

Listening well

Good listening is a special gift to give to any human being. When we listen well we give the other person attention, care and significance, gifts that are often neglected today.

- When we listen well to others, and show we understand them, there will be less misunderstandings, conflicts and hurts between us.
- When we truly listen to others and put our thoughts and needs aside for a while, we will begin to know the other person in a whole new way.
- It is especially important that we look out for people whose voices are not being heard and valued – such as children, teenagers, people with disabilities, people who don't speak the language very well, vulnerable people, and those whose families taught them to be quiet (women from some cultures, and families, etc.)

Pray first

- We listen best to others when we have listened first to God.
- Pray for that each person who speaks to you will experience whatever they need to enrich their relationship with God; strengthen their family; heal their heart, mind and body; and inspire them.
- Pray that God will use you to bless and encourage others through your connections, conversations, care and prayer.
- Listen for the Holy Spirit to guide your listening, your thoughtful questions and your care for those who need to speak with you.

1. Give good eye contact and your full attention

This shows that you are **interested**.

(If you need to prompt your listener – 'It really helps me to talk when I can see your face.')

2. Respond to the speaker by summarizing what they said:

- So you're saying that...?
- And then ... happened?

This shows how well you are **listening**.

(If you need to prompt your listener – 'Please can you help me by summing up what you have heard me say so far? I just want to check that I am explaining things in a way that makes sense to you.')

3. Be curious

- Ask questions that invite more information and ideas – 'What happened after that?' 'Who was most helpful at that time? What did they do that was helpful?'

This shows that their story is **important** to you.

(If you need to prompt your listener – 'Is there anything else you'd like to know? I'm wondering what other questions you might have about what I've just said?')

4. Listen to their story with your heart as well as your mind

- Respond to their emotions and feel what they might have been feeling.
- 'That sounds really sad, frightening, troubling, painful, discouraging, etc.'
- 'What were you feeling right then?'
- Rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. Romans 12:15

- 'I'm sorry, that sounds so sad. It hurts me that you had to go through that. If I had been with you at that time, I would like to have comforted you by...'

This shows that you **care** about their feelings.

(If you need to prompt the listener – 'When this was happening to me, I felt really... Some of those feelings are coming back as I tell the story. Right now, I am feeling... and I think it would help me if you could do...')

5. Listen for the relational needs in their story:

- Comfort/consolation; acceptance/grace/forgiveness; affection/kindness; appreciation/gratitude; attention; respect; encouragement; security/safety; specialness; support/help. These are all biblical ways of nurturing healthy relationships – each time we do one of these things we strengthen the caring bond between us. Jesus met other people's relational needs, and He let other people meet his needs, too.
- Check out any possible relational needs. 'It sounds as if you need some extra support – how can I help you?' 'That sounds so sad. What's the best way for me to show I care?' 'I really appreciated it when you did...' 'I want you to know how glad I am that you are in my life.'

This shows that you **value the relationship** and want to **strengthen** it.

(If you need to prompt the listener – 'As I'm talking to you I realise that I probably need some (encouragement, help, etc.)' 'Would you be willing to help me by...?')

6. Explore their challenges

Ask questions such as:

- Where are you now with this challenge? On a scale of 0-10, where 10 is a solved problem, where do you think you are now, and what would it take to get to the next highest number?
- How have you tried to solve this problem in the past? What didn't work so well?
- When were you able to manage the problem best? What did you learn from that experience?
- How is this problem affecting your life, and other people's lives, right now?
- What are the obstacles that are preventing you from reaching your goals now? If these obstacles were like blocks on a road, what else could you do to get to your destination?
- What do you think God is doing in your life through this experience?
- If this problem was no longer in your life, how would your life be different?

7. Follow up

- Do anything you promised to do for the speaker.
- Check in with them by phone, text, etc.
- Ask them what else you could do to help.

This shows that you **remember** their needs when you are apart from them.

(If you need to prompt the listener – 'It would really help me if we could chat again in a few days. Would it help if I sent a text to remind you about...?' 'Shall we set a reminder on our phones to connect in a couple of days?')

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