

Listen ? / !

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 July 2015

Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

[0 : 00] Father, most of us think that we're really good at listening, and most of us think that we're really good at listening to you. And Father, you know that we delude ourselves and fool ourselves, and we are unaware of it.

So Father, we ask that you would be very kind and gracious to me and to each one who is here today, and that you would gently but deeply pour out your Holy Spirit upon us. And Father, you would help us to listen to your word and learn to listen to other people as well. And Father, all of this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son, and our Savior. Amen.

Please be seated. So I don't know how many of you listen as I pray, and maybe I said something which was a little bit offensive, but I don't think there's been a statistic about this.

But would any of us be surprised? Would any of us be surprised if they did a very, very good opinion poll in Canada and asked people if they were like terrible listeners, below average listeners, average listeners, above average listeners, or excellent listeners?

[1 : 11] Would any of us be surprised if they did such a survey like that? And maybe some of you will tell me afterwards that they did. Would anybody here be surprised if the survey found that 80% of Canadians thought they were either above average or excellent listeners?

I mean, I don't think any of us would be surprised with that, would we? And of course, statistically, that's probably not the case, that 80% of us could be above average. That, you know, most of us would be average, right?

In fact, I know that we're all, and I'm not going to ask you to do this, and now that I'm sitting on the stage, we'd all be very polite about it and modest. But my guess is that most of us here think that we're one of the best listeners in the congregation.

And some of you are thinking to yourself, that person thinks they're a better listener than me? Are they smoking dope or something like that? But most of us probably think that we're amongst the best listeners in the congregation.

And my guess as well is this, that just about every single person in the room, and it depends on your context, but my guess is that just about every single person here in the room thinks that, you know, whether it's something at work or something with your boyfriend or girlfriend or your spouse or your family, that situation would be better if they listened to you more.

[2 : 35] That's probably what most of us think, that if at work they just listened to me more, things would go better. If my wife would just listen to me more, things would go better.

If my dad, if my kids, if, you know, that probably just about every single one of us here thinks that. And so, see, here's the problem.

So, okay, yeah, you're going to do a sermon on listening. Oh, yeah, yeah, I got that covered. Why do we think that's covered? Why do we think that's boring? Why? Because we're probably part of the 80% or 90% of Canadians who think they're above average in listening.

Therefore, they don't have to listen to more information about how to listen. Because we already got that covered. But if you sort of acknowledge that one moment, if 80, 90% of the people, like these people around me, they actually think they listen better than me?

And the shocking thing is they're saying that about you, okay? The person around you is saying they think that they listen better than you listen. And if that's the case, then maybe we have a bit of a problem with listening.

[3 : 42] And so maybe we need to listen to some wisdom from the Bible about listening. So this is going to be a day where we're going to say the scripture as well because saying it will help us to listen.

So, Andrew, if you could put up the first text. We're going to say it together in a moment. Or you can read it off the screen or you can find it on your little insert. And I'm not going through the insert in the order that they're written, but sort of in a bit of a logical or rhetorical order.

So if you could just, and I'm going to be asking you to say it with me. So if you could just say this with me, that would be great. An intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.

And we don't have to say Proverbs 18, 15. Let's say it again. An intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge. Now, I started, I thought I'd start with a proverb that's sort of simple.

In fact, it would be one of those examples of a proverb that we'd almost not even want to try to remember because, you know, I got listening down pat, right? I'm part of the 90% of Canadians who's above average or excellent at listening.

[4 : 50] So I don't have to listen to advice on listening. And so I thought I'd start with a proverb that sort of is almost like, how are we going to get into any type of a debate? Although in a second, I'm going to say something that maybe, I think this proverb tells us something that will maybe bother most of us in the room.

But before that, I'm not one of these Canadians who doesn't believe that IQ tests measure anything. And I'm not one of the Canadians who think that IQ tests only measure how well you do at IQ tests. I just think it's a common sense notion that some people are smarter than others.

And some people are just really good at, you know, figuring out logical type of problems very, very quickly. And some are just better than others. So the first thing you want to notice about this proverb, when it says that an intelligent heart acquires knowledge and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge, it's not saying that people with high IQs acquire knowledge.

And the ears of the wise, in other words, people with high IQs seek knowledge. It's not saying that at all. In fact, the proverb would be quite comfortable with the statement, you know the problem with that person?

They're really, really intelligent and they're really dumb. Or they're really, really intelligent or they're stupid. Or they're really intelligent and they're dumb in the way that only really intelligent people can be dumb.

[6 : 07] And the proverb would say, yeah, yeah, that, like that, the writer of the proverb would say, yeah, that's a common sense thing. So it's not talking about IQ. And it's interesting that it uses the word heart rather than mind.

And the fact that it uses heart rather than mind is significant because it's reminding us that at the heart, which is sort of deeper than the mind, that's the control or the command center, it's not referring to the seat of the emotions.

It's referring to, in most of the Bible, when you see the word heart, I've said this before, think of where Captain Kirk sits in Star Trek.

And that's what the heart is referring to. It's referring to, in a sense, the command center of the good ship George or the good ship Andrew or the good ship, you know, the good ship Louise. It's referring to the command center, sort of deeper than the mind and higher than the mind.

And it's referring to something that deals with both relational knowledge, practical knowledge, experiential knowledge, and obviously as well the ability to do conceptual knowledge. And it's referring to that part of us as being intelligent.

[7 : 17] And what characterizes that part of us being intelligent is that we seek to acquire knowledge. And we seek to acquire knowledge through hearing, in particular.

And so there's just several things in this that are a bit surprising. The first thing here is that the common misconception about Christians, and a very common belief amongst Christians, is that Christians shouldn't want to know more.

I mean, we've got the answer here in the Bible. But this proverb says, is basically saying that Christians should always want to know more. That that's a Christian idea.

You see, it's one of the reasons why science developed in a Christian context. I'm going to talk about this more in a little bit. But there's this fundamental idea that if this proverb is true, an intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.

It's telling those of us who are Christ followers that we should desire to always know more. That when we're 80, when we're 85, when we're 90, that we should still have a desire to know more.

[8 : 26] The second thing, and this is a whole other sermon topic, is that if you read the Gospels, it's very clear that Jesus asks questions. I mean, part of the mystery of the Gospels is that if Jesus never asked questions, he wouldn't really be a human being, would he?

Because human beings ask questions. It's obvious, if you look at all the different texts together, that what happens in Jesus' case is that when God the Father wants God the Son to know something that he couldn't know by normal human means, then God the Father gives it to Jesus.

But apart from that, and Jesus would just have to trust that when the Father's going to give that type of knowledge and when he won't, the rest of the time Jesus would have to... Jesus probably had to ask directions sometimes when he was going from village to village.

He had to ask people their name. And he probably had to ask his dad, how is it that you fit this piece of wood to that piece of wood? And if he didn't, then he wouldn't have been a human being. But here's the thing. Remember that the proverb is, an intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge. And note this, it doesn't say the eye of the wise, it says the ear of the wise.

[9 : 38] Does this maybe imply that we should stop watching news on television? I think it does. I think it maybe implies that we shouldn't be watching news.

Because in fact, it's a very consistent theme all the way through the Bible that the ear has a special place in acquiring knowledge and wisdom, and that in fact, often the eyes mislead us. And it's far easier to manipulate us with an image than it is with the ear.

So maybe one of the takeaways from this is that those of you who watch the news should maybe stop watching the news. I told you that when you actually look at these proverbs, even the ones that seem very simple can all of a sudden be fairly surprising.

That maybe, maybe we shouldn't watch the news. The next proverb, now we're going to start to get from these simple ones, to start to get more into the problem of listening, is this next proverb is going to say that basically every commencement address that you've ever heard gives you absolutely terrible advice that goes against the Bible.

I mean, most of us don't think that we're in a commencement address, probably even at Christian colleges, that they're saying things that the Bible says are very foolish. And maybe you're not going to agree with the proverb, but that's what the proverb says.

[10 : 58] Andrew, if you could put up the next proverb, which is Proverbs 12, 15. Could you say it with me? The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

Let's say it again. The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice. What's one of the main things that they always say at every commencement address?

Follow your heart. Follow your heart. Do what is, follow your dream. Stay on the path of your dream. Don't let people put you down or take you away from your path.

Follow your path. Follow your heart. Follow your dream. And the book of Proverbs says, The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice. Bit of a shock, eh?

It's a bit of a shock. Obviously, these things have to be nuanced, but it's hard to believe that this proverb would say that most... And by the way, I'm a bit of a minor expert on commencement addresses.

[12 : 05] Maybe not as much of those of you who are teachers, but I have now had eight children graduate from high school, six graduate from university, and several graduate from university with several degrees or certificates.

I've heard lots of commencement addresses. I think they always say it during the... There must be a web page, things you have to say in a commencement address, and then they go up and read it.

But here's another thing. Do you think that these proverbs are written so that I can feel superior to you? You're going, One moment, George. Did you just say there's a proverb here that was written so that you could feel superior to me?

George, there can't possibly be a proverb that would allow you to feel superior to me. Well, I agree with you, but let's read the proverb.

If you could put up the next one, Andrew. Proverbs 13.10. Proverbs 13.10, you want to say it with me? By insolence comes nothing but strife, but with those who take advice is wisdom.

[13 : 09] Let's say it together again. By insolence comes nothing but strife, but with those who take advice is wisdom. Now, what do you mean, George, by saying that this proverb is telling you that you can be superior to others?

Well, I've just put it in a shocking form. But you see, the problem is is that we're going to come to a lot of these types of proverbs, and the problem is that we're going to take this proverb and say, wow, Proverbs 13.10, by insolence comes nothing but strife, but with those who take advice is wisdom.

I wish my boss would read that. I wish my wife would read this. I wish my kid would read this. I wish my pastor would read this.

One moment, you're reading this to think you're superior to me? I'm reading it to think I'm superior to you. What happens if two people are both wishing the other person read this proverb?

How do you think those conversations go? How do you think it goes if I'm reading this proverb thinking, wow, I wish Louise would read this. We'd have far better conversations.

[14 : 21] And if Louise is reading it saying, boy, I wish George would take this to heart, we'd have far better conversations. We're both reading it in a way that makes us feel superior to the other person.

In other words, we're reading it in an arrogant and proud way that does not respect the other, which is what insolence is. We're both reading it in a proud way that does not respect the other.

And when that happens, there's strife. It's when happens, there's strife. And the thing about this is, by the way, no Christian should read this saying that this only applies to Muslims or atheists or feminists or gays or NDPers or people who are actually going to vote for Harper.

You pick your outside group. I mean, the fact is this does apply. This does apply to feminists. It applies to women's shelters. It applies to gay collectives.

It applies to university faculties. It applies in business. It applies in bureaucracies. It applies in gospel halls, in Roman Catholic cathedrals, in Eastern Orthodox places, in evangelical places.

[15 : 41] It's a human problem. Isn't it a human problem? It's a human problem. And just because you've asked Jesus into your life to be your Savior and Lord doesn't mean that you don't have a problem with insolence.

It doesn't mean that I don't have a problem with insolence. The scripture, if we read it carefully, is inviting us not to look at how it applies to others but how it applies to myself.

How much of the strife in my life is caused because I think I listen better and know better, way better than the other person? How much of it's going on?

Here's, in fact, another very... You know, when I told my wife last night, she has good reason for this reaction.

When I told my wife last night that I was going to do a sermon on listening, I was looking at her face and she said, Oh, that would be interesting. She has good grounds for this, by the way, okay?

[16 : 49] And she said, Too bad I'm going to be in the nursery to hear what I... You know, George on listening. That could be a variant. My kids would probably be thinking the same thing. Dad on listening.

It's a human problem, folks. And I'm probably getting a little bit red right now. So maybe if you could make the lights a little bit so I don't look like I'm blushing when I say this. Too bad we can't do it quickly.

The other thing is that these Proverbs tell us that we should be open to new ideas. In fact, the sad fact is that in many churches, if you were to say that the Bible tells you to be open to new ideas, a lot of people will instantly feel, Oh!

Oh! Christians don't need to listen to new ideas. George, that's a dangerous thing to say that Christians should listen to new ideas.

Let's look at the next Proverb, if you could put it up. It's Proverbs 18, 18-2. Do you want to say this with me? A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.

[17 : 57] Let's say it again. A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion. Understanding means you're learning new ideas, folks.

That's what understanding means. And this is, you know, once again, this is a very powerful proverb that it's very, very easy for us to say, Wow, does this ever describe my professor or my boss or my husband or my dad?

And it, you know, it doesn't, we have a harder time thinking it might apply to us. I mean, the fact of the matter is is that we've all probably talked to people, and you can tell that the only reason they stop talking is that they have to catch up with their breathing, and they're actually, but graciously, will allow you to continue talking while they catch up and replenish the oxygen in their body.

But what you say is completely and utterly irrelevant. Or that even when they appear to listen, because their eyes are on you, and they have functioning ears, but you can tell that when you're talking to them that what's going on inside their brain is that all they're doing is marshalling new things they're going to say to you once you finally stop speaking. And the challenge is, does that describe us? Because, you see, the fact of the matter is that most of us wouldn't say that we're fools. In fact, my guess is that if we did a little survey, you know, are you really foolish?

[19 : 24] Below average fool? Average fool? Above average fool? Really foolish? Probably most of us wouldn't put ourselves in the above average fool. In fact, most of us probably wouldn't even put ourselves as average fools.

But how many of us in our conversations, actually, maybe not in all of them, all we're actually interested in doing is expressing our own opinion.

And we're not actually interested in listening at all. And how can you learn? How can we learn? How can I learn, if that's all that's going on with what I've already thought?

Now, this all sets up another one of these proverbs that probably when we're looking through the book of proverbs, looking for something really interesting that'll help us, we'd skip over this because it sounds sort of hokey and probably wrong.

But if we've come through listening to Proverbs 18.15 and 12.15 and 13.10 and 18.2, then maybe we're ready to actually listen to Proverbs 13.8 and see that it's actually a lot wiser than we think and we need to hear it a lot more than we think.

[20 : 31] If you could put it up, Andrew, that would be great. 13.18. You want to say it with me? Poverty and disgrace come to him who ignores instruction, but whoever heeds reproof is honored.

Say it again. Poverty and disgrace come to him who ignores instruction, but whoever heeds reproof is honored. Now, just before I say anything more about this, you'll notice we're going to do this all the way through.

We're going to say the Proverbs twice because it's far more important that you remember the proverb than you remember me or what I have to say about it. Right? The Proverbs wise. Hopefully I don't get in the way of the wisdom of the proverb.

And so some of these you might want to take back and memorize yourself or meditate upon them or something like that. But here's the thing about this. At first glance, if I hadn't tried to lead you to the point where you acknowledge, hopefully with me, that there's a listening problem going on within me and that, in fact, a lot of strife and other problems and ignorance and everything comes from our lack of willingness to listen, if we hadn't sort of gone through that, we would maybe think that this proverb is wrong.

I couldn't find it in my bookshelves easily, so I couldn't check it up. But a man by the name of Stephen Covey that probably many of you have heard of, he's not a Christian, but a few years ago, I don't know, 15, 20 years ago, maybe more than that, for his PhD dissertation, he did his PhD dissertation on, he read all of the books, the main books for the past, I think it was 150 years in English, that talked about success and effectiveness.

[22 : 10] And when he read the 150 years worth of literature on the subject, he came to the conclusion that the advice could be narrowed down to seven statements. And he ended up turning that PhD dissertation into a book that sold millions of copies, and it's called Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.

And that, with the book by Alan, Getting Things Done, are probably the two most important books in literature around how to use your time and how to be effective. And one of those seven things that he found key to effectiveness was in fact, he didn't word it this way, I'm going to give you a different way to word it in a moment, but it's basically this, that he found that listening is key to success.

He found that if you ignore listening to people, if you ignore correction, if you ignore listening, things like poverty and disgrace will come to you.

But if you listen to correction and listen deeply to others, you'll be honored. Now, just think about it for a second, because, you know, just think about my, you know, a marriage or a family.

Like, what's it like with a marriage if the husband never listens to the wife? What's it like in a marriage if the wife never listens to the husband? What's it like if all of these proverbs, the husband and the wife, think it applies to the other?

[23 : 43] What's it like for a husband and a father and his kids or a mom and her kids? What's it like in a workplace if you absolutely never, ever, ever, ever feel that you're listened to?

[28 : 27] Maybe I can find something in the Bible that will allow me to talk about it. Whoa! This will allow me to talk about what I want to talk about. We don't realize that we do that. Pray that we don't.

Pray that that doesn't happen. Pray that when we slip into it because every minister slips into it. Pray that, that when we start to slip into it that the Holy Spirit will convict us of sin and, and we'll say, you know what, maybe I should spend 80% of my time trying to understand what the Bible's saying and 20% of my time how to explain it or talk about it.

One of the things which is, I'm not going to try to betray my, my political things, biases. Probably some of you would guess some of the things and be wrong about a lot of the other things. But, you know, one of the things that happens is if you watch John Stewart or if you watch Bill O'Reilly or Rush Limbaugh, take your pick, left or right.

I remember a few years ago that John Stewart talked as if he didn't actually think he was left wing. And I thought, whoa, doesn't think he's left wing? Sorry, I made somebody laugh there for that one.

[29 : 43] And, and a lot of people would say, no, Bill O'Reilly's not, the guy, you know, Rush Limbaugh, he's not right wing, he's just right. And a lot of what goes on is we can end up becoming part of a tribe, pro-Harper, anti-Harper, NDP, conservative, you know, green, whatever.

And, and what we don't do is we don't actually listen. What we do is we mock people who differ from us. And we're not aware of the fact that much of what happens with Limbaugh or John Stewart and you, or Colbert, you can take your different picks, is that a lot of what is their humor is actually just mocking and scoffing.

And, the book of Proverbs say that that's actually not good. Let's, Proverbs 9, verses 7 to 10.

Andrew, if you want to put it up. I don't know if it all made it on one slide or not. Two slides, okay.

I will just say this one once because it's actually four Proverbs. If you want to join with me in saying it. whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abused and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury. Do not reprove a scoffer or he will hate you. Reprove a wise man and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man and he will be still wiser.

[31 : 07] Teach a righteous man and he will increase in learning. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. Here's this thing.

You know, if you try to correct Limbaugh, instruct him, he'll, I mean, I wouldn't try to match wits with John Stewart or with Rush Limbaugh.

I wouldn't try to match wits with him. And I would probably have to, you know, depending on either one, I'd have to sit there with mocking invective that would overwhelm me.

But this isn't just a proverb that makes fun of what we may be, some of us might say are extreme people. This actually is an important litmus test for us. Andrew, if you could put up the Venn diagram.

So hopefully you can read that. I have to make sure I don't fall off the screen, the stage while I talk to you about it. Here's, here's what happens. So, most of us will say, no, I'm pretty good at listening to people who disagree with me.

[32 : 17] I'm actually pretty good at that. In fact, you know, George, if you had a poll, I would say I'm above average in listening to other people who disagree with me.

In fact, we might discover that 90% of Canadians think they're above average. Which, once again, you know, unless it's a modal distribution, sorry, statistic geek comment, it's probably not the case. But, see, what happens is that we have my thoughts and then there's the other person's thoughts and there's a bit of an intersection. My guess is with John Stewart and Rush Limbaugh it would be a very tiny area that they agree on.

I don't know, maybe they both like dogs or something, I don't know. But, apart from that, it would be a very tiny little area. And, and some of us it's bigger areas. The hard part isn't the fact that we can listen to that area, the part of the intersecting circles which is number two.

The hard part is listening to that which is number three. Doesn't intersect with us at all. Doesn't intersect with us at all. And when we come across that, is there a propensity within us?

[33 : 29] Is there a time within us that we want to make fun of it? We want to joke? We want to belittle it? That, this, this ends up being a bit of a, of a litmus test for us.

Because the, the fact of the matter is, is if I was to say how many of us have a problem with mocking and scoffing, my guess is that none of us would actually feel even remotely convicted about it before we read this.

But I, I think mocking and scoffing is a human problem. And once again, just because you gave your life to Jesus doesn't mean you have a problem with mocking and scoffing.

Just because I'm a pastor doesn't mean I don't have a problem with mocking and scoffing. And the fact that I might listen to one of those guys and, and it happens to fit with something I already believe, but it's the things that I don't believe and if, if I have a tendency to just want to make fun of them, then Proverbs 9 verses 7 to 10 is talking about me.

It's not talking about some other person. It's a litmus test. And you know, here's one of the things by the way. Just sort of pause before we're going to wrap this all up with a couple of the final Proverbs.

[34 : 44] If, if people weren't able to take in completely new information and new ideas, there'd be no science. If people weren't able to take in completely new information and new ideas and not just dismiss it, there would be nothing that, I mean, some people, you know, social science isn't really very scientific, but that's, there'd be no understanding.

There'd really be no growth in anybody's life or in whole disciplines like science. And it's interesting here that it's also saying that there's actually no, no growth in our walk with Jesus.

That there's a type of a seamlessness between being able to listen to new data and not say, no, no, no, I really think the data has to go this way. And then you just keep trying to do the data, you know, the experiments over and over and over again before you get the data that you like.

And that's not how science works. You know, it's not how in social sciences you should actually be sort of interested in trying to figure out what the actors say and what's going on in the country and the culture. And actually, you have to be prepared to be surprised.

Some of you remember, there's a few while ago, I used to be, I used to do sociological research.

That was what I did before I was a minister, amongst other things. And I was involved in a research project and that this time when the Holy Spirit convicted me, I was doing some research about the effect of income transfer policies in different nations, capitalist, advanced capitalist nations, and the impact of transfer payments on income inequality.

[36 : 16] And the United States wasn't finishing the worst. And I kept using all of my cleverness with statistics to try to bring in different variables because I was driven to believe that the United States would be the worst.

And it was one of those times, it's an odd time when in my sociological research that it was as if the Holy Spirit spoke to me and said, George, George, what are you doing? Why are you driven by this hatred of the Americans?

Many, many years ago. And I realized that's what I was doing. I wasn't actually just trying to actually understand. I had an agenda. And so it's very, very interesting here that the same type, it's all connected to the fear of the Lord, that there's no, it's not a scene, you know, you think, fear, God is vastly different than me.

His thoughts are not my thoughts. And if I'm not prepared to listen to thoughts that are different from me in another person, if I'm not prepared to listen to three with you, what makes me think I'll listen to three from God?

Like, what makes me think I would listen to three from God if I'm not willing to do it, even listen to it with you? How does that work, George? How does that work?

[37 : 39] I mean, it can't work. just a couple of final ones. One of the reasons that we have a hard time listening to instruction from others is that we know they hate us.

We know they hate us. So if you could put up the next one, it's I think the second to last of our Proverbs. You want to say this with me? It's Proverbs 3, verses 11 and 12.

Let's say it together again. My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves as a father the son in whom he delights.

I mean, one of the things that you have to get away from this proverb is, remember I didn't put it down as a point, but it's like an important takeaway for us, is that one of the reasons that people who really like John Stewart don't want to listen to Rush Limbaugh is they believe that Rush Limbaugh hates them, and vice versa.

So one of the things, you know, if one of my first point was that seek to understand before you want to seek to be understood, like one of the first, another sort of takeaway which I didn't put as a point is that if you don't like somebody, if you maybe hate them, maybe you shouldn't offer them advice.

[39 : 17] If I really don't like somebody, then maybe I shouldn't offer them advice. I mean, the thing here about all of these proverbs is on one hand, the proverbs are all a bit, just because somebody hates you doesn't mean their comment on your driving isn't true, which is why we always have to be

willing to open, to listen to advice.

I mean, the fact of the matter is they might hate me, and the fact of the matter is I might drive badly. And maybe a person who hates me is the one who's going to talk to me about it, and maybe I have to listen to them.

But, you know, generally speaking, if we think somebody hates us, we're going to probably not want to listen to their advice. And so we should try to put that into practice ourself. And if you really don't like somebody, if you really, really, really don't like them, probably don't offer them any advice. Pray instead. Pray instead. Pray. But here's the thing for us. This is a shocking thing, because this is directly connected to God.

That means that when we listen to the Bible about hell, when we listen to the Bible about tithing, about money, about homosexuality, about sexuality, about Jesus being the only way, about a whole range of things, nothing, this text is telling us that nothing in the Bible that's God's Word written, that's come to us, is written because God hates us.

[40 : 59] Every word, every word emerges from the love that has dwelt before the planets were formed or created. From all eternity, the Father has loved the Son, and the Son has loved the Father.

And the movement of the love from the Father to the Son, and the Son to the Father, is one way to understand who the Holy Spirit is. And from all eternity, there has been love, and every word in the Bible addressed to us is a word of love addressed to us, even the hardest parts.

Even the hardest parts. So here's just a couple of points, and then we'll wrap it up. True love, and if you could put it up, true love truly corrects.

True love truly corrects. Any attempt to think that there's a type of spirituality or religion that's never going to try to correct us, it's a spirituality or religion that doesn't love us.

Granted, some correction comes out of hatred, but true love always corrects. My wife corrects me because she loves me, and because I need correction.

[42 : 10] True love truly corrects. Another takeaway. God always has more to teach me in his word.

I mean, here's the question for you. When did you stop listening to God? Why did you stop listening to God?

And some of you will say, George, okay, this is a church. I didn't stop listening to God. Well, how often do you read your Bible this week? For those of you who have been Christians for more than five years, it's an uncomfortable moment.

How many of you have never read the Bible cover to cover? Well, why did you stop listening to God? Like, how would it work with Louise if I came home and Louise wanted to talk to me about it? I said, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. Don't read Numbers. Don't read Leviticus. Don't read First Chronicles. I don't want to talk to you about these topics either, Louise. How do you think it would go if I said to my wife, these are the areas of our life together that I don't want you to talk to me about because I'm not going to listen.

[43 : 22] That would not go very well. And it shouldn't go very well, by the way, right? I'm not saying it wouldn't go very well because there's a problem with Louise. It shouldn't go well.

So if you haven't tried to read the whole Bible, like, so why did you decide you're going to stop listening to God? When did that happen?

And how come you're fine with it or how come I'm fine with it? All of these proverbs are telling us that God always has more to teach me in his word.

And one more takeaway. Lord, have mercy upon me. Help me to never stop listening to you. Lord, have mercy upon me.

Help me to never stop listening to you. And that's just, it's not all work. There's grace in all of this. True love truly, true love truly corrects.

[44 : 23] There's grace in the proverbs. It's not just about our ability to listen. The Bible is going to convict us of listening, but it wants to convict us of grace first. If you could put up the final proverb, Andrew.

If you could say it with me. Whoever despises the word brings destruction on himself, but he who reveres the commandment will be rewarded.

The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life that one may turn away from the snares of death. Let's say it together again. Whoever despises the word brings destruction on himself, but he who reveres

the commandment will be rewarded.

The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life that one may turn away from the snares of death. I pray because I believe God listens.

I pray because I believe God listens. And it's not always been the case, but I know that the listening problem in God and me and our relationship, the listening problem isn't on his end, it's on my end.

[45 : 36] God is always more willing to listen than I am to speak. And I'm never as willing to listen to him as he is willing to speak to me. But I pray because I know God listens.

And God just doesn't only listen to the cry of our hearts, he listens to our rage. He listens to our blindness. He listens to our self-deception.

And that's why he sends his son to die upon the cross. As a power of God for salvation for all who believe. And why it's something just very, very, very tiny that we do that allows the power of God for salvation to enter into us and for us to enter into him.

And this proverb tells us the word. It's very, very interesting. Actually, if you want to put up the final point, Andrew, that would be great. By his grace, God's word is life-giving life.

Or James, I guess it is. If you could put up the final point. By his grace, God's word is life-giving life. It's very interesting because, you know, if you read John's gospel, you know that the word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth.

[46 : 54] And you know that in the same John in the gospels that Jesus preaches the word and he is the word made flesh who preaches the word written. And so there's this wonderful double meaning in this proverb.

To despise Jesus, to despise the word, brings destruction on ourselves. Just as, in a sense, to despise the word from my wife brings destruction to our marriage.

To despise the word of my children brings destruction on my family. To despise the word of your employer or your neighbor will bring destruction to the relationships. And the very, very same type of thing is to despise the word of God brings destruction on himself.

To despise the word made flesh brings destruction on ourselves. But he who reveres the commandment, who has an affection for it, doesn't understand all of it but has a desire to honor it, to affection for it.

And when I became a Christian, I didn't know everything that Jesus did, but I knew that I had to trust him as my savior and as my lord. And God takes that tiny bit of revering of him and the power of God for salvation comes and enters into us.

[48 : 08] That life comes into us. Life-giving life enters into me and I receive it and I enter into it.

And in fact, a whole way to understand the Christian faith, if you have a hard time understanding, repent and believe, just take the last part of this proverb to say that to turn to Jesus is to turn to a fountain of life.

And if you turn to Jesus who is the fountain of life, you are turning from death and it snares towards a fountain of life. And that's the heart. God, by his grace, gives life.

And my call and my cry to try to learn to listen to God and to learn to listen to others is not now something that I have to do in a certain way before God loves me because God, who is life-giving life, offers life-giving life to me, who is incomplete and self-deluding and self-deceiving, and he's not weighing my merits.

He offers me this gift. And now my journey to listen is not a journey that I have to walk on by myself, but I can walk with Jesus.

[49 : 25] And the love of Jesus for me is not an abstraction, but it's real. He died on the cross. He drank the cup that I deserve of my doom and offered me his cup of destiny.

It's not an abstraction. It's not an idea. It happened on Calvary. It's real. Every word in the Bible is a word of love that will turn me, hopefully, to life-giving life, a fountain of life-giving life that I might turn from death and the snares of death to enter into life and learn to listen to life-giving life.

Please stand. Let's just bow our heads in prayer. Father, we confess before you that probably we didn't think we had to hear any proverbs about listening because we had that covered and we had it matched.

We never struck us, Father, that maybe there's whole areas of our lives where we don't want to listen to you or that we read the Bible in a way that will make us feel superior to others.

Father, we thank you that your word has the power to cut us to the heart. But we thank you, Father, that your word has the power to cut us to the heart, not so that you will mock us or scoff at us, but

so that we will cry out to you for mercy and come to Jesus.

[50 : 59] We thank you, Father, that in Jesus and his death upon the cross that you offer life-giving life, a fountain of life-giving life that we can plunge into and that can enter into us.

Father, turn our hearts to Jesus. Help us to listen to you. Help us to want to listen to you. Help us to want to learn more from your word. Help us not to feel that we have arrived, that there's not more for us to know and more of us to learn and more for us to try to experience.

Father, grant us a hunger and thirst for the fountain of life-giving life. Father, grant us an ability to turn from death and the snares of death to life-giving life, your son Jesus, to your word.

And Father, as we enter more deeply into that, help us to listen to others, unafraid to listen to others, without mocking, without superiority, to listen to others.

Father, we ask that you would help us. And this we ask in the name of Jesus, your son and our savior. Amen.