

Mentor me



Share the Joy of Mentoring for the Lord

by

Betty Bender

Brenda Birckholtz

Becky Blackmon

Judy Cofer

Martha Coletta

Laura Dayton

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Lovingly dedicated

in memory of Betty Bender and Lea Fowler

Ageless servants of God whose influence lives on to
promote faith for a lifetime and whose teaching continues
to guide many in the way of eternal life.

*Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Your name give glory,
Because of Your mercy, because of your truth.*

—Psalm 115:1 NKJV



Betty Bender
1927–2020



Lea Fowler
1918–2002

Meet the Authors

by Brenda Birckholtz



Betty Bender, Columbia, Tennessee

Betty is our “good soil” girl. “Other seed fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as great” (Luke 8:8).

Betty decided at a very young age to take advantage of every opportunity the Lord put in her path to serve Him. From this heart of good soil God brought forth a hundred-fold harvest of good deeds that blessed countless people.



Brenda Birckholtz, Lithia, Florida

Brenda is our modern-day Barnabas, an encourager. When you meet and speak with Brenda, you will know right away that you have met someone who is genuinely interested in your well-being, wanting to respond in a most loving and thoughtful way. “Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:11 ESV).



Becky Blackmon, Hewitt, Texas

Becky is our Ezra girl: “For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel” (Ezra 7:10). Becky, a well-known author and speaker, will often tell us we need to learn, learn, learn, so we can grow, grow, grow, so we can change, change, change.

MEET THE AUTHORS



Judy Cofer, Columbia, Tennessee

Judy is our hospitality girl: “Let love of the brethren continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13:1–2). As we meet annually for Bible study at Judy’s house, she makes us feel like she has the honor of hosting us. That’s real hospitality.



Martha Coletta, Clifton Park, New York

Marty is a wise woman. She is our “gentle and quiet” girl: “But let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God” (1 Peter 3:4). When people meet Marty, they experience her gentleness and acceptance.



Laura Dayton, Harrodsburg, Kentucky

Laura is our nonconformist girl: “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:1–2). As a new Christian in 1978, she stated that she was “pulling out all the stops” in her new life with God, and she did.



Not to us, O Lord,
Not to us,
But to Your name give glory
Because of Your lovingkindness,
Because of Your truth.

—Psalm 115:1

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Introduction

Mentoring the Generations: Our Mission

A beautiful hymn titled “Faith of Our Fathers” heralds a message needed today. Mentoring each generation in the faith we hold dear is always needed and is urgent. Common observation may not tell the full story regarding the commitment, purity, passion, and knowledge that must be restored to every generation. We may look good on the surface, yet the sad statistics reveal a great decline in the number of young women engaged in true discipleship and Christian service. It is time to awaken the commitment among our sisterhood to the vital work of involvement and mentoring.

Jesus once asked a very important question: “When the Son of Man comes will He really find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8 NKJV). Contextually His audience consisted of the ever-quarrelsome Pharisees and His own disciples. In verse 33, the Lord’s statement, “after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him, and the third day He will rise again,” was designed to wake them up to be ready for His return. Jesus makes it crystal clear that the level of commitment required to enter life eternal requires a life totally dedicated to God. What can we understand from His powerful words?

Clearly the faith of our fathers involves far more than attending worship services and Bible study. Jesus calls His disciples to a life that puts following Him and fulfilling His plan and purpose as the absolute number one commitment of our lives.

Mentor Me seeks to awaken the important work of teaching, demonstrating, and becoming lovingly involved in the lives of our sisters. That involvement is called *mentoring*.

In her final days Sister Edna Pigman, who mentored many women over her ninety-two-year lifetime, wrote these inspiring words:

We, as Christian women today, need to be an influence for good. Our perseverance, faith, and steadfastness may be the only example that someone around us needs to turn her life around.

Her home was a hub for young women to come, be loved, and receive instruction. Her life was a flame of faithfulness and love for the Lord's church and work.

How about us?

How *Mentor Me* Began

Six women gathered for a long weekend in 2014 to draw closer to God through studying the Bible. It was a connect-meeting for some and a reunion for others. But they all had one friend in common—Betty Bender, their mentor.

The idea evolved to begin work on a book about mentoring. The process became an annual tradition, and it took five consecutive years for them to shout “Finished!”

A common sentiment prevailed: “To be honest, I never think of myself as a mentor because I need so much mentoring.” Another way of saying this is, “The best teacher is always a student.”



Top L to R:

*Brenda Birckholtz,
Betty Bender,
Becky Blackmon*

*Bottom L to R:
Martha Coletta,
Laura Dayton,
Judy Cofer*



• Betty Bender
• went to be with the Lord on February
• 14, 2020, at the age of ninety-two. Betty would have
• loved to have seen this book published and held it in her hands, but
• even better, she inspired the book!

• Mother of three, grandmother of seven, great-grandmother
• of nineteen, preacher's wife, and elder's wife, Betty Bender was a
• teacher of preachers' wives at the Northeast School of Biblical Stud-
• ies in New York. She authored five books and co-authored this book.
• Betty conducted marriage and evangelistic workshops through the
• United States and made several international mission trips. She often
• stated, "I wake up each day determined to bring everyone I meet a
• little closer to the Lord." Her pattern was Psalm 37:4: "Delight your-
• self in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart." 



Mentor Me, I'm the Mentor

by Betty Bender

It All Began with Bible Study

We see some examples in the New Testament of Jesus taking a few of His disciples off to study and pray together. Jesus did not instruct us to follow that pattern, but His example proves its benefit.

In the first few years of our married life, Duane and I grew together spiritually enough that we began to have “a hungering and thirsting” for deeper understanding of the Scriptures. We asked a few couples to our house one evening to open the Bible and search the Scriptures together to learn more about the message in God’s Word as the Bereans did (Acts 17:11). We decided that night to make it a weekly gathering, so for a number of months we studied in this small group. Through this experience, we saw the value of small discussion groups. Since then, every place we lived, we got a small group together to study the Bible with us.

One fall after we went to New England, when the men were having their retreat at Ganderbrook, Maine, I called Lea Fowler, a preacher’s wife, and boldly asked if I could come to her home in Fryeburg, Maine, and study with her on some subject we had previously talked about studying together. Lea graciously invited me to come, so we spent two days studying deeply on a selected biblical subject.

The next fall during the men’s Ganderbrook Retreat, Lea invited Fran Carpenter and me to come to her house to study another subject. Fran wanted

Judith Merriam,
Betty Bender,
Lea Fowler,
Fran Carpenter



to bring Judith Merriam along, so Lea consented. That is how it all began. We went to Lea's home and spent the night. We studied

all day, enjoyed a good meal together, went to bed, and got up the next morning, eager to study some more. We convened several more times at Lea's in Fryeburg, Maine, later at Fran's in Tilton, New Hampshire, and then at my house in Methuen, Massachusetts.

It was such a joy for us to have time together to study God's Word. We decided we needed to do it more often, so for several years, we met together at one of our homes and had a good time studying and praying together, usually staying overnight and studying for part of two days. Then Duane and I moved to New York where we taught in the Northeast School of Biblical Studies. I taught the students' wives.

One year during the summer break, one of the students was not going home, so she asked to have a weekly Bible study with me. I had just finished reading *Disciplines of the Beautiful Woman* by Anne Ortlund, and she talked about ladies' small group Bible studies. So borrowing an idea from that book, I came up with an idea how to structure a small group study. I invited two of the other teachers, Marty Coletta and Laura (Quesada) Dayton to join me and this student in a study one evening each week for the summer.

Love Circles

At the beginning of the next school year, I asked that small group if they wanted to continue the weekly study, knowing how busy we would all be when school

started. Laura Dayton, ingenious person that she is, spoke up and suggested that each of us invite three others and start a group ourselves. So we all agreed we would include others and share the joy. Laura then suggested that we call the study groups “Love Circles.” We liked that name, so I made copies of the way we had structured our summer study. The four of us started a Love Circle in each of our homes.

After we finished whatever book we were studying, we would ask each participant, “Would you like to start a Love Circle in your home?” And many did just that. As the idea spread, we eventually had the majority of the ladies in the congregation enrolled in a Love Circle.

After we left school and moved to different locations, I started Love Circles in every congregation where I worshiped.

Mentoring Tips

Those who knew Betty Bender and benefited from her wise mentoring will certainly agree that the following life-principles are worthy of handing down to another generation.

Things I Learned from Betty by Brenda Birckholtz

1. *Wake up every day with the goal of bringing every person you encounter closer to God.*
2. *Take on some work areas that are out of your comfort zone and see where God leads you. Your participation in the body of Christ should not consist exclusively of areas you like and are easy for you. If you are asked to do an uncomfortable job, say yes. You will know in time if that is where God wants you to work.*
3. *Persevere in disciplining your child even when you feel tired and discouraged. Betty shared this with me after I expressed my frustration and exhaustion while disciplining our two-year-old. Betty reminded me that parenting is demanding and tiring. She said that two years from this time, our*

child would be in school and I would lose some of my influence in his life. That wisdom redirected my thinking.

4. *Speak first when someone appears to be shunning you.* Be the first to say, “Hello. How are you?” Let your warmth and acceptance break down walls that have been erected.
5. *Approach each aspect of life with God as your pilot.* “I just want to do what the Lord wants me to do. I’m just waiting for Him to show me the way.” Betty’s book, *Oh, Randle My Son, My Son*, demonstrates how she incorporated this into her life.
6. *Focus your mind on others, on their burdens, if you are weary and heavy laden.* This will lighten your load and bring you closer to God.

Passing the Baton: Brenda Birckholtz’s Interview with Betty Bender

Brenda: What was the best part of your life?

Betty: Two times. (1) When the children were all in school, and we were active in a peaceful church in Tulsa, and (2) the last three years of Duane’s life. The family was settled into a good life. Duane and I were in a good work, and we had a lovely home in Anderson, South Carolina.



Brenda: What was the hardest part of your life?

Betty: When Randy was wandering the country, and we didn’t know where he was. Many nights I lay awake in prayer, hoping he was safe.



Brenda: What was your greatest victory?

Betty: Finishing college at seventy years of age. I had always wanted to go back to school, but I didn’t want to neglect my work for the Lord to do so. When we moved to Anderson, South Carolina, I felt I would be able to carry on my work in the church and go to school too.



Brenda: What singular message would you give to preachers' wives, other wives, and mothers?

Betty: To preachers' wives: Choose your confidants with Christian women outside your congregation, i.e., nearby preachers' wives or friends from other congregations. As much as possible, be friends with all the women in the congregation without partiality.

To wives: Love your husband wholeheartedly. Put him first—before your children, before your friends, before your parents. The more you love him, the more thoughtful and loving he will be of you (Ephesians 5:22–25).

To mothers: Be a friend and a supporter but not a buddy. Your child will make buddies with his peers.



Brenda: What stages of grief did you go through when you lost your husband, Duane?

Betty: My grieving experience was different. I really didn't grieve until two years later. I was so busy trying to finish school so I could go to work, which was a necessity. I was two years away from a degree, so I rented a room to a college girl in order to stay in Anderson and finish school. Then I had to concentrate on moving to Columbia, Tennessee, and getting settled before school started at Columbia Academy where I went to work. I was so lonely the first winter in Columbia. I knew no one. Right away I started going to West Seventh church, and that helped me to get acquainted and make friends. Either Jewell Thomason or Pam Elder would always ask me to sit with them. Dorothy Jean Witherow and Laura Williams befriended me first, inviting me to go to a visitation meeting.



Brenda: What stages of grief did you go through when you lost your son Randy?

Betty: Again, I didn't have opportunity to grieve. During the last three months of Randy's life, I made four trips from Columbia, Tennessee, to Tampa, Florida,

to be with him in the hospital. Returning home after that last weekend visit, I received a call on Monday from the hospital advising that Randy was in his final days. I had no way to go back to Florida, so I called my daughter Beth and asked her to check on him. Early Tuesday morning, he seemed to be resting well, so she went to the hotel close to the hospital to get a little rest. The next morning she got the call that Randy had died. That was May 22, 2013.

We had planned to have a memorial service for Randy in October. As a family we were to meet up in Oklahoma City, then travel to my hometown of Rogers, Arkansas, for Randy's service at the cemetery where Duane and my burial sites were. Randy was cremated but we had had a marker for him placed at the foot of our graves.

On route to and in Oklahoma City I began to have mini-strokes. I spent a day in an Oklahoma City hospital. The doctor there had advised that they bring me back to Columbia to be under my doctor's care. So we cancelled the memorial service for Randy and drove to Columbia where they checked me into the hospital at 11:30 p.m. I never got to go back home to Rogers, Arkansas, after that.



Brenda: In what way is it different losing a son and losing a husband?

Betty: I always expected that I would outlive Duane, as women generally outlive men, but Duane's death was sooner than I expected. I did not grieve for Randy as a parent normally grieves for a child, for he had suffered so long, and I knew he was whole again.



Brenda: You reached the time in your life when you had to transition into an assisted living facility. In retrospect, what would have been most helpful to you during that process?

Betty: It would have been better if I could have moved myself, or at least had a say in what to bring to the assisted living. After I was admitted to the nursing home, Rachel and Beth could spend only a few days before they had to go home. They did a good job of equipping my apartment, but no one can make

those personal decisions for someone else: books, clothes, and dishes, for example. The apartment is lovely, but I miss lots of my “favorite things.”



Brenda: What ministries has the Lord given you with your physical limitations while living in an assisted living facility?

Betty: I feel I have very little to offer now. I have given away several copies of the book, *Muscle and a Shovel*. But the setting here is not conducive to do follow-up as needed. I have made diapers for babies in Third World countries. I try to keep a pleasant attitude toward everyone I encounter. I am trying to do some writing.



Brenda: What are your thoughts as you await your final “homecoming” with the Lord?

Betty: “Lord, take me quickly!”

It's Your Turn

1. What “baton” would you like to pass on to those you leave behind?
2. Regarding marriage: Share a difficult part of your life and how God gave you the victory. What is the best advice you personally would like to share with wives? How could you encourage a preacher's wife? What Scripture is the most helpful to you in your marriage?
3. Regarding motherhood: What one word would you use to describe the mother God wants you to be? Name a Bible character that lives up to that word.
4. Why is grief personal? Why should we let each person grieve in her own way? What did you find most helpful when you grieved the loss of a loved one?



Brenda is the wife of Jack Birckholtz. They have served the churches in New England for forty years. She has taught children's and ladies' Bible classes and speaks at ladies' events. Brenda values her experiences in short-term mission campaigns in Africa, Eastern and Western Europe, Russia, Albania, Canada, and the United States. Her favorite activity is having small groups of ladies in her home for coffee, asking them to bring a favorite scripture to share as they get to know each other as sisters and future friends. She and Jack have three grown children and three grandchildren. 



Mentor Me, I Need Someone to Listen

Brenda Birckholtz

*Everyone must be quick to hear, slow
to speak, and slow to anger.*

—James 1:19—

Listen First

The guiding instruction I received before writing my chapters for this book was, “If you have the opportunity to sit down with a young woman, or a woman of any age, what will you say?”

First, I would listen to what she had to say about herself—her past, her present, and her future aspirations. I would try to listen perceptively to see if all she wanted was a listening ear. If she wanted me to respond to that which was shared, hopefully I would respond with sensitivity. If she were to ask me what the greatest life lessons I’ve learned over the years, I would share the following ideas: Be your own “pacemaker.” And nourish your relationship with God and others.



*Wisdom is the reward you get for a lifetime of
listening when you would rather have talked.*



—Mark Twain—

Be Your Own “Pacemaker”

Don't let somebody else set your pace. You and God set it; that will bring you peace. Don't waste your time leading someone else's life. An author whose name I cannot recall said, “Look at your life as a beautiful ongoing painting, and invite God in to be your Michelangelo who will deepen some colors, lighten others, and put shadows and touches where He thinks best.” Guard your time well. It is a most precious commodity.

Nourish Your Relationship with God

Nourish is a word to emphasize. Nourish your relationship with God first of all. Someone once said, “A well-fed soul feeds others, bears much fruit, and always has leftovers.” I wonder if that is what Jesus meant when He told us, “He who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit” (John 15:5 NKJV). Consider these suggestions for nourishing your relationship with God.

- Daily, even several times a day, “come into His presence with thanksgiving.”
- Open up His letters to you (His Word) and drink them in with a thirsty heart, as Paul encourages us to do. “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you” (Colossians 3:16).
- Humbly submit to all His Word says and be honest with it. With humility comes the promise of exaltation, “Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time” (1 Peter 5:6).
- Let His communication to you excite you, challenge you, and convict you. Growth, challenge, and fulfillment will follow. Talk to Him as your best friend throughout the day. “Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face just as a man speaks to his friend” (Exodus 33:11). Don't we want what Moses had?
- Wait for responses from God through His Word, through others, and through the ordinary circumstances of life. He is always eager to commune with you as best friends do. We have a God who has our back. When

the Israelites were preparing to leave captivity and come back to the land of Israel, God assured them, “But you will not go out in haste, nor will you go as fugitives; for the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard” (Isaiah 52:12).

- Our caring God has us covered in front and behind. Thank you, God! Because of God’s care, we don’t have to be frantic or stressed, going out “in haste,” or be as those who are running away from someone or someplace—fugitives. We are under His devoted care a hundred percent of the time. Is that not genuine security!

Nourish Your Relationships with Others

Pay attention to your husband, if you have one, and your children, if you have any. Pay attention to your immediate family, extended family, church family, friends, co-workers, acquaintances, and other relationships. Each person has “good news” waiting to be discovered. We must dig a little harder to find it in some people more than others. Each person is a wonderful, mysterious puzzle with many fascinating pieces. How exciting it is to come to know each piece of the puzzle and be amazed at how God is working to make it all fit together. He is doing that for us also. Don’t we all hope that those who approach us are looking for some “good news” and “fascinating pieces” in us? To illustrate this idea, please ponder the following scriptures:

- Jeremiah 1:5: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you.” God did know you and consecrated you—set you apart—for His purposes before you were born.
- Jeremiah 29:11: “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.’” Does God have plans for you? Yes, big plans to give you a future and a hope!
- Ephesians 2:10: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” Did God plan specific works for you before the world even began? Yes! *You* are that important to Him.

*Listen to God with a broken heart. He is
not only the doctor who mends it, but
the father who wipes away the tears.*

— Criss Jami —

The Transformation Process

If you are reading this chapter and looking back at all the “I’ve blown it” moments in your life, please consider the following: God has taken each “blown it” moment and fashioned it into a beautiful tapestry for His glory, your growth, and a blessing to others. What we perceived as “blown it” moments or years, Christ uses to conform us into His image. Don’t let Satan’s negative self-talk occlude God’s beautiful handiwork. Please give your God an opportunity to shape you into Christlikeness. There are no wasted moments with God! As amazing as it may seem, He is transforming us “from glory to glory” (2 Corinthians 3:18) with each passing day.

“Be Careful How You Listen”—Jesus Christ

Jesus was the greatest listener of all time. Lepers came to Him and He listened (Luke 17:11–19). The blind came to Him and He listened (John 9:1–41). One of the most reciprocal conversations in the Bible is recorded in John 4:4–26 where Jesus listens to the immoral Samaritan woman. The out-

There are
no wasted
moments
with God!

come—she came to believe He was the Messiah and helped evangelize her community, Sychar. When we meet Jesus, the only way to go is up. And oh how high He can take us!

Why do I want someone to listen to me? Why do I want someone to mentor me through listening? Well, I have feelings, thoughts, aspirations, disappointments, shocks, and confusion that need to be shared with another caring person. I need a listening ear to help me heal from my disappointments

and brokenness. How about you? Also, I have joys, hopes, dreams, aspirations, and plans that I want to share with another caring person. How about you? When someone sincerely listens to me it's like a healing balm, the much-needed medicine I need to restore my soul and deepen my relationship with God. Don't we all have a thirst for the above? Let us share our listening ears with others, and in so doing bring the love of God closer to them.

You're short on ears and long on mouth.

— John Wayne —

The Way to the Heart

How can we use listening as a nourishing tool? Start by developing the art of listening. James gives us a helpful passage when he writes, “Be quick to hear [listen], slow to speak, and slow to anger” (James 1:19). The book of wisdom tells us, “If one gives an answer before he hears [listens], it is his folly and shame” (Proverbs 18:13 ESV). And Voltaire is often quoted: “The ear is the avenue to the heart.”

If we want to have meaningful friendships, we must become good listeners. That is more easily said than done. Listening takes constant practice and self-control. John Drakeford's book *The Awesome Power of the Listening Ear* is a great help. So is Alan McGinnis's book, *The Friendship Factor*. Chapter 10, “How to Improve Your Conversational Skills,” is especially helpful, relating how the author's history teacher shared this incredible bit of wisdom: *The secret of being interesting is being interested.*

The quieter you become the more you hear.

— Anonymous —

Use Your Listening Talent

In my early years of elementary school, I perspired and stammered when I spoke, yet I was thirsty for someone to listen to the ideas swirling around in my head. In high school, a teacher listened to me express some of my deep

analyzed thoughts and responded positively. In college, another teacher listened and encouraged me to use my talents to serve others. “Talents—what talents?” I thought.

I began to consider developing a “listening” talent to communicate to others their value, just like I wanted someone to communicate mine to me. Thank You, God, for these listeners who inspired me. We can all turn our pain into a listening talent as we sensitize ourselves to the needs of others. Isn’t that what God tells us through Paul?

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our afflictions so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:3–4).

 *God gave us mouths that close and ears that don't. That must tell us something.* 

————— Eugene O'Neill —————

Listening Enables Outreach

My sister-in-law Arline is to be commended because of her commitment to my older brother who struggled for years with alcohol and drug abuse, causing considerable pain to the family. Surprisingly she said, “I’m glad we went through those difficult times, because they have brought us to the point we are today.” Attending AA and Al-Anon meetings, along with Alateen meetings with their son Brian, taught him valuable lessons to strengthen his life journey.”

Additionally Arline said, “We made great friends in the programs which helped us cope with our struggles.” Today they have a strong family unit which she credits to having to walk through the stormy challenges of the early years of their marriage. My brother has sponsored hundreds of people in the AA program. My younger brother, Terry, also struggled with alcohol and drug abuse and has mentored many young people as well as his peers. He learned to be a good listener because members of AA and Narcotics Anonymous listened to

him. Yes, God comforts us so we can comfort others. As the seasoned members of AA, Al-Anon, and Alateen listened to Barry, Arline, and Brian, they gave them direction and helped them heal. The family in turn reached out and listened to others.

What God Says about Listening

The Bible is not silent about the importance of being attentive.

1. *As He speaks to you in His Word:* “Open my eyes that I may behold wonderful things from Your law” (Psalm 119:18).
2. *As He speaks to you in prayer:* “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).
3. *As He listens to your prayers:* “In the morning, O Lord, you will hear my voice; in the morning I will order my prayer to You and eagerly watch” (Psalm 5:3). Other translations read “I plead my case to you and watch expectantly” or “I lay my requests before you.” Note: God wants you to bring your praise and pleadings and needs to Him in the morning, or any other time, and then waiting and watching eagerly or expectantly for His response throughout the day.
4. *As He speaks to you through others:* “Encourage one another day after day” (Hebrews 3:13). The encouragement of others always helps you see God more clearly.
5. *As He provides you with support from others:* “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15). How we desperately need others to rejoice and weep with us so we can see God in them and they can see God in us.
6. *As He speaks to you through circumstances:* “God causes all things to work together for good” (Romans 8:28). There is no happening in the Christian’s life that God isn’t working out to His glory and a blessing for all.

The word “listen” contains the same letters as the word “silent.”

— Alfred Brendel —

Your Husband Needs Your Listening Ear

No one will listen to your husband like you do. In his place of work and in other situations, he probably has to share time and attention with numerous people. In a very competitive world, your husband probably isn't number one, but he needs to be number one when he walks through the door of your home. With you he needs to know that everything he says is important, even those long boring computer details, or whatever. Ask God to help you be a calm, patient, receptive listener, especially when the topic is not of interest to you. What's even more important is that it is of interest to him. As you nourish your husband by listening, he will be healthy enough to nourish you and others. It's a “win-win situation.” By listening we will be living out God's will for us in Ephesians 5:33, that we respect our husbands.

One of the most sincere forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to say.

— Bryant H. McGill —

Listen to Your Children

We are always telling our children, “Now listen to me! You're not listening!” Let's talk about how important it is to listen to them. They are telling their story, and our response affirms who they are. Children also need to take turns and listen to others. After Christmas break, I would tell our back-to-school children, “All the kids will be excited about their new toys and want to talk about them. But somebody has to listen.” If they were fortunate, someone would listen to them.

We emphasized the importance of listening in our family. Although we are a flawed, quite imperfect family, I must say that all three of our children are really good listeners, a trait that has served them well spiritually and socially.

As they reached the teen years, they did not want to be left alone in social settings with a group or an individual they didn't know. They wanted to know what to do in these situations. My answer: "Take time to get to know people." How? By asking them questions about themselves and listening to their answers. After some awkward practices, it was delightful to see all three children, with a degree of comfort, conversing with people of different age groups. It's most gratifying to see our son and his wife teach Brooke, Bailey, and Ben, our grandchildren, to be considerate listeners. Don't you love it when you see the "baton" being passed from one generation to another!

But the art of listening has to be continually practiced. Having grown up in an era where "children are to be seen and not heard," I was left with the impression that what I had to say had no value. Fortunately, some caring teachers along the way and a good counselor communicated to me that I actually had value and something to offer others. I am eternally grateful. If we nourish our children and grandchildren by listening, they will be healthy enough to nourish others. Listen to what is important to them.

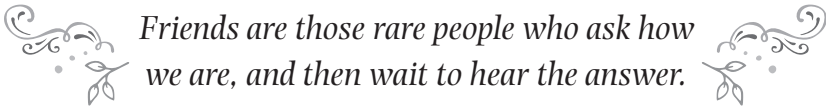
Other Family Members

This section is hard for me because I don't come from a close family. My parents are deceased. In the past, five years could easily go by without much communication between me and one of my brothers. So what does one do in these situations? Never miss a birthday: theirs, their wives', or their children's. Either make a call or send a card or text. And always send a Christmas card. Although you can't feed these relationships by listening, you can keep the door open for the future. I have to say in the past few years I've had more frequent conversations with my brothers brought on by one brother's



Ask God to help you be a calm, patient, receptive listener, especially when the topic is not of interest to you.

serious health problems. Praise God, we now have meaningful relationships. Maybe my small efforts over the years helped make that transition possible. God takes our mini steps and stretches them into bridges that can build relationships! I'm so thankful.



Friends are those rare people who ask how we are, and then wait to hear the answer.



— Ed Cunningham —

Our Friends

We have some friendships in which we do the majority of listening. This can be difficult but also a blessing. Listening attentively to others blesses their lives and ours. We usually come away with a greater understanding of our friends and their challenges. From these conversations, we come to know how to pray for them and how to lend a helping hand.

Listening Reciprocally

Good listeners need someone who will truly listen to them, I mean truly listen. These are people with whom you have deeper relationships. You share back and forth, and you always make room for each other. It's assumed that confidentiality is a given in listening situations. Take confidentiality seriously. It is the foundation on which relationships are built and deepen. My good friend Mary taught me that confidentiality means that some parts of a conversation need to be kept behind a steel trap door. Our greatest listener is Jesus who encourages us to come to Him, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Could it be that your listening ear could be the "rest" others desperately need?

Listening in Everyday Events

Quite frequently you have the opportunity to listen to someone in passing, maybe for a few minutes or a few seconds. Just listening to their comments and responding to a sad or enthusiastic tone in their voice can make their day.

You can make someone's day at the 24-hour store, Walmart, on a walk, or any place where a smile, a "hello," or an "I'm sorry" says, "You count."

You and God set your pace and devote yourselves to nourishing others by listening. You will have God's peace and an abundant fulfilled life with many friendships as you listen with your heart to those God places in your path. Your listening can be the path that will lead others to Him. What a talent!

It's Your Turn

1. Why do you want someone to listen to you?
2. Why do you need to practice listening to others?
3. How do you personally nourish your relationship with God?
4. Share a time when you were "in haste" and feeling like a "fugitive," based on Isaiah 52:12: "But you will not go out in haste, nor will you go out as fugitives; for the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard." How did God calm you down and show you He had your back?
5. Consider the effect of these words: "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). How can this verse help you with your perception of and deal with all the "blown it" moments or years in your life?
6. How would it change the world if people truly believed that God "formed you in the womb" and "consecrated you" for His service before you were born (Jeremiah 1:5)?



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7. Have you seen God work in your life to “give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11)? Share what you have seen. How would a despondent person feel about having “a future and a hope”?
8. How do you feel when you read, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10)? Read this verse aloud and put your name in the place of “we.”
9. Share a time when you were able to comfort others after someone comforted you.
10. Why do you need to listen to God first?
11. Explain how sometimes God is trying to reach you through your friends and through the circumstances of life.
12. How is your husband affected when you listen intently to him for a long time?
13. Suggest ways you can teach your children to become good listeners.
14. What mini steps can you take in difficult relationships to help keep the door open?
15. Why must some of your listening situations be reciprocal for your own spiritual and mental health?
16. Share a time when you made a difference by listening to a stranger.

Listening Extras

1. *Taking Turns.* Partner up with a person, preferably one you don’t know very well. Spend five minutes getting to know that person, drawing her out. Do not take back the conversation. It’s her time to talk.

Then it is your turn to talk for the next five minutes. At the end of that listening session, ask the group if anyone would like to share something they learned about the person they were listening to.

Here are some conversation starters, but feel free to come up with your own.

- a. What is your favorite scripture and why?
 - b. Share two goals you have set for your life.
 - c. Who is one of your favorite heroes and why?
 - d. Describe the person you would like to be.
 - e. If you could change your life, what would you change?
2. *Self-Evaluation.* Here is a test to give yourself after a conversation.
- a. “Did I mostly listen or talk?”
 - b. “Do I know more about the person than she knows about me?”
3. *“Listening” Coffee Event.* Frequently I hold small “coffees” at my home and invite up to ten ladies. I serve light refreshments. Then, having asked the guests to bring a favorite scripture, each begins in turn to tell how her scripture has been helpful in her life. That often leads to lively discussion. Then we eat and continue the “getting to know you” time. As these ladies listen to each other, they build relationships that transfer into making deeper connections within the body of Christ. What a blessing that has been to my life, to see sisters become better friends through listening, coffee, and Scripture.
4. *Special report.* Research or ask a class member to report on Todd Smith’s blog, “Ten Ways to Be a Good Listener.”¹

*You can make more friends in two months
by becoming interested in other people
than you can in two years by trying to
get other people interested in you.*

———— Dale Carnegie ————



Laura Dayton has been actively involved in evangelism and serving the Lord's church for over forty years. She is a Bible class teacher for all ages and speaks at ladies' events. Laura is married to Bill Dayton, a gospel preacher. They have served in planting church's and ministry for over thirty years. Laura enjoys singing, playing the piano, reading, and most especially mentoring younger women of all ages in the faith. 



Mentor Me, I'm a First-Generation Christian Woman

by Laura Dayton

She was very excited. Today was the beginning of her new life as a Christian. She was about to attend her first Bible class before Sunday worship. She had never thoroughly read the Bible and was eager to learn all God had to teach her. The study was to be from the book of Jude. As the teacher began, he briefly mentioned that Jude was a study in apologetics. She was a bit confused by this term, so after class went to the teacher and made this comment: "I never dreamed there was a whole book in the Bible that teaches us how to apologize!" The teacher showed much restraint as laughter brewed within. He then patiently explained exactly what the term meant. He was gracious, and she did not feel as ignorant as she might have, but she clearly realized she had a lot to learn.

This humorous true story illustrates the reality that many new Christians are uninformed, even of the basics concerning the Bible.

Who Are These Women and What Do They Need to Know?

The greatest number of new Christians are women, converted from the world and denominational backgrounds. These babes in Christ include single moms, grandmas raising their grandchildren, widows, those divorced and abused, and others with many complicated troubles such as addictions and phobias. As God's dedicated women, we are called to come alongside these precious souls