

To Communicate, Listen

Our Sunday School class has been engaged in a study of the Book of Job during this spring and summer, and these sessions have been highly interesting and thought-provoking. You know the story: God allowed Satan to test Job's faith and character, but not take his life. As a result, Job lost his health, his 10 children and his wealth. Three friends – Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar – came to encourage him, and they did something very unusual. Job 2:11-13 tells us:

Now when Job's three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, each one came from his own place ... For they had made an appointment together to come and mourn with him, and to comfort him. And when they raised their eyes from afar, and did not recognize him, they lifted their voices and wept; and each one tore his robe and sprinkled dust on his head toward heaven. So they sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his grief was very great.

Job's friends wanted to help. They felt his pain and were horrified to see a friend in such need. Mercifully, they kept their mouths shut for one whole week. Can you imagine such? They sat with their friend and listened. Often, we may encounter a friend who is grieving or who has experienced some adversity, and we don't know what words to say to them. It's all right to say nothing; in fact, in some cases, that may be the best approach – to be present, and to listen.

Job's friends realized an important truth: People don't lose intimacy when they stop talking, but when they stop listening. It is a lesson that leaders, in particular, must learn and practice. Listening empowers the other person. Because a person is recognized as a leader, the simple act of listening speaks volumes that even a great speech cannot communicate.

--Beecher Hunter