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# A Measure of Grace

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## Resisting, Not Participating with Temptation

*by Roger Jones*

S was recently listening to the radio and heard a preacher relaying a short story that got me to thinking. It went something like this:

A man and his young son were outside one Sunday afternoon when they walked by a ditch that was filled with water. The boy asked, "Can I swim in here?"

The father responded, "No, it isn't safe. We don't know what is in the ditch or where the water came from." The two went on their way and didn't speak of it further.

The next day after the boy came home from school, the father discovered a wet swimming suit in his son's bag. "Did you go swimming in the ditch that I told you not to swim in?" He asked.

"Yes. I didn't mean to, but I did," he replied.

"If you didn't mean to, why did you have your swimming suit with you?"

Much to his father's chagrin, the boy responded,  
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*(Temptation continued from page 1)*

"I took my swimming suit in case I was tempted."

Hearing this story made me laugh. Then it got me to thinking, because I could definitely relate to it. What is *my* version of carrying my swimming suit around with me, just in case an "opportunity" I don't want to refuse comes along? Several things came immediately to my mind; some of my own experiences and some that I have heard about from others.

Most of us would agree that for an alcoholic to have a bottle of booze in his/her home would be risky. Yet we often do the same thing with the things we struggle with. When I am trying to eat better, it probably isn't going to help me much to have chips and ice cream in the house. I might be able to resist for awhile, but eventually, my self control will be at an ebb. Will I choose carrot sticks or ice cream when that time comes? And whether or not I choose to go through the McDonald's drive-through, I take comfort from knowing I have exactly \$1.08 in change to buy french-fries after a stressful day.

While some of these may seem like silly examples, there are others that are more dangerous. A number of years ago, an attractive man I met on the bus gave me his phone number. I never called him, but by not refusing it or not throwing out the number, I held onto that possibility for quite awhile. I never "went swimming," but I sure thought about it. All I

had to do was pick up the phone.

What comes to your mind when you think of ways you prepare for the possibility of temptation?

The story of the boy and his father illustrates the point that we like to keep our options open. If we don't feel like our needs are being met in the way or the timing we want, we will take things into our own hands. We hope that God will show up, but we want to be prepared just in case. We learned in economics to not put all of our eggs into one basket. We

should diversify our investments! While that is a really good idea in investing (in money and relationships), I am pretty sure that God is an exception to this rule.

It is a really good idea to try to make things easier for ourselves, rather than more difficult. With the issue of temptation, our pride often gets in the way. This is because we really need help and accountability. It is impossible for

another person to monitor every moment of our lives and every thought that passes through our heads, but it is a mistake to think that we can navigate life in a healthy way without other people involved.

Just a few months ago, I had an opportunity to let my pride keep me from making a good choice for myself. My wife's computer was older and having some problems, so we decided to get a new one. A few weeks went by when I real-

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## Are You Listening... Really?

*By Mary Heathman*

Recently I was asked to teach an in-service class for WGA facilitators. The staff talked about what topics might be good for new and experienced facilitators alike. We agreed that we all wanted to become better listeners, and get better at facilitating growth in listening skills among our group members as well. We also know that listening better would result in loving people better – the core of our calling.

I also recalled a proverb that seemed to bless our direction: “A wise man will hear, and will increase learning, and a man of understanding will get guidance (Proverbs 1:5). With these thoughts in mind, I launched into a bit of research and came up with a few pointers about listening that I shared at the training. The principles for effective listening seemed to be relevant in a much broader circle than just our leadership team, so I decided to make effective listening the focus of this newsletter article. For the scope of this article, I will present a few thoughts on the benefits of being attentive, and share two keys to effective listening. At the end of this article I have also listed two books that would be helpful for further reading on the subject.

### *“Listening is a lost art.”*

In a Google search for the quote “Listening is a lost art” there were 26,600 sites listed. A brief look at the first few pages took me to video clips of corporate sales trainers, motivational speakers, sites for famous quotations that listed the author as anonymous, and one that attributed the saying to a Buddhist

monk. In this diverse set of contexts, the point made is clear: people are talking all the time, either actually or virtually—so much so that we are not really listening to one another well. Yet, listening is the first key to learning, discovering, and coming to understand. We would do well to pay attention—to really attend to one another and to learn to use keys to effective listening.

In my experience, the most enjoyable and fruitful conversations are those within which the participants simply listen well and respond thoughtfully to what they hear. In these gatherings, whether discussing favorite authors or considering together a thorny problem in the community, people are attentive to one another and respond with respect. And they do so in such a way that there is no doubt about the importance of each person. In these conversations, I feel understood; I want to understand others. And I am also humbled; I become a better listener and a more thoughtful responder by simply being with those who do this so much better than I.

### **The Rewards of Attentiveness**

When we really attend to one another, when we pay attention, when we concentrate on hearing what a person is saying in order to understand and know them better, there are benefits that make the effort well worthwhile. Attentiveness helps us build relationships because when attended to, people sense they are important and trust builds in the relationship. They want to understand us; they return the favor and pay attention to us.

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## Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

*By Nancy Hicks*

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### My Utmost

I love making jewelry. When I hermit away in my studio with torch and saw and hammers and silver, my heart dances a jig. My mind, however, starts its own hammering: “You should be doing something that has an impact on other people not just making yourself happy; shouldn’t you be calling lonely people and paying bills and taking the dog for a walk . . . ?” If I ignore this initial droning, the spiritual drill sergeant comes flying out of his tiny barracks in my head and starts barking Scripture:

“No one should seek their own good, but the good of **others**” (I Cor 10:24).

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value **others** above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the **others**” (Phil 2:3&4).

“And do not forget to do good and to share with **others**, for with such sacrifices God is pleased” (Heb 13:16).

“Each of you should use whatever

gift you have received to serve **others** . . . ” (I Pet 4:10).

(Come to think of it, the drill sergeant usually has a sort of Pauline toga on.)

As I have been wrestling through my guilty pleasure with God, He has brought to mind some very interesting stories. The first drifted through my head unexpectedly; it was a line from Eric Liddell in the movie *Chariots of Fire*, “I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run I feel His pleasure.” “That’s it!” I thought when this sprinted through my thoughts. “When I create jewelry, I feel His pleasure.” Liddell’s faith grabbed the attention of the world in 1924, during the Paris Olympic Games. He refused to participate in his strongest race because it fell on a Sunday and violated the Sabbath rest he believed was dictated by the Bible.

Then God reminded me of the story of Biddy Chambers, wife of Oswald Chambers. Chambers is best known for his devotional classic, *My Utmost for His High-*

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est. According to the <http://utmost.org/> website, this book “has been continuously in print in the United States since 1935 and remains in the top ten titles of the religious book bestseller list with millions of copies in print.” What most people don’t know is that when Chambers died at the age of 43 from appendicitis, he had virtually no handwritten notes of his copious sermons from which to compose a book like this. But Biddy did. As a young girl, unable to continue with school because of health issues, Biddy stayed home to help her mother and studied Pitman shorthand. She was eventually able to take dictation at the phenomenal rate of 250 words per minute (faster than most people can talk). After marrying Chambers, she sat in the back for every talk, sermon, and teaching that he gave and copied them down word for word. After Oswald’s death, Biddy composed the devotionals from her notes and had them published solely under Oswald’s name.

So I consider Eric’s running, that reminded the world about faith in God and His Word, and Biddy’s shorthand excellence, that has carried truth to people around the world on a daily basis for 76 years. These are not the “acts of

God and service” that I would instantly think of when challenged by my internal drill sergeant. I am brought up short by these stories to examine my own judgments about what is good. Who am I to say what God can and can’t use? I am challenged to press in to God and ask for His direction. Another verse springs to mind, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight” (Prov. 3:5&6). I’m not expecting to make an impact on the world with my jewelry. But I do expect that God’s pleasure combined with mine is a good enough reason to continue.



*(Temptation continued from page 2)*

ized her old computer was home and not being used. All of my internet access (at home and work) is monitored through a program called Covenant Eyes. My phone has internet access, but it is restricted via a password which only my accountability partner knows. My wife's old computer had no restrictions or monitoring. Likely, she would never use it again and would never know if I used it to view pornography.

Once I realized this, it took A LOT of my attention. I weighed the potential consequences. I got lost for awhile thinking about the things I would be missing by not taking the opportunity to indulge myself. Then the consequences returned to my mind. It was not worth it, I realized. Surely I could just be strong enough to resist this on my own? No one needed to know, did they? This "on my own" strategy had failed miserably for me in the past. Ultimately, I swallowed my pride and asked Jill if she would take her computer and leave it in her office at work, which she did. I didn't want to admit my weakness to her in

that moment, but it was what I needed to do for myself. And it felt so much better to talk with her about my struggle BEFORE I had acted upon it.

As you ponder how this article applies to you, I pray that God will lead you to a greater accountability—to make the most of the relationships in your life by helping each other make better choices for yourselves. If you don't have friends like these, I pray that God will bring people into your life that can offer you accountability and grace when you struggle with temptation.

"But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded." (James 4:6-8, NIV)

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Paying attention also helps us get the right information; we hear more correctly, and we will then be able to act on that information with a higher degree of confidence. Another benefit of attentiveness is that it helps improve our concentration; as our bodies adopt the attentive pose we sit up straight, breathe better, getting the oxygen the body needs to be able to focus.

### **Two Keys to Effective Listening**

I will offer two practical suggestions—something to do and something NOT to do. These two keys will give you a great start in becoming a more

effective listener.

### **Key # 1: NOT "Listening to..."**

In case you didn't notice the bolding and underlining and all caps, I just want to emphasize that our first key to effective listening is to **stop** doing something most of us do a lot of the time! Our listening often involves *listening in order to....* We listen to find out who is talking, whether we are going to agree or not, or evaluate the message to see if we like it or not. We listen to discover where we can dive in with our own ideas and opinions. According to Brinksmann and Kirschner (2002), "This is not effective

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tive listening. This is effective *interrupting*. You are simply mentally interrupting their thoughts, ideas, and expressions as you wait for an opportunity to actually interrupt. You cannot possibly listen to learn if you are listening to interrupt.” So, “listening to...” is to be abandoned in favor of “listening for...”

**Key # 2: “Listening for ...”** Effective listening is to consider what the other person is actually saying and *listening for the opportunity* that will arise from their thoughts, ideas, opinions, etc. In *listening for*. . . we create opportunities to discover where the other person’s perspectives might intersect with our own and others vantage points, so that we can learn from another and be built up by one another. This requires attentiveness and careful listening to whoever is speaking and to whatever they are saying. In this way, each person’s perspectives are accepted and validated. The outcome of this sort of listening is more likely to result in the type of conversation I described in the opening of this article; a discussion that builds connection.

**In summary**, (1) be attentive to one another in conversations and reap the rewards, (2) don’t *listen to* find a way to turn the conversation to your own agenda, (3) instead, *listen for* the opportunity to understand and learn and build up one another.

**One last thought:** Did you know that interrupting isn’t always rude? Maybe next month I’ll write about effective interrupting!

For Further Reading:

*Dealing with People You Can't Stand: How to Bring Out the Best in People at Their Worst* (2002),  
Dr. Rick Brinkman and Dr.

Rick Kirschner provide a strategy for dealing with ten of the most "unwanted behaviors" of colleagues. Their strategy is focused on assuming the best in others and identifying the positive intent that fuels these ten undesirable behaviors. Once we identify the positive intent, we can apply communication strategies and self-adjust our own attitude in order to "bring out the best in people at their worst" and, ultimately, make our lives easier.

Mehrabian, A. 1990. *Silent Messages: Implicit Communication of Emotions and Attitudes*. Second Edition. Wadsworth Publishing Company.





## March In Review

**March 12th: Facilitator Training.** Our facilitators met together to learn/refresh small group facilitation skills together.

**Tuesday nights thru mid June:** The men's Commitment Group and the Survivors of Abuse Group (which began in January) meet. Please pray for the 16 people participating in these groups each week.

## April And Beyond

**April 1st:** The WGA staff will participate in a leadership training seminar

**May 7th: Intercessory Prayer.** Join us from 8:00— 9:00 am at the WGA offices

**May 28th: Founders Day Picnic.** Join us to celebrate Mary's birthday!

**September 17<sup>th</sup>: WGA 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration.** We hope you will join us to recognize this milestone of WGA history. More information will be coming your way soon!

## Financial Update

**April 1st:** The WGA staff will participate in a leadership training seminar

### Thursday Night Group

**March 3rd: 31 people**  
**March 10th: 41 people**  
**March 17th: 37 people**  
**March 24th: 37 people**  
**March 31st: 39 people**

**Orientation meeting - 2 new people**

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*Where Grace Abounds*  
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understand sexuality and  
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God's plan for their  
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