

The Family Friend



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

Volume 17, Number 4

April, 2015

What Won't Be in My Obituary

"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 relation-

ships 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.

15. 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.

—Norman Bales, *All About Families*, May 29, 2008

Learning Servanthood in the Home

We see self-centered behavior in the marketplace, in the workplace, in the school, and the church. The home may be the last environment in which we've still got a chance. So how do we go against the flow and encourage servanthood in our families?

I want to suggest three important servanthood guidelines that need attention in our families.

1. An authentic relationship with Jesus is the starting place. There's a difference between performing acts of service, and being servants. People who would never think of devoting their entire lives to serving can perform acts of service. In his book, *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster wrote, "When we choose to serve, we are still in charge. But when we choose to be a servant, we give up the right to be in charge. We become available and vulnerable" (132). That's exactly what Jesus did. He said, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). The apostle Paul surely described the life of a servant when he said, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). If you want the members of your household to become servants,

that's the starting place. But how do you teach the concept of servanthood?

2. Example is your most powerful communication tool. That works positively and negatively. Charles Swindoll wrote a wonderful book titled *Improving Your Serve*. He tells a story that illustrates just how vulnerable we are to the allure of self-indulgence. He and his son had gone canoeing with some other men. While they were waiting to receive instructions from their guide, Swindoll noticed that some of the canoes were newer than others. He urged his son to move close to the new canoes so they would be sure to get one of them. On the way home, they blew a tire on their van. Changing the tire was a hot, dirty job. They also had to remove all their gear in order to gain access to the spare. Swindoll volunteered to direct traffic. They were on a little used country road, and not one vehicle passed their way during the time they were changing the tire. All of this took place under the watchful eye of his son. Of that experience he wrote, "It was not until the next day that it dawned on me that I was being selfish in any of this" (33). Swindoll looked inwardly and realized he was "disciplining his son in selfishness."

Servanthood starts with the way you think, and so does self-indulgence. When our children were small and there weren't enough dollars to feed and clothe them the way I wanted to, Ann could create miracles with a frying size chicken. She cut it up into several pieces, and always reserved the liver and

The Family Friend

Published Monthly by
Calvert City church of Christ

gizzard for herself. No one else challenged her for them. My favorite piece was the pulley bone, and the kids could have anything they wanted after that. One night our daughter said, "Daddy, why can't I have the pulley bone?" I handed the pulley bone to her. I wish I could say that I did a noble thing. Actually I gave it to her because she pushed my guilt button. We have to move beyond guilt-tripping if we're going to teach servanthood in our families. Self-denial has to become a way of life. On the other hand, Ann didn't think she was making a sacrifice when she asked for the liver and gizzard. Over the years she developed a taste for them. I think that's what a parent has to do - develop a taste for self-denial.

Servanthood is a wonderful thing. No one would dare attack it, but it's so tempting to ignore the demands of servanthood. The easy path is the way of self-indulgence, but the way of the self-denying servant is more satisfying, and if we're genuine servants, the likelihood that our children will also choose that path is far greater.
—Norman Bales, *All About Families*, February 13, 2008

