

HomeWord

Vol. 4, No. 1 A newsletter dedicated to household harmony & family faith

In This Issue

People who love each other make the effort to stay in touch. When separated by miles they call, write, and exchange gifts. When separated by conflict, they seek solutions, reconciliation, and forgiveness. Healthy families stay in touch by truly talking and listening to each other. It's pretty obvious; healthy families tend to communicate well. Healthy families of faith must also stay in touch with God. This *HomeWord* issue is dedicated to helping you and your family recognize and reflect on God's gracious activity in the ordinary and extraordinary events of your lives.

Enjoy!

What Ear Are You On?

by Lisa-Marie Calderone-Stewart

I have a delightful five-year-old niece, Bernadette. Although she lives in New Jersey and I live in Wisconsin, we try to keep in touch and stay close. When she was much younger, I used to worry that she wouldn't remember who I was. I was afraid that when I came to visit, she would regard me as a stranger and not want to play with me. When many months had to separate our visits, my husband, Ralph, would help me make short videotapes of our family so Bernadette could watch them over and over again and come to know who we were.

Every time I visit Bernadette and her family I take pictures and create a little story about all the things we did when I was there. I try to record every significant act, even things like going to church and saying bedtime prayers together. Not only does Grandma, my mother, read these to Bernadette as a reminder of our last visit, but they are read as preparation for the next visit, too.

For years my mother and I have had a tradition of talking every Saturday morning. Until a few months ago, Bernadette never really wanted to talk on the phone with me. But now, she seems to know that Saturday mornings are Aunt Lisa time and she even likes to call me herself.

Lately the conversation routinely seems to return to one topic, "What ear are you on?" The first time this happened I didn't understand the question. But then I caught on. "I'm on my left ear."

Then the inevitable response: "I'm on my left ear, too! We are both the same!" It seems Bernadette and I like to start our conversations left-eared; it's a clear preference. And she loves to notice when the two of us do anything the same.

Bernadette will typically suggest, "Let's switch ears." So we switch ears. I take the phone into my right hand, and hold it up to my right ear for a while. And naturally Bernadette will again ask, "Aunt Lisa, which ear are you on?" So, of course, I answer, "My right ear."

Guess what her response is? "I'm on my right ear, too! We are both the same!"

Sometimes she likes to vary the game by saying, "Aunt Lisa, you stay on your ear, and I will switch ears, okay?"

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Reflective Listening for Families

by Leif Kehrwald

Sometimes God's grace explodes in our faces in such a way that there is no way to miss it. These extraordinary events of our lives deepen our relationship with God and with one another. My wedding day was one such event. God was so clearly present to me, Rene, and all who gathered with us. Easter was also a powerful experience of grace for me last year.

Yet these are not the only times God is active and present in our lives, not by any means. I believe God is always yearning to be discerned and acknowledged. Of course, this requires some intentional reflection or "active listening" on our part.

In her book *The Art of Theological Reflection*, Patricia O'Connell Killen offers a simple but powerful four-step process for theological reflection. She wrote her book for individuals, but her ideas are easily adapted for families. Let me show you how.

Step 1. Focus on the experience. Choose an event that does not easily fit into your current understanding of things. Think about your relationships with those you live with, or bring to mind an experience one family member has had that impacts the whole household. What confuses, amazes, inspires, or delights you?

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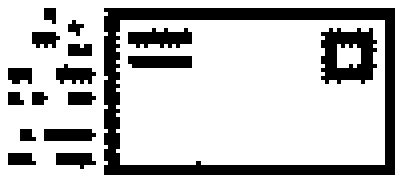
Staying In Touch

With some intentional effort, we can stay in touch with those we love. Here are some practical ideas:

- *Schedule family time regularly.* Write it on the calendar in red. Also schedule one-to-one time with each other: parent-child, spouses, etc. Decide what works best for you. A Friday night date, a leisurely Saturday breakfast, or whatever. Rene and I take a walk together just about every evening.
- *Plan and cook meals together.* Preparing the meal, serving it attractively, enjoying it, and even cleaning up can become an unhurried ritual providing cherished time together.
- *Get away alone as a couple.* Arrange to bunk the kids with Grandma or a friend; sleep naked, enjoy breakfast in bed, be romantic. Return the favor by keeping your friend's children.

Some parents and children and grandparents and grandchildren are separated, which makes connecting more challenging. Here are a few simple ideas:

- *Write frequently.* Children love getting their own mail. Every day our son Luke, age twelve, asks, "Any mail for me?" To get a reply, include a self-addressed stamped envelope. Encourage the children to send drawings, schoolwork, and copies of report cards to decorate your fridge. Send them a photo of you with their displayed artwork.
- *Set up a weekly phone date.* Lisa-Marie Calderone-Stewart speaks with her niece every Saturday morning (See "What Ear Are You On?"). Let family members know they can call you collect anytime.
- *Keep a journal for each child.* Write your feelings about them, funny things they say in person or over the phone, experiences you had at their age, and so on.



(*"What Ear Are You On?" continued from page 1*)

"Okay," I assure her.

"Aunt Lisa, what ear are you on now?"

"I'm on my left ear."

"I'm on my right ear. We are both different!"

The first time she said this it cracked me up! Being both different seemed an oxymoron, a contradiction of terms. But if we can celebrate our similarities, why not celebrate our differences, too?

In the third chapter of his Letter to the Galatians, Paul reminds us that we no longer have to keep ourselves apart in separate categories such as Jew or Greek, male or female, slave or free. We are united in Christ, which means we are free to celebrate the fact that we are both the same and different.

Paul wrote a lot of letters in order to stay in touch with the people in the faith communities he established. He didn't want them to forget him or their faith. He wanted to remind them of everything he knew about them and their faith. They were all like godchildren to him. If he had been able to videotape and take photographs, I'm sure he would have sent them Grandma's scrapbooks as well.

Today's world is hectic and fast-paced; families move often and must face many sad good-byes to friends and extended family. It's important to find ways to connect long-distance to loved ones who are far away.

It's comforting to know that Paul probably felt the same way toward his loved ones that I feel about Bernadette. He would have loved my mother's Saturday morning phone calls. I wonder what ear he would have been on?

(*"Reflective Listening for Families" continued from page 1*)

As an example, when our oldest son was in the fourth grade, he found himself bullied by a classmate named Zach. One of the results of this experience was that Nicolo would come home from school, where he felt powerless, and terrorize his little brother to regain a sense of power.

What experience would you name?

Step 2. Describe the experience in order to identify the "heart of the matter." Be completely nonjudgmental and avoid interpretation. Just describe it. Avoid phrases like "should have" or "could have."

I'll never forget the day Nicolo finally told us about his problem at school. Luckily it was a pretty good parenting day, so Rene and I remained calm and asked him to simply describe all the trouble Zach had been giving him. In our minds we were building a case to bring to his teacher. By the time he finished, we understood why he had been so mean to his little brother in recent weeks. Nicolo, of course, didn't see the connection . . . yet.

Describe the experience in detail. What is the heart of the matter?

Step 3. Build a bridge to our faith tradition. What stories from the Scriptures or beliefs from church doctrine connect to this experience? What answers have former believers already given to the questions raised in your experience?

We've always had a tradition in our house of telling stories about "Jesus and his friends." In our own words, Rene or I would often share a Gospel story at the dinner table or at bedtime. In this situation it made perfect sense to tell the story of Zacchaeus, a professional bully in Jesus' time, to Nicolo and his brother. We didn't try to teach a lesson or anything. We just told the story and asked them to think about it.

Step 4. Identify new truth and meaning for our lives. What have you and your family learned from this experience and conversation? How has it affected your faith? How will you incorporate this insight into your daily life?

New Year's came a few weeks after we had told the story of Zacchaeus to Nicolo. On January 1, we shared New Year's resolutions as a family. When it was his turn, Nicolo said, "I'm not sure what I can do about my problem with Zach at school, but here at home I promise to be a better big brother from now on." And even to this day, with a few gentle reminders, he has kept his promise.

It's important for the new insight to be expressed and embodied in some way, otherwise it will be quickly forgotten.

If God's grace hasn't exploded around you and your family recently, perhaps it's time for some reflective listening. Try these four steps and I think you'll be amazed.