Every once in a while you hear something new that changes you.

Dave Matthews after losing his bass player in an accident referred to him as a generous musician.

I knew the words generous and musician but had never put them together.

Contemplating the words changed me. (elaborate)

Mike Oneill and Sheft Hat Kanamu Ra in their first rehearsal session played so well together that the latter described him as having 'Big Ears'.

I knew the words and had heard them in the context of a toast “Cheers Big Ears!” but I had never contemplated them in this sense.

Big Ears: Hearing what the music is saying and doing your part to help it be said…no more…no less.

Built into this is the idea of:

Giving the music what it needs not what your ego needs…

One of the worst sounding things you will ever hear is a bunch of musicians climbing all over each other each individually trying to be a star.

It took me a while to learn that…and I still fail from time to time but I’m better.

If you do anything for a long enough time you will either get better at it if it’s right or get punished for it if it’s wrong.

I have loved this story for quite a while

Leonard Bernstein, the late conductor of the New York Philharmonic orchestra, was once asked to name the most difficult instrument to play. Without hesitation, he replied: “The second fiddle. I can get plenty of first violinists, but to find someone who can play the second fiddle with enthusiasm, that’s a problem. And if we have no second fiddle, we have no harmony.”

Pushing ego aside and pursuing harmony is at the heart of being a generous musician with big ears.

Ego often traps us into relentlessly pursuing the stardom we feel we want and distracts us from the harmony we actually need.

The next part gets more difficult…

A couple of months ago I was driving north up the Baja for the Baja Mil off-road race. I really enjoy time spent alone on the road. It’s a good time for reflection, contemplation and junk food. I make sure I have my supply of cold Coca Colas, sandwiches, chips, cookies… But most importantly my Ipod.

Just out of high school my first job was in Public radio for a couple of years and I have since remained a fan. I love the depth and scope of their programming.
One of my current favorite shows is a show hosted by Krista Tippett called ‘On Being’. The show was originally titled ‘Speaking of Faith’ which I found incredible in the generally liberal secular humanistic leaning realm of Public Radio.

Obviously they did too and changed the name to ‘On Being’.

The guest interviewed on the show span a wide range of beliefs and topics and the guests may include Muslim Imams, Buddhist Monks, The Dalai Lama, Catholic Archbishops, Anglican Ministers, Evangelical Pastors, Musicians, etc., etc., etc.

I don’t always agree with what I hear but Krista tends to focus many discussions on a couple of topics I find very engaging and important in our lives.

One is compassion which we explored the last time I spoke from here a few months ago as a deep feeling of empathy for another being that moves us to action. Another principle the show explores is the vital need for civil discourse in human affairs. Basically dialogue unimpeded by violent emotion, confrontation, and disrespect.

Only the most hard hearted among us could reject these as desirable and important.

On my recent drive north I heard a new thing (for me anyhow) again old words, new configuration, new meanings. Oddly enough they had a stron similarity to my earlier words, generous musician and big ears.

Generous listening…

Generous listening…

I apologize to any of you who have already heard me talk about this (possibly a bit too much) but I thank you as well as your generous listening has allowed me to better work this out.

Now let me start by pointing something out: One of the best ways to avoid others criticism is to do it yourself. I seldom if ever speak from a place of authority having mastered in my own life some sin, weakness, or failing.

On the contrary what I usually share from here is a contemplation leading to a conviction of my heart through which God is showing me a path towards righteousness. Being shown a path and being on that path are not by any means the same thing.

In other words if what we are talking about sounds like something I personally am not very good at…I know…that’s probably why I’m talking about it…Because I’m working on it.

So here we go:

Everyone has a story to tell.

Generous listening is about sitting still and hearing the story… giving them the floor…the talking stick.

When we listen generously we may ask for clarification, but must always encourage the speaker forward with their story.

The hard part:

We must listen when we disagree
We must listen when we think our story is ‘better’

We must listen when it offends us

We must listen when it challenges us

We must listen when we feel we have heard it all before

We must listen when we ‘know’ that the speaker is wrong

We must listen even when we may have a chance to offer a rebuttal

It’s not easy…the more I contemplate this idea the more I walk away from conversations aware of my failure to listen generously…bits and pieces of story debris left in the air incomplete and useless…I now recognize my mistake… it’s a start.

So I want to talk a minute about why this is important.

First, it is easy to get caught up in our own story and lose perspective

Our thoughts, beliefs, and actions revolve around each other and fail to bring in anything new. We stagnate. In the worst cases our emotions and actions can get us into cycles or addictions we have trouble escaping our own story.

When we have an opportunity to ‘talk out’ our circumstances we (most of us anyway) feel a need to make our story ‘make sense’. A generous listener gives us the listening space to work out our own thoughts, beliefs, and actions and to hear ourselves and make sense of our story. Sometimes it takes a lot of time and working out. A generous listener gives us time.

I will repeat the principle: A generous listener gives us the listening space to work out our thoughts, beliefs, and actions and to hear ourselves and make sense of our story.

We as generous listeners give the speaker the listening space to work out their thoughts, beliefs, and actions and to hear themselves and make sense of their story.

I don’t know, first hand, but I think something similar is employed, possibly by another name, at alanon groups and at one point the Women’s Bible study group…as I have attended neither I’m not certain.

This principle of generous listening is 3 things:

-seemingly so obvious that I need not even say it much less to build a sermon around it

-so powerful that it makes or breaks lives, businesses, relationships, and marriages

-and so rare that people will pay money for it…lots of money for it

A good psycho-therapist is a good listener. Again, I’ve never undergone psycho-therapy so there is some speculation involved here as well as experience with the 2008 HBO series “In Treatment”.

Simply put a therapist listens to the client and on occasion repeats back what is heard while encouraging the client to unfold their story. Many people when their story is unfolded start to see the roots and directions of their story. As they continue to unfold their personal story they often can see the adjustments needed to their lives. Instruction born inside your own heart is a very powerful thing.
Paul Hogan’s character ‘Mick’ Crocodile Dundee hearing someone speak of meeting with a therapist asked the simple question “doesn’t he have any mates?”

His girlfriend Sue replies “I guess we could all use more ‘mates’”.

Some of us are blessed by a brother or sister or buddy or mother or mentor who will listen generously to us; Perhaps even a wife or husband who can afford the time it takes to listen.

My fear is that good ‘mates’ are not all that common.

It doesn’t turn out to be that simple either.

A generous listener listens patiently and carefully.

A generous listener doesn’t jump to conclusions.

A generous listener doesn’t judge.

A generous listener doesn’t focus on the personal cost of the speech.

A generous listener encourages the speaker to speak.

A generous listener asks for and encourages clarity on the part of the speaker in a spirit of kindness and love.

A generous listener is ultimately seeking wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, God’s miracles, discernment, and understanding.

I know that for me it’s not often enough that I slow down and just sit and listen to my wife, my daughter, my buddies, or the rest of you.

I tend to be a problem solver so my first reaction when someone starts their story is to look for problems and offer solutions…usually as fast and as many as I can.

I tend to overlook the fact that people often just want a chance to work problems out for themselves and for me to be their listener and not their savior.

I sometimes fail when someone starts their story and I just can’t wait to tell them mine. I get to be a star but I seldom hear anything new or really get to know people. Pretty soon people don’t want to bother trying and I end up in a big ‘me’ bubble.

Generous listening not only helps us to be a blessing to others who need to sort out life but it refreshes life for us as well.

Generous listening holds the promise of another blessing for the listener: If you listen long enough, you just might learn something new.

So, let take it to church…

A generous listener in a Christian context prays for the Holy Spirit to act upon and shape the hearts of the listener and the speaker.
Communication is at the heart of every meaningful relationship and generous listening is at the heart of meaningful communication.

We create and sustain our meaningful relationships by generous listening.

So…How does all this relate to our walk as Christians.

As a church we have a simple set of goals:

-As a body to be actively participating in the process of the unfolding of God’s Kingdom here on earth.

-To do this we need to receive the revelation of His will through His word, share it with others, and do it in our own lives.

-Also we must work to help individuals realize (meaning to take from concept to reality) …to realize their individual gifts and individual mission within the wider mission of the church.

Everything in our lives needs to be seen within the context of our individual and corporate mission in God’s Kingdom, His Church, and His Christian community. We tend to think of it as the pastors job full time and ours part-time.

Bad news brothers and sisters…there are no part time Christians…you don’t die and go to heaven part-time and finish out the week in hell.

Do Sunday Christians get to do Sundays in heaven and 6 days a week in hell? Talk about everybody waiting for the weekend! If you belong to Christ you belong 24/7/365.242199

This is no easy task…it’s hard…to see everything…everything… in our lives in relation to our individual and corporate mission in God’s Kingdom.

Our service to our Lord, born out of gratitude to Him and love for Him, can only proceed through His power when we are in meaningful relationship with Him.

So how do we create and maintain a meaningful relationship with our Lord.

Generous listening.

Is listening important to God?

I always think of the importance God places on his commands being evidenced by repetition in the Bible.

Remember Christ after Peter having denied Him 3 times and later after His resurrection when Peter goes fishing Christ asking him do you love me more than these fish…saying…then feed my lambs, do you love me more than these fish…then feed my lambs, do you love me more than these fish…then feed my lambs.

So how about this:

1. **Job 4:12**
   "A word was secretly brought to me, my ears caught a whisper of it.

2. **Psalm 135:17**
   They have ears, but cannot hear, nor is there breath in their mouths.
3. **Proverbs 18:15**
   The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge, for the ears of the wise seek it out.

4. **Matthew 11:15**
   Whoever has ears, let them hear.

5. **Matthew 13:9**
   Whoever has ears, let them hear.

6. **Matthew 13:15**
   For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’

7. **Matthew 13:16**
   But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.

8. **Matthew 13:43**
   Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

9. **Mark 4:9**
   Then Jesus said, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”

10. **Mark 4:23**
    If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear.”

11. **Luke 8:8**
    Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.” When he said this, he called out, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”

12. **Luke 14:35b**
    “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”

Milton 1:1 2012 Whoever has ears let him have ‘Big Ears’

Is our listening important to God?

Are our goals in listening to God the same as our goals in listening to each other?

-seeking wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, Gods miracles, discernment, and understanding.

Of course they are as these are the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

**1 Cor 12:** Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues,[a] and to still another the interpretation of tongues.[b] 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

Christ expects us to know and do His will.

In one of the ‘On Being’ interviews with singer/vocalist Bobby McFerrin Bobby made a comment..

He said “God ‘gets’ us...He gets it...what it is to be human”
God knows what it is to be weak, flawed individuals in a broken world incapable of meaningful action apart from Him. He wants us to depend on Him and make provision for us.

I have read this next verse many times and it’s so easy to run past and miss the power in the meaning.

**John 14:15** "If you love me, keep my commands. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth.

I lose context and think of ‘help you’ as being very general but I now hear this as very specific ‘help you keep my commands’.

Christ says and does this because He gets us…He knows we can’t do it alone. …even when we don’t.

The power of the Holy Spirit gives us power to listen generously to Gods word and know and do His will. He shows us our roots, our direction, and needed adjustments

Does our act of generous listening to our Lord resemble our generous listening to each other?

Should we listen patiently and carefully? Should we listen and not jump to conclusions? Should we listen and not judge? Should we listen and not focus on the personal cost of the speech? Should we encourage the speaker to speak?

How about this…is God a ‘mate’ for us.

When we pray does He listen patiently and carefully, without conclusions, without judgement, disregarding personal cost while encouraging our speech and clarity.

I believe that if we fail to pray regularly… out loud…we miss an opportunity to hear ourselves try to make sense of our thoughts, beliefs, and actions to the one person in the world who knows and loves us best. We miss out on the power of the Holy Spirit helping to reveal the roots and the direction of our stories and Gods powerful instructions born inside our own hearts.

Pray…regularly…out loud…your mate is listening generously…

Then listen generously to Him…you just might learn something.

May the Lord in this new year grant you by the power of his Holy Spirit the gift of Big Ears and may He grant us as a body new discoveries in harmony.