

Devotions for Those Who Serve



Serving By Listening



Tom Lemler

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From the Author

There are few things, if any, that are as emotionally exhilarating, and draining, as the task of serving others. Having worked in a variety of ministry settings, including various roles within Christian camp ministry, I understand the excitement that often comes with the beginning of a new ministry or ministry season. I also understand the weariness that can develop when our focus begins to drift away from the ministry of serving and onto ourselves.

This devotional guide is part of a series that came about through some conversations at a Christian Camp Leaders' Conference about the need for camp summer staff devotional material that would be useful without being a burden in an already busy schedule. On my way home from the conference, I began to pray about what would be a useful format and about potential topics for devotions developed specifically for those who serve. Out of that prayer time, this series began to form in my mind and then on paper.

It is my prayer that every Christian recognizes the importance of serving others. With this guide, I pray that you would learn the value of listening to God and to people as you serve. As you go through this devotional guide, each day will focus on a different aspect of our need to listen. As you pray, ask God to help you be a more obedient listener to Him. Pray that the people around you would know you as one who truly listens to them. Use the note section at the bottom of each page to jot down thoughts, ideas, or action steps that God will bring to your mind.

In prayer,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tom".

Tom Lemler

Day 1

Listen for the Truth

(Ephesians 4:15-16)

How much of what you hear on a daily basis do you believe is true? How would you know? Of the things that you don't believe to be true, is there often an element of truth in them? Have you ever agreed to do something that sounded much different when explained than what it actually turned out to be? How often do you exaggerate, or minimize, the truth when you are trying to get people to see things your way? How does a person's tendency to do that make it so important to really listen for truth when serving?

Most of us rarely put a lot of effort into listening so we only hear what we want to hear. We even go so far as to define the words we do hear according to how we want them to sound. We are too often satisfied with the, "How are you doing?" 'Fine' 'Have a good day'" exchange that fills our interactions with people. When serving, it is important to listen beyond the words that are spoken, or not spoken, and hear what the heart and soul are saying.

As you pray, ask God to help you be one who is quick to listen. As you listen to those you serve, ask God to help you hear the truth in what is being said and in what is being left out.

Notes: _____

Day 2

Listen with Understanding

(Matthew 15:10)

How much of what you hear do you think you really understand? What are some listening techniques that would increase your level of understanding. How does a growing relationship with a person help you to have a greater understanding of them when you listen? How much effort is required to understand those you serve? How is your serving changed when you choose to listen with understanding?

Years ago I was a team leader and cabin dad at a 5th & 6th grade camp where one of the campers I was responsible for was an incredible challenge from day one. It didn't matter what was said by me or the camp dean, this guy was going to do his own thing no matter what. It all reached a boiling point the first night when we were out as a team doing a scavenger hunt and he couldn't get his mind off a flashlight that was back in the cabin. He ran off from the group and I was ready to give up and go home right then. Fortunately, the camp dean sat down with me and helped me to listen with understanding as I served. It turned out to be a great week for all of us.

As you pray, ask God to help you have a greater understanding of unseen issues as you listen to those you serve.

Notes: _____

Day 3

Listen for Reconciliation

(Matthew 18:15)

How often do you find yourself at odds with someone? What kinds of things tend to extend the distance between people? What things help to bridge the gap when differences have divided people? Have you ever been wronged by someone you serve with? By someone you serve? Have you ever wronged someone you serve with? Someone you serve? Have you ever resolved any of those issues? How many of them were misunderstandings that a resolution was helped along by deliberate listening?

While not always a cure for every conflict, few conflicts are ever resolved without purposeful listening. When you serve, there will always be a need for reconciliation because even in the best of circumstances, we do things that offend those we serve with and those we serve. When we listen for reconciliation, we are able to hear beyond the facts and listen to the heart of the person we need reconciled with.

As you pray, ask God to show you any situations in your life where you need to listen for reconciliation. Pray that you would not ignore the conflict, but that you would listen for the common ground that you have in Christ.

Notes: _____

Day 4
Listen to God's Son
(Luke 9:35)

What does it mean to listen to someone? Does that mean the same thing to you as hearing someone? Why? What types of things make you believe that a person has listened to you? What would make you think they have not listened? How often do you listen to God and His Son, Jesus Christ? Would the people closest to you agree with your answer? What evidence could you give to support your answer? How does listening to God's Son about everything help you as you serve?

Sometimes we give instructions to someone, perhaps someone we have served or serve with, only to get a response of, "I hear you." How we take that response usually hinges on a variety of variables including tone of voice, body language, and physical action that accompanies the response. When someone says, "I hear you" and they are immediately doing what was instructed, we tend to believe they actually listened. If there is no change in what they are doing, we conclude they may have heard but they weren't listening. God wants our listening to be put into action by the way we serve others.

As you pray, ask God to help you be an obedient listener to the instructions that come from His Son.

Notes: _____

Day 5
Listen Patiently
(Acts 26:3)

How quickly do you get tired of listening to someone? How likely are you to interrupt a person before they are done speaking? How often do you quit listening to someone because you think you already know everything they could say? Has your listening to someone ever revealed an unexpected surprise? How difficult is it to continue to listen to something that you suspect will challenge your beliefs and way of life? How will listening patiently help you as you serve today?

I have a rather slow speech pattern. Unfortunately, most of the world doesn't seem to know what to do with such a thing. It is nearly impossible to finish a sentence because I have met very few people who know how to listen patiently. Many of the people we serve, and serve with, have the same frustration with us but for a slightly different reason. Often times the very heart of what they want to tell us is buried deep toward the end of a conversation as it takes great courage to build up to what they need to say. It is through our patient listening that we discover how we need to serve.

As you pray, ask God to give you patience in listening.

Notes: _____

Day 6
Listen Eagerly
(James 1:19)

What types of things are you eager to listen to? Why? Are there things, or people, that you try to avoid listening to? Why? Do you ever feel trapped in a conversation and try to find a way out? What could you do to listen more eagerly in such a time? How eager are you to listen to those you serve with? Why? How about to those you serve? Why? Are you more likely to listen or to want to be listened to? Would the people closest to you agree with your answer?

We have all likely had times when something happened that caused us to listen eagerly to every detail we could possibly hear. I think of national tragedies such as 9/11 and the space shuttle Challenger disaster. Everyone I knew was glued to a news source, eager to hear whatever could be told. It didn't matter how minute or trivial the details may have been, we all were eager to hear every last word. We would do well to apply that same eagerness to our desire to hear every last word of those we serve and those we serve with.

As you pray, ask God to help you to be a person who is quick to listen. Pray that you would listen to others with an eagerness that encourages them to speak.

Notes: _____

Day 7
Listen for Instruction
(James 1:22)

Are you a person who is likely to read instructions and owner's manuals of things you purchase or do you live by the motto, "If all else fails, read the instructions."? Do you often find yourself in the middle of doing something and wish you had more information before you began? What do you think is the purpose of God's Word in your life? How often do you think of it as being instructional? How would a daily practice of listening to the instruction found in God's Word help you as you serve?

God says that His Word is "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness", yet how often do we really listen to what it says and believe that it is the greatest source of instruction on how to serve? When we serve people, it is important that we listen to them to understand their needs. It is even more important, if we wish to serve well, to listen to God's Word for instruction on how to serve that person according to their needs.

As you pray, ask God to help you listen to His Word with the intent of doing what it says. Pray that your usefulness in serving would come by applying the instructions of Scripture.

Notes: _____

Devotions for Those Who Serve: Serving by Listening is a part of a series of devotionals written specifically with those serving in Christian camp ministry in mind. I pray that these devotionals are useful tools in a wide variety of ministry and service settings. While the development of these devotional guides is an ongoing project of Impact Prayer Ministry, the following is a list of the initial topics to be addressed:

Called to Serve

Serving with Contentment

Serving with Strength

Serving with Courage

Serving with Excellence

Serving by Faith

Serving through Friendship

Guard Your Heart in Serving

Serving with Integrity

Serving by Listening

Serving with Patience

Serving in Purity

Serving as you Go!

Please contact Impact Prayer Ministry for information about using these devotionals in your ministry. If you have ideas for other topics related to serving, please feel free to pass them along also.

www.impactprayerministry.com

About the author:

Tom Lemler is the director of Impact Prayer Ministry where his preaching, teaching, and resource development is designed to help individuals have a greater connection to God through prayer.

For more information about Tom's ministry of teaching, preaching, and writing, visit the "Tom's Treasure" blog at impactprayer.com or the Impact Prayer Ministry website at impactprayerministry.com.

