

Are You Your Favorite Subject?

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In a popular song, the singer goes on and on about how much he likes to talk about another person. But then the main point of the song comes when he says emphatically, "I wanna talk about me!" We laugh, but this song reveals something that we should all think about. The truth is, some of us like to talk about ourselves all the time!



We all know someone like this—the person who always has the "bigger fish" story on the tip of his tongue. The accident he saw was more shocking than the one you saw. The injustice she experienced was worse than your experience of injustice. The funniest things their children do are funnier than what your children do. In short, whatever the topic of conversation, it always seems to turn around and focus on them.

Most of us have acted this way at one time or another, and we have probably annoyed others in the process. But I must also admit that this sort of communicative one-upmanship is not always bad. There are times when the sharing of like experiences is helpful, informative, or really, really funny, even if your "fish" happens to be bigger than everyone else's. Then there are times when speaking about yourself is thoughtless, self-centered, and rude.

For example, perhaps someone you know has experienced a tragic loss. In the midst of her grief, when you should be consoling her with your presence, weeping with her *in silence*, you find yourself saying, "I know how you feel. When such and such happened to me. . . ." For the next ten minutes, the person who should be the focus of *your* attention is forced to focus her attention politely on *you*.

The Bible tells us that there is "a time to be silent and a time to speak" (Ecclesiastes 3:7). I have given one example of a time when silence would be preferable, and we can all think of many others. In fact, James seems to say that we should lean *toward* silence—"everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak . . ." (James 1:19). Now it is true that God gave us lungs, tongues, and vocal cords for a reason. Verbal communication is a necessary part of life. The question is, when should we speak up *about ourselves*?

- Unlike the poor timing illustrated in the above scenario, there are times when it is helpful to identify with another person's pain by letting them know you have gone through similar pain.

- It is often helpful to illustrate solutions to another person's problem by sharing how you dealt with a similar problem.
- It is often helpful to admit personal failures in order to reassure the one listening that you understand his or her struggles.
- It is often helpful to share experiences in evangelism in order to encourage others to imitate you. You are not bragging when you credit God with your knowledge and boldness.
- It is often helpful to share your personal testimony of how God saved you. The Apostle Paul shared his testimony three times in Scripture.

But still, there is a need for balance—for your sake and the sake of others. If you are one who talks about yourself too much, in thoughtless and self-centered ways, it is like having a piece of food stuck in your teeth. You can't see it until you look in the mirror, but by then, everyone else knows it's there. If you suspect that you might have this unsightly distraction in your dealings with others, ask a trusted friend to be your mirror—to tell you honestly if your self-focus is annoying.

In order to become more biblical in your communication skills, try asking yourself the following questions before you speak:

Have I listened long enough to know what to say?

He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him. (Proverbs 18:13) *But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak...* (James 1:19)

Does anything need to be said at all?

When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise. (Prov. 10:19)

Does what I am about to say reveal any sinful self focus?

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves. (Phil. 2:3)

Will my words be of spiritual profit to those who hear?

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. (Eph. 4:29)

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