite me to reflect on more of my day's experience than just work, and to share about things that made my heart feel alive and joyful. These questions communicate that she cares about me and the things that interest me, and help me to feel seen and known.

Meaningful questions aren't just for starting a conversation; they are also an important part of deepening the conversation. But don't shoot off your questions rapid-fire like a 1980's action movie. Give the other person time to ponder, to consider, and explore one question before asking another, as you listen well to their responses. Who knows what you might learn about them? You might begin to see them more and more the way God sees them.

Examples of Good Questions:

- How does/did that make you feel?
- Can you tell me more about that? Or, I'd love to hear more about that.
- That sounds really important to you. Do you want to share about why?*
- What is it that made that moment so special (or so difficult)?
- Does what you experienced/heard/felt stir up any memories from your past?

*When asking a “why” question, use caution. It's very easy for “why” to sound condescending or judgmental, even if you don't intend it to. We all have experiences of being asked “why” in a way that sounds like “You're an idiot.” That's why tone and body language matter. You communicate love and kindness with your whole presence, not just your words.

Good questions pair well with engaged listening. It's okay to clarify, especially if you are not sure you understand correctly. Try to “mirror” what they said, in your own words. “It sounds like you're saying Is that right?” This kind of engaged listening is very valuable, especially in conversations that are serious or confrontational in nature. In those cases, it may be difficult for you to hear their answers—you may want to explain or defend yourself. Try to allow them to share what they experienced, and allow yourself to seek understanding rather than to be understood. Understanding and defensiveness seldom go hand in hand.

Jesus is our ultimate example. He asked over 300 simple and brilliant questions in the gospels, engaging with individuals of all walks of life. He often stopped what he was doing to offer care to hurting people, and embraced their interruptions. Next time you read the gospels, try to imagine Jesus's body language, his tone of voice, his smile, the glimmer in his eyes, the touch of his rough calloused hand, as he pursues the hearts of others through questions. Here are a few examples:

- What do you want me to do for you? Mark 10:51 (NIV)
- Why are you afraid? Matthew 8:26 (NLT)
- Do you believe that I am able to do this? Matthew 9:28 (NIV)
- Has no one condemned you? John 8:10 (NIV)

Do you see how Jesus's questions go beyond the surface, deep into the heart of the other person? My prayer is that all of this will help you to move in partnership with God as Jesus did, so that when listening to others—at church, in small groups, at work, at home, in your marriage—you may invite the presence and the light of God's kingdom by asking good questions that encourage deeper engagement and bring dignity to another's heart.

As you ponder all this with God today, consider asking him:

Father, who in my life has shown me the value of asking good, wise, kind, thoughtful questions? What can I learn from their questions, tone, body language, and countenance?

Jesus, in what ways does your kindness shine through your questions? How might others experience your love through me as I seek to listen well?

Holy Spirit, would you help me to be attuned to the heart and emotion that is behind the words when others are sharing? Please help me and guide me in how to be curious and open without judgment as I listen. May your presence in me create a gentle and discerning heart to know when to ask and engage, when a pause is needed, and when to sit quietly.

Day 5: Naming and Validating

Scripture:

Proverbs 12:25 (NIV) Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up.

Psalms 10:14 (NIV) But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand. The victims commit themselves to you; you are the helper of the fatherless.

1 Peter 1:22 (NIV) Love one another deeply, from the heart.

Devotional:

I was walking through the lush pine peppered forest of the North Carolina countryside after a frustrating day. Thanks to a couple years of good counseling and healing, my inner Hulk had not gone on a rampage in quite a while, but on this day I could sense the not-so-gentle giant getting restless. I had about forty-five minutes before I needed to re-engage as a dad and husband, so I put in an emergency call to a good friend. After letting me blow off steam for several minutes, my friend simply said, "Man, it sounds like you're feeling really disappointed. I can hear it in your voice." That was it. In an instant, what had felt like a rising storm was peaceful again.

At that moment, my friend didn't throw out-of-context scripture verses at me. He didn't participate in my frustration or open up a can of gossip judgment. He listened to my words, but more than that, he listened to my heart. And he named it for me. I felt heard, and understood, and that it was okay.

When something is accurately named, the body *already knows it*. I literally let out a sigh of relief when my friend named my disappointment, like a weight being released. It is an experience of kindness to have someone else bear witness to what you know is true, but might not be able to put words to. Sometimes it's a willingness to name painful feelings the other person is carrying:

- I hear how heartbreaking that must be. It sounds really lonely.
- You've been carrying so much responsibility. That's a lot to bear.
- That sounds really frustrating.
- It sounds like you weren't allowed to feel (sad, angry, weak, excited, silly, etc.). Is that true? How has that impacted you?

Responses like these help you to meet the other person in their story and to invite more

engagement. Accurately naming another's experience invites them to feel what they weren't allowed (or didn't know how) to feel in the midst of the situation, opening the door for it to be grieved (if painful) or celebrated (if joyful), which can bring significant healing. Naming the themes of what you are hearing in their story can bring clarity and perspective, stripping it of its power it may have over their heart and mind.

When you courageously and kindly name something in another's story, you offer them a gift of joining them right where they are and shining a light in the darkness. Naming honors their heart, mind, soul, and body, as they have endured much. It gives words to what may have gone unnamed, unacknowledged, untended, uncared for, ungrieved, and unhealed.

Naming and listening in this way is a practice and skill that can be developed as we seek to care well for our wives, our kids, our friends, or just about anyone. Men, especially men who have positions of authority such as a father or a boss, can invite significant emotional healing by offering strength and kindness in this way. After all, we were created to care for our spouse and the people entrusted to us.

I pray you will cultivate the practice of naming what you see and hear as you listen to others, that it might help bring deeper clarity, understanding, healing, freedom and life.

As you ponder all this with God today, consider asking him:

Father, where in my story has someone named something for me that they've seen in my story? How did that feel for me?

Jesus, how does naming something with curiosity and without judgment invite others to experience being seen and loved as you see and love them?

Holy Spirit, as I seek to practice listening well, please show me where naming something in my story has brought deeper clarity, understanding, and healing, and grant me the grace to walk with you in offering that to others.

Day 6: Hold the Silence

Scripture:

Proverbs 15:2 (NIV) The tongue of the wise adorns knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly.

Job 2:13 (NIV) Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.

Galatians 5:25 (NIV) For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.

Devotional:

How do you feel when there is silence in a conversation? Does it feel awkward or uncomfortable? Do you feel a need to fill it with words and conversation? Pay attention to these moments, especially when practicing your skills of good listening.

The person you are with may need a few minutes or moments of silence to process their thoughts and feelings. They may not be used to being listened to and honored in this way, and it might take them some time to adjust to it.

Here's a secret: Silence doesn't have to be empty.

When there is silence, this is an opportunity for you to be attuned to the Spirit of God. Many of us talk to God. How many of us really listen to him? During a conversational silence, take a moment to check in with yourself and the Spirit: Where are you feeling their story in your body? What emotions come up? Pictures? Words? Ask the Spirit to help you see what this person needs in that moment.

Allowing there to be silence in a conversation is a way to honor the other person. It gives them time to consider their thoughts and feelings, and it allows what they've already shared to form deeper roots—in their heart and ours.

Contrariwise, the need to fill any empty space with words creates a restless environment, where conversation may pinball at any moment, and where a person may not feel safe or welcome to share anything of value out of anticipation that it will go unnoticed. Far from deepening the conversation, this is more likely to shut any meaningful conversation down.

Imagine that you are spending a day at an art museum. Do you speedwalk down the hallway with barely a glance at each display? Of course not! You take your time. You walk slowly, you linger over each piece, and allow yourself to notice the nuances in the brushstrokes, the uniqueness of the composition, the emotions that each piece of

art stirs in your heart. When we handle conversations in the same way—slowly, allowing silence for words and thoughts to linger—we create an opportunity for richer, deeper, more meaningful engagement.

In this final day of this reading plan, let's recap the big ideas:

- When we listen well with an attuned heart, we create an environment for healing, displaying the loving presence of God to other people.
- Every person's story matters, to each of us, and to God, and deserves to be honored.
- When we bear witness to each other's stories, we each feel seen and heard, and less alone.
- The ways we are often accustomed to responding (and used to think most helpful) in listening can actually be harmful and create isolation. Each conversation is an opportunity to engage your whole person with another.
- Asking open-ended questions allows others to continue sharing their story and helps them to feel seen, known, and cared for well.
- Kindly listening to and naming what you observe in another's story offers a mirror for him/her to see their story with fresh eyes, and permission to feel now what they couldn't before. It helps bring clarity, and is often an important step toward emotional healing.
- Leaning into the silence in the conversation rather than shying away from it creates space for engagement and deeper understanding. In those moments, ask the Spirit to guide both of your hearts and words as you continue.

As a man, you have a tremendous presence in this world. Your words (or your silence) and your presence have weight and significance. By developing a practice of listening well, with kindness and with strength, you will honor the hearts of others and create environments where they can see and experience the love of God and the goodness of his Kingdom.

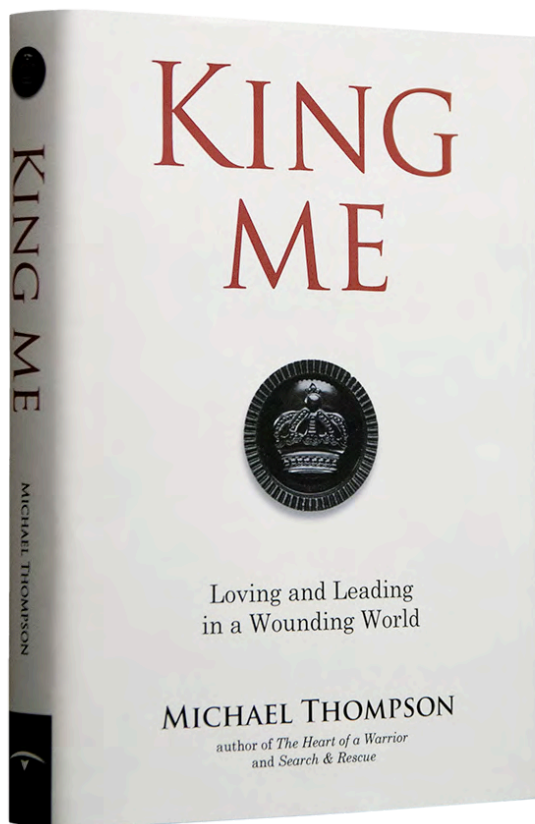
As you ponder all this with God today, consider asking him:

Father, what is my relationship with silence? How do I feel in the silence? What might that illuminate about my story?

Jesus, what are ways that I can honor others with their silence? How might my words or my silence invite your Presence?

Spirit, I invite you to speak to my heart in moments of silence. Help me to be attuned to the hearts of others, and to your voice, that I may honor them well and be a light of your Presence to their heart.

If you enjoyed this reading plan, we invite you to continue your healing journey in *The Heart of a Warrior* and *King Me*, both by Michael Thompson.

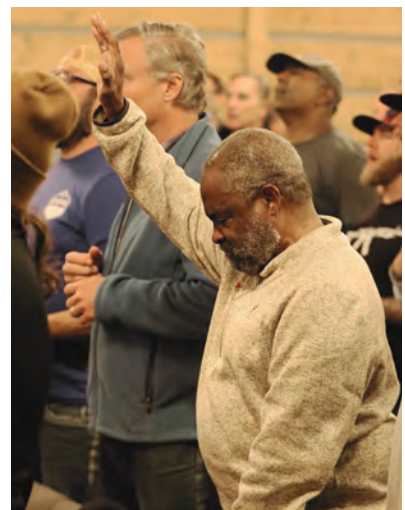


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AND **THE GOOD** THAT GOD IS UP TO IN YOUR LIFE.

A Dangerous For Good Men's Summit is designed to be a catalyst event for the hearts of men in your church or community, inviting them to encounter God in a way that validates and initiates them along their masculine journey of becoming more oriented men.



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