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Harling's "How to listen so people will talk: build stronger communication and deeper connections" (book review)

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Book Reviews



Harling, B. (2017). *How to listen so people will talk: build stronger communication and deeper connections*. Minneapolis: Bethany House. 173pp. \$12.99. ISBN 9780764219443

Author Becky Harling's career is based on talking: she is a speaker, leadership coach, and trainer with the John Maxwell Team. The premise of this book, however, is that the secret to great relationships is excellent listening skills. The author asserts that listening improves one's family relationships, friendships, and work environment. Listening also deepens an individual's relationship with God and helps one become more Christ-like.

The author begins by describing common listening problems and includes a short survey to assess listening skills. The remaining chapters address specific areas where listening skills can be strengthened: honor another's story, silence your inner fixer, ask great questions, offer empathy and validate feelings, watch your non-verbal communication, how to listen during conflict, let go of distractions, and be available. Each chapter ends with a section entitled "Exercises to Strengthen Your Ear," with questions and activities for Listening to God, Listening to Your Heart, and Listening to Others. These activities include reading scripture, journaling, and engaging with others to practice the principles presented in the chapter. Keeping a journal is encouraged both to track progress and to be accountable to yourself about your listening skills.

The book is intended to be of practical help for those looking to improve their relationships with others by improving their listening skills. Biblical narratives illustrate each of the chapter topics. The author doesn't simply quote a key verse, but provides examples and extended illustrations from scripture. For example, Jesus' practice of "asking great questions" is the foundation of chapter 5. The author illustrates how "Jesus asked questions that offered people the opportunity to reflect and reveal what was in their hearts" (p. 73). The exercises at the end of each chapter help engage the reader in actively improving his or her listening skills. In keeping with the practical nature of the book, references to other works are minimal. Notes to works cited are collected at the end of the book; no index is included.

Many titles designed to improve listening and communication skills are available; however, most books focus on a specific context (work, marriage, parenting, ministry, etc.). Harling takes a broader approach and intentionally includes situations applicable to all types of relationships and environments. The author's background in public speaking is evident in her conversational writing style. As a result, her book is very readable and will appeal to a wide Christian audience. It is appropriate for church libraries and collections that support personal development.

Reviewer

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