The Art of Active Listening

<https://fiercemarriage.com/the-art-of-active-listening>

[00:00:00]

**Ryan:** This month's theme has been communication. We started with the broad kind of talking about talking. If you missed any one of these episodes, we highly encourage you to go back and listen to those.

The second one was how to talk about sex. And the reason is is in our experience and all the couples that come talk to us, even in our own lives, sometimes you need someone to give you permission to and tools to talk about sex with your spouse.

**Selena:** Yeah. It never hurt anybody.

**Ryan:** That was the second communication episode this month. And then last week, we talked about selective hearing. Namely, we talked through three types of selective hearing, three levels of selective hearing, and gave you some tangible ways to kind of begin finding your way out of those habits, out of those ruts.

Today, we're talking about the art of intentional - or what is the word that you used?

**Selena:** Active.

**Ryan:** Active listening. The art of active listening. So you can kind of see the progression happening, right?

**Selena:** Yeah.

**Ryan:** So we go from ignoring, not talking, not knowing how to talk to each other or about certain issues to now we're hearing but maybe we're not hearing the fullness of what we could be hearing...

**Selena:** Or shouldn't be hearing. Because our response is then I think short-circuiting. Some of the joy to be had or the pleasure of just being with each other conversationally, and in our spirits, and how we're understanding each other.

**Ryan:** Yeah, yeah. So this episode is all about that art of active listening and getting to the deeper meaning that your spouse is maybe they're trying to communicate, but they need your help to communicate that. We might change this. But next week, I think we're going to talking about learning to express yourself more effectively. *[both chuckles]* Like being yourself. You know what I mean? Because I always feel like I have a hard time just knowing what I'm even feeling.

**Selena:** Sure.

**Ryan:** So how can I be known by you if I can't even put words to how I'm feeling...

**Selena:** Express feels... I don't know if that's the right word. I understand what you're saying.

**Ryan:** Express is a real word.

**Selena:** It is a real word.

**Ryan:** I think it gets a bad rap because people think self-expression has this ultimate value in our society.

**Selena:** Right. That's not what we're talking about.

**Ryan:** Expression is important if you're going to be able to be known. Right?

**Selena:** Right.

**Ryan:** Anyway. So the art of active listening, that's what we're talking about today. It should be a good episode. We'll see you on the other side.

**[00:02:19] <Intro>**

**Selena:** Welcome to the Fierce Marriage podcast where we believe that marriage takes a fierce tenacity that never gives up and refuses to give in.

**Ryan:** Here, we'll share openly and honestly about all things marriage—

**Selena:** Sex—

**Ryan:** Communication—

**Selena:** Finances—

**Ryan:** Priorities—

**Selena:** Purpose—

**Ryan:** And everything in between.

**Selena:** Laugh, ponder, and join in our candid, gospel-centered conversations. This is Fierce Marriage.

**[00:02:51] <podcast begins>**

**Ryan:** We have to be careful with this title. We were going to go with "deep listening" but then we realize that's kind of a new age... I mean, if you think about the words "deep listening" alone, they mean to listen in a deep way with intentionality, with active listening. But it turns out that that phrase, deep listening, has kind of other connotations. So we're trying to be sensitive to that and be wise. We're certainly not advocating anything outside of what the Bible would teach, about the human condition, about how to love and serve one another in light of how Christ has loved and served us. So I want to be crystal clear about that.

The whole point of active listening, of deep listening, is to not just empathize. Empathy is a big piece, and that is a big driver—sympathy, empathy, understanding someone else's struggle, their pain, their confusion, whatever that thing is. But the difference between—and we'll talk about this more—the difference between a worldly view of those things and a godly biblical view of those things is we don't stop there in the Christian worldview. There's a reason for it. We'll talk about that reason in this episode. And you can probably imagine. But before we do that, let's do our housekeeping.

If you haven't yet, we would just ask that today you would take 30 seconds and leave a rating and a review on your podcast app. That means the world to us. It helps other people find this content and understand what they're getting themselves into. It's very encouraging to us. We just thank you in advance for that. So 30 seconds today, either now, or at the end of this episode, and please do leave a rating and review.

Secondly, our Patreon community is growing.

**Selena:** Sweet.

**Ryan:** And I love it. We're almost past the 400 patron milestone.

**Selena:** Oh, wow

**Ryan:** It always ebbs and flows every month as things go. But I'd like to see us get to the 500 points fairly quickly. And the reason for that is, you guys, and I'm not trying to be kind of a doomsday or whatever, I just feel like our days are numbered in terms of how we can freely express the truths found in the Gospel without a risk of being either suppressed, passively or active. [00:05:00]

And what I mean by that, like for instance, on Facebook, we have almost, I don't know, over half a million people that have liked our page. Algorithmically, if we post like, "Hey, Jesus wants your marriage to flourish" or something like that, only, I mean, at most, 3% to 5% of our audience will even see that message.

**Selena:** Wow.

**Ryan:** Three to five. Think about that. Now, if we use certain keywords or if we link out or if we try to do anything that's kind of not Facebook platform friendly...

**Selena:** It takes you away from Facebook.

**Ryan:** It takes you away from Facebook. Or in any way propagates a worldview, namely, Christianity, that they don't find palatable, then it gets passively suppressed. That's my going theory. I think I could probably support it with some facts.

**Selena:** And data.

**Ryan:** And some data. But the point is, is you know what? There's something to be said for rallying around the message of the gospel and maintaining our kind of... What am I trying to say? Our ability to continue saying this message regardless of what bureaucrats have to say. So with that said, if you want to be part of that small community, we consider our patreons to be our closest supporters, go to patreon.com/fiercemarriage. There's lots of tiers there where you can hop on board, starting $2 a month on up.

Okay, so let's get into the content today. What is active listening? Or where's the need? I'll ask you, Selena. Where's the need for active listening? And this might be something that's super obvious, but let's just hash through it real fast?

**Selena:** No, I mean, speaking from experience, my personality, I guess, tends to be one that listens and hears, and then thinks I hear it all and I'm ready to start prescribing how can we begin the journey towards healing and reconciliation? Otherwise, I try to fix it I think too soon. I don't mean to. It feels like an honest desire to help you. And I've experienced this in friendships as well. But I think the part that I miss is actively listening, like listening not to just respond but listening to understand and hear and ask questions.

I think we are so quick with information, generally speaking as a culture that we're quick to come to conclusions as well. Like that just kind of translates over to "Oh, I get it. I guess this what you're saying." And then "here's my response blah blah." We're so quick to compartmentalize, to think we understand, to figure out our response already. Like, "All right, let's move on to the next thing."

**Ryan:** Let's pause for a second.

**Selena:** This is our tradition.

**Ryan:** That's great. I want to just hover on that a little bit more because we think we can provide an answer because we have this... we've talked about this in the past. But the prevalence of information, the ability of literally to have kind of world body of knowledge in the palm of our hand has given us this false sense of omniscience.

**Selena:** False sense.

**Ryan:** That I know everything. I can know anything.

**Selena:** Right.

**Ryan:** And while it may be true that you can look up anything that has been discovered and posted within humanity, it's also true that we have... the false sense of omniscience means that I literally will forget what I just looked up seconds later. But because we read an article last week, or I watched this thing last week, or I saw this YouTube video, or I talked to somebody or engaged with someone in some forum, now, listen, I know how to solve your problem. And that is a very shallow. It's just we know just enough to cause damage in that case.

**Selena:** Right. I think God is calling us to a deeper place in terms of how we listen because when we're... active listening is going to take time. It's going to take repetition, it's going to take constantly dealing with some of the same battles until we experience that breakthrough of saying, "Oh, I get it. I've not been listening well, and these are the ways I haven't been listening well." But again, you don't know until you know. And you kind of have to just keep going at it, which I think is why marriage can be such a beautiful place in the covenant in this area, this safe place of us learning how to listen to each other, learn how to share information, and communicate and connect better because we are just going to fail. We are going to have this false sense of, you know, I know everything I know the answers, blah, blah.

**Ryan:** In my research and thinking through this and reading, one of the things I came across was the notion that most people has these... they're just psychologists. I'm reading different psychological kind of papers and articles, and one of the themes was most people rarely experience being deeply listened to. And tragically, that's true in a married couple's life too. Thinking about when you first started dating [00:10:00] or first got engaged headed into marriage...

**Selena:** There wasn't enough hours in the day to be listening and talking. *[laughs]*

**Ryan:** Right. You would just stare across the table at each other's eyes and just hang on to every word and every detail...

**Selena:** I still do.

**Ryan:** That's sweet. ...because you want and you wanted so badly to know this person, right?

**Selena:** Yeah.

**Ryan:** It's so novel, the relationship is so new. They're just this frontier, right? And you're forging ahead and you're finding all the treasures to be found in this new person that you have professed your love to. I think what happens we get into marriage, you all know the story, is we kind of hit cruising altitude and we think, "Man, I know enough."

**Selena:** "We're okay."

**Ryan:** Or "I know this issue that he or she is dealing with, and I know why. And I can just kind of gloss over all the stuff that they're saying right now. And I'm just going to cut to the chase." That is the antithesis of deep listening.

**Selena:** I'm going to ask you a question. Do you think you're a good listener?

**Ryan:** No, *[both laughs]* I don't.

**Selena:** I don't mean that to be picky. But when you're like, "We just tend to gloss over and cut to the chase," I'm like, "I feel like that's something I value in you in a lot of ways." But I could also see how that can be...

**Ryan:** There's a difference between glossing over and being incisive. And I'm not saying that I'm incisive. But you can...

**Selena:** Maybe I appreciate the incisiveness about you.

**Ryan:** Another perspective. Somebody can bring another perspective, and they can cut through all the noise that you've been busy about and get down to the core of it and you're like, "Oh, you said the thing that I've just definitely..."

**Selena:** Exactly. Maybe that's the active listener, right? They're able to do that.

**Ryan:** Yeah. And we're gifted in different ways. There's times when you do that to me and I'm struggling and I'm in my own head, and you'll just come in with this hot knife through the butter of my brain, and I'm like, "Oh, yes. That's the thing. God used you. You're my helpmate. It's amazing."

**Selena:** I think one of the blessings of pastoral care or biblical counseling is just this idea of how active they listen, or how active they seem like they're listening. I'm assuming it's all the counselors out there right now. But they've been trained in how to respond and they've been trained in how to read body language and what's actually being said. I would say they're probably some of the best active listeners.

**Ryan:** Well, I would hope so because you're paying them, you know, $130 an hour or whatever.

**Selena:** Right.

**Ryan:** But the cool thing a lot of these therapists... I mean, we have our good friends, Drew and Leanne. they are counselors. Drew says one of the biggest things that they try not to do is they just try to ask more questions instead of saying, "Okay, here's your prescription. Go and take two pills and call me in the morning," so to speak, "otherwise, do these things, and then let me know how it goes," He says it's more about leading the journey in the conversation. Now granted as a spouse that can be very patronizing where you're like, "Okay, I'm just going to leave Selena on this journey. I know where we're going."

**Selena:** "Lead me when I'm in the mood to be led. Okay." *[chuckles]*

**Ryan:** Well, you start to feel patronized. It's a different dynamic. We have to be aware of that. But the cool thing is that they are literally in the business of active listening because they have no other stake in the game other than just to understand what you're going through.

**Selena:** And help you understand, right?

**Ryan:** Yeah, yeah. I guess, yeah. So to help you understand.

**Selena:** Discover why you're not understanding this.

**Ryan:** So they have a series of tools that can be diagnostic, they can be therapeutic, you know, they have different purposes. Tools in conversations to have, questions to ask, different ways to phrase questions. And those all become the means by which you can peel away the layers and understand just a little bit more, ask us another... Like you're just thinking like you're chipping away at a...I'm thinking of an archeological dig. You go, you find this...

**Selena:** You can't just go with hammers.

**Ryan:** You got to sweep it.

**Selena:** Be really gentle.

**Ryan:** You got to apply solution. And it's got to be like acid-free. May our words be acid-free. Toxic substance free. The point being that that's their job. There's a reason why that when people go to therapy, and this can be your barber, this could be your bartender, this could be just somebody that you go and go hunting with. I'm thinking of all kinds of...

**Selena:** [inaudible].

**Ryan:** Well, that's like a movie thing.

**Selena:** I know. *[both laughs]*

**Ryan:** It sounds like I have my own bartender.

**Selena:** This is where you go.

**Ryan:** I can't remember the last time I've been to a bar.

**Selena:** We have some questions. *[Ryan laughs]*

**Ryan:** That's where we met. Selena at the bar. *[both laughs]*

**Selena:** We shouldn't go with that [inaudible] people that.

**Ryan:** You know what? That's fine. There's nothing wrong with going to a bar and having an adult beverage with friends. Okay? In moderation. [00:15:00]

**Selena:** Yeah.

**Ryan:** Anyway, don't [inaudible] help me with that one. Look it up.

**Selena:** It's the first miracle. *[laughs]*

**Ryan:** Listening is a skill that can be learned. I think that's one of the big premises that we're starting with today is that true listening, this art of it can be learned, and it can be taught, and it can be gleaned, and it can be studied, and it can be practiced. And dare I say it can be mastered.

**Selena:** Well, didn't we read about this? There's two different kinds of listening. Oftentimes, I think many of us... well, I do honestly. I'll speak for myself. I listen to respond because I just so desperately want to be helpful because I know how I value that help, I value that wisdom of somebody speaking that into me. But then I project that onto other people who may just need me to listen to understand and just ask questions to empathize, which sometimes feels like I'm just enabling. But again, God is God. And I have to kind of follow that person on whatever journey they're on and just trust that God is at work, and that I can pray for them, and that I don't have to always have a solution. I think sometimes our responses are we just feel like we need... We have this pressure, this undue need to offer a fix. Like, "How can I fix this for you?"

**Ryan:** Or we want to be the hero. And that's I think maybe where we can hang our hat for a few minutes here is that we want to be the one that solves the problem. And I think the heart of Christian listening is that we'll never be the ones to ultimately solve each other's problems. We can encourage, we can exhort, we can help, but ultimately, the only help we can really provide is to apply the [inaudible] that is the gospel, to apply the truth that is God's Word. And so the answers aren't found in us. And that kind of grates against I think our sin nature. That's why sometimes some are very apt to being fixers.

Now there are some things that can be fixed that are just kind of common sense. They're based on wisdom versus folly. I want to frame this a little bit and kind of give us a little of structure. As you're talking, this occurred to me that as we sit down and have conversation with each other, there's a progression that happens. There's the hearing, which we talked about last week, and hearing before the full picture, opening our ears. Then there's listening.

Listening is what we're talking about here—is internalizing understanding, taking the things you're hearing, and applying the filter of wisdom to them. And—and this is huge—understanding where those words are coming from. So that's what listening is. It's not just hearing the words, but hearing the circumstance, hearing the heart, hearing the tone, hearing what you know about your spouse. You're hearing all that stuff that they're not even saying.

**Selena:** Yeah. That's hard.

**Ryan:** And you're putting it into a context and listening and hoping for the best not assuming that they're just...

**Selena:** Right.

**Ryan:** You know, because they could be complaining or having a bad day and but not being super nice to you. But you can still listen in hear. Like, I get that you're not attacking me even though you are. I have to be big enough to say, "What's really going on?" and ask those questions.

So there's hearing, there's listening, and then there's the reading. That's what you're talking about. You read the situation. So Selena is my wife. Is she just wanting me to listen here and then just leave it at that, or is she asking me right now to help her in some way?

**Selena:** Sometimes you just verbalize that to me when I'm just like, "I just need you to listen right now," or "I need your advice on something." Sometimes I think we are able to get more familiar with each other and know each other because of past miscommunication or lack of hearing mistakes *[chuckles]* that we've had in conversations. But now we're kind of in that rhythm of like, "Hey, I just need you to listen and just be on my team." And we'll joke and he'll empathize with me and just be like, "oh, that person's the worst." Just jokingly. But also, you know, "Hey, maybe there's another perspective on this."

Sometimes I'm like, "I don't want to hear that right now." But most of the time, I'm very grateful that he's just even listening. Not that you don't listen, but I'm grateful for your active listening because it feels like you care.

**Ryan:** Okay. Okay, that's great. I want to get around to the benefits of active listening. I think we can identify at least three really core incentives why we need to be doing this. But I wanted to finish this logical sequence that I was thinking in my head before I forget.

Hear, listen, read. You're reading situation, and then responding based on how you read the situation. And that's where I could, as your husband, just say, "That's hard. I love you. That's really hard." Or "here's an idea. Let's fix it. You know what we can do? Tomorrow I'm going to take an hour and I'm going to just take care of this thing that's on your mind right now. So that you can know that I support you not just in my words, but also my actions and my priorities. And I'm serving you and loving you before [00:20:00] I'm serving and loving other things, other people."

**Selena:** Would it be a stretch to say that Jesus is one of our models for that hearing and listening and responding? What did you say? Hearing, reading, and responding.

**Ryan:** Yeah. We talked last week about how He's kind of the perfect model of hearing because He doesn't miss anything. He's not ever kind of distracted by other things.

**Selena:** He knows your thoughts. He knows your beginning and end.

**Ryan:** I would say that He's also our model for listening in that He understands. He hears and then He internalizes in a way that He understands more fully. This is where I have to be careful. We're not ever introducing a new information to God.

**Selena:** Right. Right.

**Ryan:** This is God. So it's not that He's somehow because we've talked to Jesus that now He has a new...

**Selena:** For sure.

**Ryan:** ...understanding of the universe. I think patience is kind of the marquee of God's brand of listening and loving and responding. It's a little bit of a hard thing to say because He's never having to read a situation. He knows the right way to do it. *[both laughs]*

**Selena:** Well, I know. But we look to Christ as our model for loving each other, and we look to our Christ in terms of how to deal with conflicts. So...

**Ryan:** Sorry. Maybe that's where it is. He's not ever listening in a selfish way or in a self-serving way.

**Selena:** Right. I think another just how I would like to highlight the gospel in this area is that if we're... I guess I would just ask us the question: are we practicing active listening when we are in the Word and praying to God? If we were going back to... you know, we're trying to actively listen to our spouse. But if we take a few steps back, and we can't even actively listen to the Word and to the Holy Spirit when we're praying, how can we expect ourselves to respond in a way that reflects Christ, that reflects His glory and His purpose for our marriage and for our lives?

I guess that would be my question is that yes Jesus is our model. We will never be Jesus. We were not born. He is perfect. He is King, we are not. But if we know Him through His Word, we are listening, we are allowing... Active listening is allowing I think even some of that risk to be involved, that vulnerability, that... non-meaningful risk, because I don't think that...

**Ryan:** I think that's more on the communication side. It's interesting you said that, because I'm doing a lot of study right now on how to accurately divide God's Word. If I read a narrative, for example...

**Selena:** What do you mean divide?

**Ryan:** Understand...

**Selena:** Okay, gotcha.

**Ryan:** ...communicate faithfully, even teach. I mean, that's kind of what we're doing here is how do we do that with faithfulness, with fidelity, without perverting the Word of God or the intentions of God or the character of God? That's a very sobering thing to undertake is to do that. I mean, the truism is true as most truisms are is that the more I learn, let me use this word, the dumber I feel. The more I learn, the stupider I feel. So I'm really humbled by this. Anyway, the point is when you're reading scripture, to do it, well, you have to ask yourself a series of questions. Who wrote this?

**Selena:** Why did they write this? Who has it been written to?

**Ryan:** And what happened around the scenario? What happened around this text? What is wrong with this picture? In other words, what's the bad thing that's happening here? What is the author? The person who's saying these words or writing these words, what are they trying to say? What are they trying to draw my attention to? What's the sequence? I mean, some of it starts to kind of feel like it doesn't make sense in terms of this conversation.

**Selena:** No, I think it's a great model, though, for us to be talking. You and I are talking and in my head, I'm saying, "Where is this coming from? Where are his words actually or to whom are his words actually being directed at? Maybe not me?"

**Ryan:** There's a risk there.

**Selena:** Getting that wrong?

**Ryan:** Yeah, there's a risk that you could be wrong, that you could be making the wrong assumptions.

**Selena:** Which is why we ask questions. Like you said it second. The first thing you're like, "We go to God's Word and we ask questions." And I think that's the first and truest way to begin active listening is to ask questions.

**Ryan:** But the key is when you ask the questions to actually want the true answers. And that's what happens with Scripture is we go to Scripture and we ask a hard question, and we get an answer that we don't like. The question is....

**Selena:** Yes, not bad answer. It's an answer we may not like.

**Ryan:** Yeah. So the question is, are we willing to let that answer change our view of that scripture or that change our [00:25:00] view of God? And that's why we have to read it so carefully so that we're getting an accurate view of God and not some distorted, culturally informed, selfishly informed view of God.

So the biggest question that hit me like a ton of bricks as I'm doing this study, when going through Scripture is asking yourself, why is this included in Scripture? Why did God put this in the Bible? You can't always answer that fully. But it begins to shed light on, okay, we remember that the Bible is God's story of redemption of His people. It's the story of Christ. It's a story of creation and redemption, and salvation, and all these wonderful things. It's a book about God. So even in a story that you don't feel like God is there, you have to ask yourself, where is God in this? And why is this included? And that really does start to inform our view.

So let's back that into the marriage conversation space. Our marriage is not scripture so you have to kind of parse it out a little bit. But I can ask myself, "Why is Selena including this in our conversation right now? Why is she bringing it to my attention? Why tonight of all nights. We're tired. You know, the kids are being crazy. She's bringing this thing up. Why?"

**Selena:** "Why is she raging like this? Why is she saying it the way that she's saying it?"

**Ryan:** I know that you're joking, but that's the right question to ask.

**Selena:** It really does happen sometimes.

**Ryan:** Where is her frustration coming from? Is it coming from just the kids are chaotic? Or is it coming from days of this? Is it coming from she's feeling a lack of support or she's feeling a lack of understanding or she's feeling a lak of...?

**Selena:** Or there's big transitions—things happening outside of you.

**Ryan:** So lack of security, a lack of safety. So as a husband, if I have the wherewithal and the wisdom to ask those questions, and then let the answers happened to me and let them actually change me, then I can say, "Okay, I don't have to be defensive."

**Selena:** And we can love each other through that and in that.

**Ryan:** Yeah. Her frustration is not an indictment on me as a man and a provider, as a husband. It's just frustration because of x, y, and z. Now, I can love her. I think one of the biggest keys is that active listening is other-focused.

**Selena:** It's not about you.

**Ryan:** It's not about you. And that's what you said. Listening to understand mean that when you admit that you need to understand something, you're admitting to yourself and to your spouse that there's something about you I don't know. So I need to know this new thing about you.

**Selena:** Well, yeah. And there's a humility aspect to it. Because whether we admit it or not, we want it to be a part of us.

**Ryan:** Unfortunately.

**Selena:** I'm speaking from truth. Because I would like to think that I don't make everything about me, but guess what? Ask my husband, he's always saying, "This is not about you. This is not about you."

**Ryan:** But simultaneously I'll say that you're one of the most selfless people.

**Selena:** Right. Sorry, I didn't mean to say it like that. But I tend to hear myself talking about myself or making it about me more and more and only because I want to find that agreement.

**Ryan:** I think that's where it comes from.

**Selena:** And I don't mean to make it about me, but I want to say, "Hey, I'm experiencing the same thing."

**Ryan:** Let me say my story. *[both laughs]*

**Selena:** But it's not helpful in that moment to you because you're like, "I'm just going through this and I just need you to ask me questions. I need you to show me that you care." And I'm like, "We're talking about it." That's probably some other people's response as well. Like, "I'm listening." "Are you listening, though? You're not engaging with me while I'm sitting here looking at you in the eyes. Well, okay, I want more. What does that mean?"

**Ryan:** That's why we say "the art of active listening," because it's not just "hey, go home and ask your spouse these 10 questions and you will be a good listener." There's you have to read and know. There's an art. It's not just a science. It's not just two plus two equals four. It's not just that. It's two plus two equals four and how can we write it in a beautiful way. *[laughs]*

**Selena:** Yeah, it takes time. And if we expect it to not take any time, then our expectations are not calibrated, they're not right. So we absolutely, I think, need to take that model of reading scripture. Start with some of those questions and understand that we need to hear. Are we really hearing what is being said in Scripture? Are we really listening? And are we reading it in a way... Like with our spouse, are we really hearing our spouse? Are we really listening to what they're saying? Are we reading maybe what's going on a situation? Are we asking those questions? Are we diving into some of the struggles saying, "Hey, I know you struggle with this. Did you feel like this when this was happening?"

**Ryan:** I would say do that carefully because it can be really easy to assign a silo or a category to an event or an emotion.

**Selena:** Yeah, I think that there's a tone and there's a way of doing that.

**Ryan:** Or a time not to do it and a time just to listen and still keep gathering information and just hesitate to jump to...

**Selena:** You can only do the best you can. I think I feel defensive because I feel like I do try my best and I still can fail miserably.

**Ryan:** I'll use one example. I'll use our daughters [00:30:00] because you'll see both sides to it. As a listener, you'll fall on either side of it. *[Selena chuckles]* But they'll be having a tough night, whiny, arguing. And this is why when we do a parenting podcast, we'll talk through this stuff in more detail. But they're arguing and I'm like, "Clementine..." she's just the one that we have to talk down off the ledge, so to speak.

**Selena:** She right in the middle.

**Ryan:** She's in that age. She's got a strong personality, and we love her so much. I say, "Clementine, what is going on? You're not listening, you're talking back, you're arguing." And I'll say it in her terms. And then Selena will jump in and say, "Oh, she's just really tired. They had a long day. She's tired. She's crying. She needs to go to sleep." And I'm thinking, "That doesn't change the fact that she's disobeying me now." I get that that's why she's disobeying me. She's still disobeying.

Or sometimes they'll be wanting to express something and you'll say, "You're tired, you just haven't eaten, you need to go brush your teeth and go to bed" type of thing. And they still feel what they feel even though they might know they're tired. Saying they're tired and attributing their behavior to the tiredness doesn't actually get to the bottom of the behavior. So we have to be careful to say like, "Is it just because of this?" Because we want to assign a cause so quickly. And I'm saying that active listening doesn't always have to assign a cause right away.

**Selena:** Well, it's not quick. We're conditioned for quick and fast and easy and...

**Ryan:** Yeah. Take a pill, go to sleep.

**Selena:** That's not what I think we're called to. As believers, we're called to bear with one another.

**Ryan:** Whoo, bearing. That's lifting and bearing the weight and striving.

**Selena:** And a lot of how that's done these days is through listening.

**Ryan:** So I'd like to get into these because I think they could be helpful. Three, I'll say, big incentives for learning this art, committing yourself to learning the art of...

**Selena:** Active listening.

**Ryan:** Active listening. *[Selena laughs]* Deep listening is what I'm trying to say. Learning the art of active listening. Okay, so here's the first one. This one's really, really easy and intuitive. So truer listening leads to a truer knowledge. Therefore, that leads to a truer empathy or a source of empathy or relation. So we can now relate in a newer truer way, which then leads to the final thing, which we all want is a truer help. So a truer listening leads to truer knowledge, leads to a truer deeper relationship, and therefore truer help.

**Selena:** It begs the question, though, why does true have to be there? Shouldn't we just be good at listening, which would get us more knowledge, and then we'd be able to emphasize? I feel like words are losing their meanings because we are so quick with them. And we're so...

**Ryan:** Oh, because we can hear. That's why I want true in there because you can have a false sense of knowledge.

**Selena:** Okay.

**Ryan:** "I know what's going on with you." But did you listen? Do you really know? Because you might have a false knowledge, therefore, a false empathy, therefore, a false unhelpful?

**Selena:** No, that's good. I'm glad you define truer or true because I was feeling like it was not true. *[chuckles]*

**Ryan:** Just feels like it's a redundant statement. But no, the reason it's there is to contrast I think against false lies or just even half-truths. That's the first one. It helps us help each other better. And we know how to listen and subject ourselves to this art and this discipline of active listening. The second one is... and this kind of goes hand in hand, but it's the means by which we know. Selena has this phrase, or... I can't remember if it was you or we were talking in one of our editorial meetings. Kind of this getting at one another? And that's where I think next week we're going to talk about.

**Selena:** I think it's you. I've always heard you say that.

**Ryan:** Like how do I get at what's in your heart? It's like this treasure and it's buried and it's entangled...

**Selena:** The more you dig, the more dirt that falls on it.

**Ryan:** So getting at...

**Selena:** That's how I listen.

**Ryan:** Really getting to know each other in a deep and I'll use this word penetrating way. The way we do that is through this type of listening, this pursuit of each other's mind, of each other's emotions. God has created humans as deeply complex. That's a huge statement, but we are not just two-dimensional beings. Our dog, Bentley, if you throw him a bone, he's happy. He got a treat, he's happy. That's not true for humans.

**Selena:** Maybe when little.

**Ryan:** Maybe our babies. There's more dimension to us. It's not just about a physiological or just...

**Selena:** So we shouldn't assume that there's only one answer, one fix. I think we have to explore with each other, journey alongside one another.

**Ryan:** Yeah. And this tool of communication, of hearing, listening, speaking is literally... like we can't mind-meld one another [00:35:00] and know what's going on.

**Selena:** No. *[chuckles]*

**Ryan:** We have to be able to communicate and hear in order to get at one another. And the communication could happen through a written word, too. It's not limited to just audio. But the point is, is that this skill is the only way that God's really given us. I wanted to take a quick pause and add this caveat. We haven't brought scripture in yet. That's because we're kind of building on the last couple episodes, the whole kind of doctrine, if you will, the underlying kind of truth that drives even desire and the ability to listen to one another. So go back, if you haven't, listen to those.

One of the things I do want to bring back to our attention is just this passage from Philippians 2 that says, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition, but with..." How does it go? I don't have in front of me.

**Selena:** It all depends on the version.

**Ryan:** "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

We talked about that last week, but this posture of not thinking more highly of ourselves than we are, remembering that the one that we worship, our God, our Savior, our friend is the ultimate example of ultimate power, ultimate humility. Ultimate opportunity, but still ultimate sacrifice.

**Selena:** Gosh.

**Ryan:** In another passage, is not considered... Yeah, it's right here. It's did not count equality with God, I think. He humbled himself. And He didn't have to. He's the one human in all history that didn't have to do this.

**Selena:** We gloss over the equality with God. I mean, again, if you read the Old Testament and you are looking at who God is in the midst of the Israelites, the Jews, and God's people, and you see the laws and just everything they had to do, and then they would go to God, and then they'd walk away from Him, and He would still... There are some big punishments there and there were some big deaths that happened. And He still...

I mean, with all that authority, with all that power, all that glory, He is the Creator. There's no one above Him. There's no one equal to Him. He didn't take even an ounce of that with Him. I mean, He is fully God and fully man, so I can't say that.

**Ryan:** Well, that's again tricky because He was fully man.

**Selena:** I mean, He is. That's what I meant. He's fully God and fully man, but He didn't use...

**Ryan:** There's no caveats to that. He was subjected to every ounce of humanity. He wasn't just like pulling His godhood out of His back pocket. There's a lot of that's a complex Christological kind of conversation. The point is, He's our example of humility in this case. That's the point. So when we listen, and I wanted to take a pause and just remind ourselves and our listeners that that's where this is coming from is that we have been endowed with value, with an importance by the Creator of the Universe Himself. Therefore, we must and should endow each other with value worth, and importance as we have these conversations. So I just wanted to make sure that we revisited that as we continue the conversation. Probably should have done that at the outset. But here we are.

**Selena:** Here we are.

**Ryan:** All right. So three big reasons. The first one is we get true listening, true knowledge, true empathy, and therefore truer help for one another. The second big reason is art of listening is the means by which we know one another. There's no other way than to be actively listening and probing and mining for more and more information in the heart of your spouse. And the final big incentive is simply it's a joy. It is a joy to experience. I read in one article that said the goal of deep listening or active listening is to acquire information, understand a person or a situation, and—this is the interesting part—experience pleasure. So it's a joy. And then it continues on.

"Active listening is about making a conscious decision to hear what people are saying. It's about being completely focused on others, their words, their messages without being distracted." In other words, it's a joy to know each other through this process.

**Selena:** Wow.

**Ryan:** In that way, it's maybe call it selfish. I don't care. I think the point is...

**Selena:** Yeah. We don't take on that approach I think very naturally when it comes to listening, that it's a joy to listen to you. Because usually, we're kind of like, "Okay, what do you need?" Again, we're fighting to some extent this conditioning of...

**Ryan:** If it's not fast I don't want it. If it's not easy, I don't want.

**Selena:** If I can't figure it out within a day or two, then agrrrr. Even then that price sounds like too long.

**Ryan:** Any couple, you guys that we've counseled, we've talked with, we've walked with who have gone through months-long struggles, [00:40:00] they will tell you that man, it was brutal, but man, are we better for it, and we got down to it, and now we have deeper trust, a deeper understanding, a new skill set."

**Selena:** Right. It's not a quick fix though. Praise God for that.

**Ryan:** And this is why it comes back down to covenant, down to love, down to the gospel is that the marriage that's why it's so beautiful. This is the only institution, marriage, that allows this level of human relationship. It's the only way for it. And God designed it. Yeah. And that's why it's so beautiful. Because with a covenantal bond, I know I'm not going anywhere, you know you're not going anywhere. We know that of each other. And now we have a place and venue through which to work this out and to learn to love in these deep ways. You've heard us talk about that a lot. Those three big three reasons.

We want to leave you with some thoughts on what are the red flags or the yellow flags to how we can recognize opportunities for deep listening. So I'll just throw some things out there. This could probably go in a lot of different directions. But these are the first ones that came to my mind.

We can recognize opportunities to deeply listen or actively listen during... this is going to be hard, but it's one of the best opportunities. It's during fights. It's during your conflict. It's during your arguments. It's humbling yourself and saying, "I get it. I'm angry. I probably feel right right now. And I'm justified, and I'm going to make a good point. But instead, I'm going to shut my mouth, and I'm going to question myself, I'm going to ask questions of my spouse." And they're not questions that are inflammatory, but questions that are about getting information.

**Selena:** Sometimes it's just about keeping your mouth shut and waiting that extra minute. It's amazing to me when I've waited about 30 seconds after you've said something, and I think I have the answer and just kind of wait and sit. Then you say something else and I'm like, "Well, that's not at all where I thought this was going," or "praise God, he's already recognizing some things, and I just get to be here to listen and be next to him during this time, whatever." I don't know. Sometimes it's just shutting your mouth is one of the best things you can do.

**Ryan:** To counter your... because you said something about me, I want to cou... *[laughs]*

**Selena:** Speaking from experience.

**Ryan:** I found that when I ask you more questions, and I confirm meaning, we talked about it last week...

**Selena:** Yeah, shared meaning.

**Ryan:** Like, "I hear you saying this," or "are you saying this?" And try to say that in a way that's disarming. Not like, "Who do you think you are? *[both laughs]* I have a question. How dare you?" So asking... *[both laughs]* It took us that long to get to that reference. I found that to be super elucidating and helpful. And it makes me want to know. Just by asking those questions, I actually want to know.

**Selena:** It makes me feel valued again, and it affirms that you're actively listening to what is going on in my heart.

**Ryan:** Which is huge for building trust and communication.

**Selena:** And friendship.

**Ryan:** And friendship, yes. So during fights, that's a great opportunity to actively listen. The next opportunity is during a big life change or a big decision. So we're just moving and...

**Selena:** Totally thought I'd be like, "We got this. Totally fine." You just pack things in boxes. You just move to a new place. Not even that far. It's fine." Guys, our world has just been upside down.

**Ryan:** It's among the hardest things human beings go through.

**Selena:** I know. Ryan told me that because I was having a real crazy night on Wednesday. No, it was a couple day. Monday, I think. And I was just like questioning everything. This is my tendency, and I recognize this about myself. And he's helped me. It's just you can't make any big decisions or big assessments during big times, like crazy times. Because I tend to reassess everything in those moments because it's wrong. So something must be very wrong. I must have made a really bad decision a long time ago.

**Ryan:** When in reality you're just at sea, and the waves are really high.

**Selena:** Yeah. You're just going through hard time.

**Ryan:** And there's nothing you can do; you just get through it. You don't have to throw your boat away. "This boat is broken. It's too rocky. Get another boat."

**Selena:** How dare you?

**Ryan:** I'm not trying to be [inaudible] fun. But there we go. *[both laughs]* So during life change, that's an opportunity to ask these questions and to pause and try to hear without having your defenses up.

**Selena:** So life change. And I think just kind of external pressures, not maybe within your marriage, but you know, with your family or friendships or community. Just something outside that is affecting your marriage.

**Ryan:** Other life change scenarios could be maybe your kids are getting ready to go off to college. And that's a big thing. Or maybe your parents are getting sicker and that's causing stress. Maybe there's been fallout in a family relationship or personal relationship. That kind of falls into the next one, which we'll get into. I'm trying to think through some of these life changes. Maybe you just had your first baby.

**Selena:** Oh, yeah.

**Ryan:** Or maybe you got hired or fired from a job, or a promotion [00:45:00] and now you're working 20 hours more a week. So those are all opportunities to recognize that you don't know everything there is to know about your spouse, the situation or how they're perceiving it, how they're responding to it. Therefore, the only tool you have is to deeply listen, is to listen harder.

**Selena:** To actively listen.

**Ryan:** Actively listen. The next opportunity to actively listen is when one is distraught. And this sounds obvious, but you can tell when your spouse is out of their groove, they're out of sorts. Now, it's time to pick up your ears and ask questions. And that could be, like we said before, because of a relationship, some sort of circumstance, some sort of stressor, outside stressor...

**Selena:** You got to proceed with caution around there, right? Because, again, good intentions have gone awry, speaking from experience. "What's going on with you? Why are you so...?

**Ryan:** It could be because of something you did.

**Selena:** I am so bummed out.

**Ryan:** It could be because of something you did as a spouse. Maybe you broke their trust or you said some things.

**Selena:** Maybe they're distraught because they're trying to figure out how to approach it with you or something. And so that'll take some extra effort, I think, to rebuild trust simultaneously. Because sometimes they'll feel like you're just listening now because you're...

**Selena:** You know you're wrong.

**Ryan:** ...you're a perpetrator, and you're trying to make do, make right. So you have to rebuild that trust and rebuild those bridges. We can go on and on. I think, listener, you'll be able to discern when those opportunities are. I think anytime there's...Go ahead.

**Selena:** I was just reading further down in Philippians. Real quickly about being lights in the world. Verse 12, and talking about "do all things without grumbling or disputing that you may be blameless and innocent children of God." We talked about this last week. "...without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain." Even then I'm poured out the but a mark of you know, a believer, the fruit of a believer is one that is able to listen well, to actively listen, to actively hear, to actively, then respond from a place of knowing God, knowing His purpose, His will, His desire for us. Again, that's how we are light in a dark world. That is how humbling ourselves, you know, looking to Christ for that humility, understanding that again this is where we can magnify Christ in a dark world.

**Ryan:** That's great. So couple's conversation challenge for this one. I think just simply sit down and talk about your active listening tendencies. In other words, are you taking the time to ask hard questions and to listen to the response, and let the response inform you? And if you aren't, just simply find reasons why. Maybe you're distracted. Maybe you're too busy. Maybe you don't value your spouse like you should. Ask those hard questions. And I'm confident that as you ask and answer those questions honestly, that will get your foot on a better path toward better active listening and deeper community in your marriage between you and your spouse, your relationship, and therefore deeper intimacy, and greater joy. That's your assignment. Go get it.

**Selena:** Go get it.

**Ryan:** Lord, I thank you for our listeners, the husband who's listening to this, the wife who's listening to this. I thank you for their willingness to work on their marriage. But not just that, but to do it in light of your Word and in light of all that you are, and even to be obedient to what you've said. Lord, I pray that you would enable that husband, that wife, that couple to flourish in this area of communication and to enjoy deeper communion with one another, deeper intimacy, deeper joy with one another, Lord. Marriage is truly a gift. It's a profound, deep mystery of a gift you've given us. I pray that You would allow us to be fruitful in it and faithful. In Jesus' name. Amen.

**Selena:** Amen.

**Ryan:** All right. Next week is going to be our last episode on communication for a little while. We might touch on it again here and there. We're doing themed, kind of chunks of content over the coming months here. But next week, we're talking about kind of the other side of communication. In James, it says, "Be slow to speak, quick to listen." So often we hear that and say, "Don't speak hardly at all." But really, there is a time to speak, a time to speak accurately. So there are skills to be learned around communicating and expressing your thoughts with fidelity and with clarity. We're going to talk through kind of what that looks like in the marital relationship. And I trust that it will be helpful to you. So we got some really tangible tools that we're going to bring to the table for that one. [00:50:00]

**Selena:** Tangible tools.

**Ryan:** Tangible tools. That said, this episode of the Fierce Marriage podcast is—

**Selena:** In the can.

**Ryan:** Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for joining us. We'll see you again as always in about seven days. Until next time—

**Selena:** Stay fierce.

**[00:50:18] <outro>**

**Ryan:** Thank you for listening to the Fierce Marriage podcast. For more resources for your marriage, please visit FierceMarriage.com, or you can find us with our handle @Fiercemarriage on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Thank you so much for listening. We hope this has blessed you. Take care.

**PODCAST NOTES**

* **[00:14:40]**
* Scripture references:
* Philippians 2:3-8
* Philippians 2:12-13

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