

Are You All Ears?

Luke 18:35-43

Series: Friend for God Week 2. Listening

The Woodside Church

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Watch on Youtube: “It’s Not About the Nail” by Jason Headley

Listening is hard. Yet it’s hard to have a relationship without it. Listening is a way to show care, support and love. Listening mends torn relationships and makes good relationships better. Though it looks passive, listening requires active concentration. Though it looks easy, listening is a skill which takes practice.

During Lent we are learning 5 practical ways to BLESS people and the world the way Jesus does. Together they spell the acronym “B.L.E.S.S.” We are blessed by God to be a blessing to the whole world. The first practice is to Begin with Prayer. Each day we begin by asking, “Lord who do you want me to Bless today?” Keep that prayer on your mind as you interact with people where you live, work and play: co-workers, students in your school, neighbors, the barista at the coffee shop.

The second letter in BLESS – Listen. In this age of great divisions in our nation, there is an abundance of talking but precious little listening. In an article entitled, “Can Deep Listening Heal our Divisions?” Simon Greer writes,

Listening deeply means listening not just with your ears but with every sense you’ve got. It means listening to all that is said and unsaid, to the body language, the tone, the eye movement. This type of listening builds trust, opens doors. Study after study shows—in medicine, marriage, real estate sales, and more—that true listening generates better results. And yet most of us go through our entire education without learning how to do it.¹

Some may even pay a counselor just so they have one person in their life who really listens. The book of Proverbs tells us to “listen” 23 times. In Proverbs 31, the mother of King Lemuel had to work hard to get her son’s attention,

Listen, my son! Listen, son of my womb! Listen, my son, the answer to my prayers!
Proverbs 31:2

She probably wanted to prevent him from making foolish decisions.

The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice. Proverbs 12:15

Jesus practiced listening. Even though the Gospels frequently tell us He knows what people are thinking, Jesus still takes the time to ask questions and listen.

As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, “Jesus of

¹ Simon Greer, “Can Deep Listening Heal Our Divisions?” Greater Good (1-19-21)

Nazareth is passing by.” He called out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Luke 18:35-38

As Jesus passes through the city of Jericho on the way to the Passover Feast in Jerusalem, mobs of pilgrims join the parade. Picture the Ben Franklin Parkway in Philadelphia on the Fourth of July. It’s totally packed. In the middle of this mass movement, there is a blind beggar. When he learns the Lord is passing by he cries out, “Have mercy on me.” Despite the roar of the crowd, Jesus hears this single voice. The people traveling with Jesus tell the beggar to be quiet. But he cries out even louder.

Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” “Lord, I want to see,” he replied. Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God. Luke 18:39-43

Notice how Jesus asks the blind man: “What do you want me to do for you?” Sounds like a silly question. Jesus can tell he’s blind. So why does He ask the blind man what he wants? It’s Jesus’ practice to listen first, then heal. Listening heals relationships. Good listening is a skill. Thankfully, all of us can become better listeners with a few exercises and a little practice.

First, **Eliminate Distractions – Outside and In.** Proverbs says, “Listen, my sons, to a father’s instruction; pay attention and gain understanding.” (Proverbs 4:1) Begin by paying attention. It’s impossible to listen when we are distracted by driving, making dinner, and crying children. Those other tasks are important and deserve your attention. To really listen, though, you need to be free from these other urgent demands. And by all means, before you listen, put away all technology – television, computers, tablets, cell phones. If necessary, shut them off so they don’t distract you with a ding, beep or buzz. Those are the Outside Distractions.

By Inside Distractions I mean the thoughts which swirl around in your mind while someone else is talking. This is harder to turn off. You may be thinking about the next thing on your to do list, your hungry stomach, what show you’re going to binge watch. Another inner distraction is preparing your reply. There’s a saying “The opposite of listening is not speaking, it’s waiting to speak.” While the other person is talking, you are probably thinking about what to say next. When this happens, you shift your attention to yourself. This prevents you from hearing and understanding what the other person is saying. Another bad habit to avoid is assuming we know what the person needs before really listening. Proverbs says,

To answer before listening— that is folly and shame. Proverbs 18:13

After eliminating distractions, **Assume the Position to Listen.** Much is communicated through body language and non-verbal clues. Sit up, face each other, make eye contact, maybe even lean in a little. Slouching and looking elsewhere not only shows a lack of concern but also prevents you from picking up on messages a person may be sending you through their expressions. I met with someone this week who is a successful salesman and he told me, “It’s all in the face. When a person scratches their head, looks up or squints I pick up clues of what they

are thinking and if they are ready to make a decision.” If good listening helps close a deal it can also open a deadlock in a relationship.

Now that you are focused and in the position you are ready to listen. My coach, Dr. Bob Logan is an expert listener. In a recent article he writes,

Whether you are trying to help someone move forward, solve a problem, or initiate change, it’s almost like you’re a detective on a case and you’re listening for clues. If you miss something, it could turn out to be central to solving the case.

He offers these exercises to improve your listening.

1. Mm-hmm. Next time someone comes to you with a problem or an issue, listen by spending the first 10 minutes saying mm-hmm. Invite them to say more. Doing this is much, much harder than it sounds.

2. Wait to Relate. We are conditioned to relate and that’s a good thing—most of the time. Yet once we start “relating” we take the focus off the other person and put it on ourselves. For the second 10 minutes of the conversation, commit to making no statements—only asking questions. This means no stories from your own life, no examples of what others have done in this situation. While circumstances may be similar, they are never the same.

3. Stay curious. When you are ready to ask a question, think of yourself not as the expert having the solution but as someone interested in learning more. For a simple example, not: “Have you tried talking to so-and-so?” but “What have you already tried?” Just as questions help doctors properly diagnose a disease, questions allow us to learn and understand what’s really going on.² Proverbs reminds us,

The purposes of a person’s heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out. Proverbs 20:5

Giving advice, suggestions or directions tend to shut a person down. Staying curious and asking questions is like dropping a bucket down a long well to draw out what’s deep.

4. Silence is Golden. This is also hard. Silence makes us nervous. We feel the need to fill the space with conversation. A brief silence can feel like an eternity. Yet if we immediately jump in we may prevent a person from thinking through what they are trying to say. Giving someone the silent space to reflect and think may open the door for a deeper, more valuable truth to come out. When I train caregivers to listen I give them this clue: If a person is silent and looking down, let them be. Just wait. When they look you in the eye, that’s the sign they are ready to talk again. You may even ask, “What were you thinking about just then?”

5. Get Confirmation – Finally, to show you really heard what they said – try rephrasing it in your own words. “So you don’t like it when I squeeze the toothpaste tube in the middle?” It

² Bob Logan, *Three Listening Exercises*

https://christiancoachingtools.com/articles/3-listening-exercises/?mc_cid=f13beac489&mc_eid=536e41f891

can feel awkward, like you are a parrot repeating what's said. Yet getting confirmation does two things – it shows you really received what they said and even encourages them to tell you more.

So now you are focused, positioned and practicing good listening skills. Next comes the crucial question: What do you do with what you hear? It's one thing to listen as a coach or counselor to someone else's problem. It's quite different to listen when you may be the problem. Your first reaction is to defend what you think or feel, to dismiss what you hear, to deny what is said. You may be tempted to list the wrongs they did. Your thoughts and feelings, your perspective and opinion are important and deserve a listening ear. Hopefully the other person is listening to you as you are to them. According to Proverbs, you will receive a rich reward when you listen, learn and then lead a different life.

Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is the rebuke of a wise judge to a listening ear. Proverbs 25:12

Listen to advice and accept discipline, and at the end you will be counted among the wise. Proverbs 19:20

It's difficult to receive critique and criticism. Yet our greatest growth often comes when we listen to someone who tells us the honest truth, when we change our behavior and character based on the hard truth we hear from others – from our loved ones and even from our critics.

If we want to BLESS the world the way Jesus does, if we want to reach those who are far from God and help them find their way home, We B - Begin with Prayer. Next L - Listen to the people and the places where we live, work and play. Let's pray for that daily. "Who do you want me to bless today? Help me to listen." And then listen each day. And when we get together in our Growth groups, let's talk about what we're hearing and what people and places are telling us. Every day you will meet people who nobody cares about and nobody listens to.

There is a woman named Jan who works for Athletes in Action – a ministry that shares the Good News with student athletes. After attending a conference which stressed the importance of listening to seekers, Jan and others were relaxing in the hotel whirlpool. Two adolescent girls joined them in the tub. One of the teens, named Brittany, began passionately telling her friend about an upcoming Wiccan gathering she was planning to attend. Jan says,

Normally we would have tried to counter the girl's ideas, but we decided to listen instead. I said something simple like, "Wow, you really sound excited about this!" This was all the encouragement she needed to launch into a five-minute explanation of why she was so attracted to neo-pagan rituals. The bottom line was that she'd had a really traumatic time in high school and the Wiccans accepted her. She said, "I've gone through so much (junk) just trying to make it through high school that I'll probably be in therapy for the rest of my life!"

I tried to mirror back what she said with, "It's hard for you to even imagine a future where you'd be free from all of the pain you've gone through."

What came next completely floored me. With a film of tears starting to form in her eyes and with complete sincerity in her voice, she said, "Sometimes I wish I could be born all over again. I'd really like to start over from scratch." After a long pause, my friend asked if she would really like to be born again. "Yes, I really would," she said.³

They are talking. Are we listening?

Thank you for sharing the document! Here are six open-ended questions inspired by its content:

1. How do you think the concept of deep listening, as described in the document, could help address divisions in today's society?
2. What are some practical ways you could eliminate distractions—both external and internal—while trying to listen to someone?
3. How does Jesus' question to the blind man in Luke 18:41, "What do you want me to do for you?" illustrate the importance of active listening?
4. Why do you think silence can be a powerful tool in conversations, and how might you use it effectively to foster deeper dialogue?
5. Reflecting on the "mm-hmm" and "stay curious" exercises mentioned, how could they influence your approach to listening in your personal or professional relationships?
6. In what ways could becoming a better listener help you build stronger relationships in your community and live out the "B.L.E.S.S." practices?

Let me know if you'd like more questions or if you'd like to dive deeper into any of these!

³Steve Sjogren, Dave Ping, Doug Pollock, *Irresistible Evangelism* (Group Publishing), p. 109.