

## What Makes Deep Listening Hard?

There is no doubt in my mind that deep listening makes a difference—

- In showing love and compassion.
- In getting to the heart of concerns or disagreements.
- In developing deep, sustaining relationships.

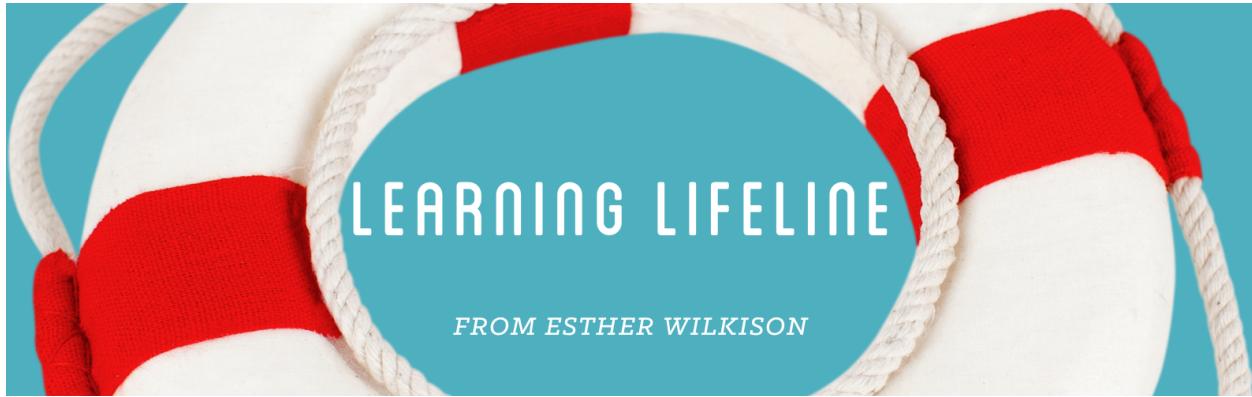
Yet, even knowing all that, I have a skill set that doesn't always support good listening. In fact—when someone is telling me a story—I'm gifted at . . .

1. Jumping in to share my experience (or riff on a favorite rant) about a topic that their story reminded me of.
2. Sharing a similar story—not usually to one-up them, but just to participate in the conversation.
3. Providing a solution—practical, logical, or spiritual—to anything that sounds like a problem.

For context—I think I developed those detrimental skills when I was young and anxious about talking to people. I had processing challenges, which meant it was hard for me to hear with understanding and also think of how to respond. To compensate, I would just say whatever came to mind with no filter. I didn't think about the fact that I was keeping the attention on myself or acting like the other person was not worth really listening to. I just felt (and sometimes still feel) more comfortable talking than listening.

Paul, who wrote lots of the books in the Bible, said that when he was a child he talked, thought, and reasoned like a child. Then, when he got older, he put away childish things. I'm with Paul and would add—I want to put off listening like a child and develop deep listening skills that allow me to keep the focus on the person I'm listening to, and ask questions that take them even deeper into the feelings and beliefs behind their words.

Deep listening takes self-regulation and emotional maturity. Without those, when a topic comes up that activates our nervous system, we verbally fight (argue), flee (change topics or crack jokes), freeze (shut down), or fawn (gush sympathy or flattery).



Self-regulation and emotional maturity are not things we naturally pick up as we get older. Both require intentional help from someone who is already self-regulated and has emotional maturity—and knows how to help others develop those two crucial areas.

As I've become aware of my challenges with deep listening, I'm getting to where I can spot the times I fall back on habits that hurt relationships. And when I spot them, I go back to my friends to ask them to forgive me for not listening well. I'm grateful that I have extremely patient, forgiving friends and that I'm growing in my ability to learn deeply from others by deeply listening to them.