



# The Family Friend

*A collection of articles and quotes to aid your family in daily living.*

Volume 10, Number 9

September 2008

## WHAT WON'T BE IN MY OBITUARY

by Norman Bales

"You seldom listen to me, and when you do you don't hear, and when you do hear you hear wrong, and even when you hear right you change it so fast that it's never the same." - Marjorie Kellogg, American author and playwright.

Have you ever wondered what might be in your obituary? Few people write their own obituaries in advance, so it is left up to the people who knew you best to sum up your life in a few paragraphs. Most of the people who do this try to draw attention to your virtues. In the process they carefully leave certain things out - especially those things that make you look bad. I'm pretty sure that those who write my obituary won't say, "He was a good listener."

That's because I'm much more skilled at talking than I am listening. Nevertheless I see the need to cultivate better listening habits. I thought it might be helpful if I made up a

list of the reasons I fail to listen. I'm not defending them. I'm just pointing them out. I share them because marriage and all other human relationships work better when we rise above these obstacles and practice real listening. I've got an idea that a lot of husbands and wives can probably identify with some of the things on my list. Here's my list of reasons and excuses for not listening.

1. After the first few words, I'm busy deciding my response.
2. Interruptions.
3. Sometimes it's difficult to follow the speaker's train of thought.
4. My mind is on something else.
5. I may not like what is said, so I choose to tune it out.
6. Sometimes I'm not interested in what is being said.
7. I'm in a hurry and I don't think I have time to properly consider the speaker's message.
8. I'm prejudiced against the speaker's message.
9. The message may be articulated in a way that I don't understand.
10. I feel like the speaker is talking down to me.
11. I am bored by the speaker's repetition.

12. I may not consider the speaker qualified to address the subject.

13. I don't like being criticized.

14. I may consider the message unimportant.

I think, "It really doesn't do any good. We've been down this road before and nothing changes."

As you can readily see, many of my reasons are really excuses. I don't listen because I'm not disciplined enough to rise above the obstacles. There's a lot at stake here. Failure to listen prevents closeness in a relationship, but eagerness to listen tears down barriers and builds closer bonds. All of us would do well to heed the counsel of James. "My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" (James 1:19).

"We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak." ~Epictetus, Greek Stoic philosopher.

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### OTHER QUOTES ON LISTENING

"A person's real need, a most terrible need, is for someone to listen - not as a 'patient' but as a human soul." - Carl Rogers.

"The most important marriage skill is listening to your partner in a way that they can't possibly doubt that you love them." - Diane Sollee.

"Listening is such a simple act. It requires us to be present, and that takes practice, but we don't have to do anything else. We don't have to advise, or coach, or sound wise. We just have to be willing to sit there and listen." - Margaret J. Wheatley

"To listen is to continually give up all expectation and to give our attention, completely and freshly, to what is before us, not really knowing what we will hear or what that will mean. In the practice of our days, to listen is to lean in, softly, with a willingness to be changed by what we hear." - Mark Nepo

"Know how to listen, and you will profit even from those who talk badly." - Plutarch

"Wisdom is the reward you get for a lifetime of listening when you'd have preferred to talk." - Doug Larson.

## **So You Have Just Discovered That You Are Not Perfect**

**Though it takes some of us longer than others, we all finally recognize that we are not perfect.** We do not always see things correctly, and sometimes our responses to situations are simply not right. We even come to know that we

possess some annoying habits that exasperate those whose lives intersect ours.

How we respond to our mistakes is crucial to developing healthy relationships. Too many become angry, express frustration, or simply blame others. These approaches sabotage communication and undermine closeness. Let me suggest two positive ways to deal with our personal mistakes.

**First, we need to be able to apologize.** Admitting a mistake facilitates forgiveness and growth in a relationship. The ability to sincerely say "I'm sorry," is an imperative skill in the family. Rather than defending or trying to excuse a mistake, we need to be able to openly confess.

Spouses need to be able to say, "I'm sorry, I'll try to do better." Parents need to be able to admit to their children, "I was wrong, please forgive me for losing my temper." Youngsters learn how to handle their own mistakes by observing how their parents handle theirs.

Far from demonstrating weakness, an apology reveals strength of character and a trust in the relationship. No one is perfect or expected to be perfect, so let's be willing to admit it.

**Secondly, we need to be able to laugh at ourselves.** How do we respond to making a bad golf shot or spilling coffee on our tie? Is every little mistake a personal crisis?

Patti Jones writes, "If you can laugh at yourself, you have

an effective escape valve from life's real pressures." Norman Cousins describes laughter as "inner jogging." Victor Hugo adds, "Laughter is the sun that drives winter from the human face."

Laughing at ourselves allows our mates and children to relax and realize that no one scores 100% in life. Laughter is contagious; so is complaining.

The next time something goes wrong in our lives, let's determine to handle it more positively. If we are wrong, let's be mature enough to admit it. If we do something stupid, let's be secure enough to laugh about it.

—Don Loftis, via *Families 2000 & Beyond*

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## ***Your Last Name***

You got it from your father,  
It was all he had to give,  
So it's yours to use and cherish  
For as long as you live.

If you lose the watch he gave you  
It can always be replaced,  
But a black mark on your name son,  
Can never be erased.

It was clean the day you took it,  
And a worthy name to bear.  
When he took it from his father,  
There was no dishonor there.

So make sure you guard it wisely;  
After all is said and done,  
You'll be glad the name is spotless  
When you give it to your son.  
—via *Families 2000 & Beyond*