

***Listening:
There's more to learn***

**with Chris Gerardis
Ministry Conference 2012**

Introduction

The ability to speak and the ability to listen are two of the most significant gifts that God has given to human beings. **James 1:19** "Everyone should be: quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry!"

Scenario:

Ruby is a young mother from the church whose husband has lost his job. He is depressed. The family has been coming to church for about 5 years after the youngest child was baptised but they are not really involved with much. The children who are 8 and 6 are acting out at school and getting bad reports. This conversation takes place at the local park.

C1 Hi Ruby I've just heard that your husband has lost his job. That must be awful. I've been praying it won't happen to my husband because we couldn't pay the mortgage. So far God's been good to us.

R1 Well we must have been really bad then because everything is going wrong.

C2 What you need to do is get a part time job and let Tim look after the children.

R2 He is too depressed. He just sits around all day watching television. He doesn't help with anything. The kids are getting bad reports at school and I can't even talk about it with him

C3 That's really bad. I'm glad my husband is not like that. I'd tell him where to go.

R3 I still love him but I don't know how to handle him.

C4 Have you thought about talking to the minister?

R4 I don't know what he could do to help. Besides I don't think much of God at the moment.

C5 You mustn't say that. God doesn't like it when we are angry at him.

R5 Well I can't help it, that's how I feel at the moment. My whole life is about being there for my family. I've been a good wife and mother and now it's just all falling apart.

C6 Oh it's not that bad. We all go through rough patches. Last year I felt like you feel but it all worked out in the end. You'll see. Why don't you come out for a girl's night out with us on Saturday night? You'll feel heaps better.

R6 Thanks but I can't leave the kids with Tim and we can't afford a baby sitter at the moment. I've got to go and do the shopping now before I pick the kids up and take them to their music lessons.

What was unhelpful?	What effect did it have on the conversation?

How does a person you are talking to know that you are listening to them?

Effective Listening is learnt. It is appropriate to use when you want to encourage talkers to put their total focus and attention on themselves. This is important so that they can process what is happening in their lives and how they feel about that.

To listen effectively we need to...

1. Consider verbal and non-verbal communication methods.

The voice is a key component of communication. It includes tone, pitch, volume and rate of speech.

2. Understand and practice effective listening skills

Our advice, reactions, encouragements, reassurances, and well-intentioned comments can actually prevent people from feeling understood.

3. Learn to communicate in clear, respectful and non judgmental ways

Being non-judgmental when listening shows the person we are listening to that we want to understand what has been happening to them. No one enjoys being judged. By learning to be adaptable, flexible and non-criticizing, people feel more comfortable sharing of themselves.

Communication Equation

What they hear e.g. tone of voice etc = 40% of the message

What they see = 50%

Words = 10%

There shouldn't be a distinction between the meanings we 'give' in words and the meanings we 'give -off' in Non Verbal signals. In other words our words need to match our non-verbal communication

If you were a good listener what would you do differently?

"Talking is Sharing; Listening is Caring"

Active listening:

Allows a person to process and express what's happening for them. It allows them to feel their emotions and explore new discoveries about themselves.

First, reduce or eliminate distractions as much as possible. Or, move to a location where distractions are minimized.

Next, have good eye contact. Good eye contact sends a strong signal of engagement.

Third, observe the other person's body language. People speak with their bodies and it is important to listen with all the senses. Your own body language is also important. Be aware of the signals you are sending out.

Finally, be ready to receive communication. Busy schedules, personal pressures, how you feel physically and/or emotionally and a host of other factors can act as distracters to being engaged in a conversation. If the distracters are significantly harmful to the conversation, than consider postponing until later.

When you think you understand the other person accurately, these phrases might be useful:

- It seems to you that
- You feel
- From where you stand
- You believe
- You mean
- In other words

When you are LESS SURE about what the other person is expressing, these more tentative phrases might be a useful way to start:

- Let me see if I understand what you're saying
- I get the impression that you
- Perhaps you're
- You seem to be feeling.

Or ... to sum up a conversation:

- Wow, let me see, you
- Your main concern seems to be
- Let's see if I've understood correctly

Communication is a two way process.

The filter acts as a barrier and will alter the message sent or received.

The way we communicate is a learned style.

Barriers to effective communication.

Sometimes we can ask too many questions. We think we are showing interest, but the effect on the other person is that they feel interrogated.

The question you need to ask yourself is “What do you need to do to hold your reaction, in order to stay listening to the person you are caring for?”

To listen to someone’s story doesn’t mean you agree with them.

- We can talk too much and ask no questions and the person feels ignored!
- We can ask too many questions and the person feels interrogated!
- We can ask questions in the wrong way and the person feels threatened.
- We can respond with silence and the person can feel insecure?
- We can respond with inappropriate comments e.g. I know just how you feel; How could you have done that? What you need to do is.....!
- We can respond with being distracted – not giving our attention, looking around the room, trying to figure out what we say in response or ask next!

The Art of Listening

“He (or she) who answers before listening-that is folly and his (or her) shame.” Proverbs 18:13

“If we were supposed to talk more than listen, we would have been given two mouths and one ear.” Mark Twain

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to project oneself into the world of another person in order to better understand that person's emotions or feelings.

Guidelines for Empathic Listening

- Be attentive to the content and the emotions of what the speaker is sharing.
- Don't be distracted by the surroundings or by trying to figure out what you are going to say next.
- Create a positive atmosphere through nonverbal behavior and this will foster a safe sharing environment.
- Act like a mirror -- reflect back what you think the speaker is saying and feeling. Don't discount the speaker's feelings by using stock phrases like "It's not that bad," or "You'll feel better tomorrow."
- The aim of empathic listening is to stay with the feelings of a person. The temptation is to jump out of that and get hooked into the details of the story.

How to Listen with Empathy:

- Open ended questions. An open ended question invites the speaker to say more. A closed question requires only a one-word answer. Yes or no.
- Sensitivity to emotions being expressed is about creating a place where the other person can explore what is going on for them.
- Then you would reflect back the substance and the feelings being expressed.
- This allows the other person to give you more information if you are wrong
- You are helping a person reflect on some deeper issues and feelings.

Empathy Blockers

- Thinking we have all the answers
- Arguing logically e.g. someone shares that they feel lonely and your response is “There’s no need to feel lonely. God is with you, you are now a member of the church and they are your new family.”
- Judging is where we condemn a person based on our perceptions of how things should be. People who judge often generalise.
- Diagnosing is thinking that you know what is going on for a person without taking the time to listen to them
- Reassuring: 'You'll be all right.' 'It will be OK, you'll see.'
- Topping can appear to be helpful. E.g. “I worked for a boss that was horrible as well so I know exactly what you are going through. My boss used to make hurtful comments because I was a Christian.”

A Hurting Heart Has No Ears.

C1 Hi Ruby I've Just heard that your husband has lost his job. Is it ok if I sit and chat with you for a while? I'm concerned how you are going!

R1 I'm just devastated and don't know how we are going to manage.

C2 it sounds like you are really worried and at a loss to know what to do

R2 Yes with Tim depressed and all! He just sits around and watches TV all day.

The kids are getting bad reports and I can't even talk with him about it.

C3 So it's affecting the whole family and you feel that you can't talk to Tim about it!

R3 Yes! That's exactly right! It just feels hopeless!

C4 I can hear the hopelessness in your voice

R4 Yep (starts to cry)

C5 It sounds like it's overwhelming and scary! (Just waits quietly)

R5 I haven't been able to tell anyone about it - not even God.

C6 so you feel like even God would not listen?

R6 Yes but also I'm pretty angry with God. I've been a good wife and mother. Lots of other women wouldn't care for their families, yet I have, and look where it's got me. Just in a big mess!

C7 You're angry with God because you have done everything by the book, looking after your family! You had some expectations that God would protect you and look after you! Do you feel God let you down?

R7 Yes I did. Do you think he hates me?

C8 At the moment you believe that God let you down and he hates you. I imagine that must be a horrible and confusing place to be in!

R8 It is (cries some more)

C8 (waits till the tears stop) you know one of the stories that comes to my mind is Job. It tells us of the struggle Job had with God. I admire Job for his honesty and I admire your honesty in the mist of your difficulties.

R9 Really! I thought God would be angry with me for not coping and I feel ashamed of my feelings.

C9 God loves you just as you are Ruby. He really does understand how hard life is for you at the moment. He wants to reach out to you with His love – He wants to be there for you and walk the journey with you. Can I encourage you to talk to him about your feelings and your confusion?

Could I pray for you now? Would you feel comfortable with that?

R10 Yes please that would be good.

C10 Dear Jesus, thank you that you love Ruby and Tim and the girls very much. Thank you that you understand Ruby's anger towards you. Jesus Ruby is feeling overwhelmed and fearful of the future. Help her to know your peace. Please be with Tim and help him to seek help for his depression. Please help the children to settle. We ask that you will strengthen Ruby. I pray Jesus that she may know your presence and seek refuge in your promises.

Amen.

R11 Thanks for listening!

