

Creekside LifeGroup Study

Series: Before We Lose Our Minds

Topic: The Art of Listening

2020/09/27

LEADER NOTES

Welcome back to our series at Creekside called, Before We Lose Our Minds. The year 2020 has been a crazy one for our world. We have been challenged with a pandemic as well as political and racial division. In the middle of all the disturbing world news around us it can be hard to listen to each other. We form opinions that can close us off to receiving and loving others. When we lose our minds we lose each other. Communication is key. We have to be willing to listen and seek to understand ideas that we disagree with. The goal of this week's session is that we would learn how to slow down and listen to one another. Jesus did this. He asked questions. He sought to understand the person beneath the opinion. Let's discover how we can grow in the art of listening.

ICEBREAKER: What did you say??? 😊

In our day when everyone is wearing a mask, it can be challenging to clearly hear what others are saying. Sometimes the miscommunication can be downright comical! Share with the group a recent time when you've experienced a funny miscommunication whether from talking through a mask or typing a message online that turned out differently than you intended.

LEADER NOTE: This summer I went into a restaurant and inquired with the hostess at the front about how long it would be if I ordered takeout. We were both speaking through masks in the noisy restaurant environment. She asked my name and next thing I knew she took off back the kitchen! She thought I had asked her to pick up my takeout order! Do you have a funny miscommunication story to share with the group? Lead out with this story or share your own, then ask your group members to share any stories they have.

STUDY:

Listening is one of the easiest things you'll ever do, in one sense, but it is also one of the hardest. It is easy for many of us to hear the words another is saying. It can be much more difficult to accept and love the person behind those words, particularly when we disagree.

READ James 1:19 "Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to get angry." NLT

Q – In this passage, James begins to teach us the art of listening. He says we should be "quick to listen". What do you think it means to be "quick" to listen?

LEADER NOTE:

Listening is both a skill we can grow in and an art we can practice. To be "quick" to listen means we prioritize listening to others, we make intentional effort and we show our love for others by listening well. In the rest of our study, we will look at six habits of a good listener.

6 Habits of a Good Listener *

Let's explore six habits of a good listener. As we look at these habits, allow God to speak to your heart about which of these you should focus on to grow in the art of listening.

1. Good listening requires PATIENCE

In his book, Life Together, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote that good listening requires patience. We must avoid "a kind of listening with half an ear that presumes already to know what the other person has to say." This, he says, "is an impatient, inattentive listening that ... is only waiting for a chance to speak."

Q – Do you think listening with half an ear has become more common in our culture in recent years? Why or why not?

LEADER NOTE: In our day of social media and news feed overload it can be a struggle to listen patiently. Encourage your group members to think of practical examples of when they may listen with only half an ear. You can give them examples of husband and wife communication, parent to child, dialogue on social media.

Q – How might you begin to listen more patiently, particularly to those with whom you disagree?

LEADER NOTE: Listening patiently means giving our full attention to the speaker. If we are in face to face conversation, this includes eye contact, watching non-verbal cues and listening for the emotion behind the message. A practical skill is to rephrase or repeat back what we think we are hearing from the speaker – for example, “You’re telling me you want me to let you know when I’m going to be home late from work. Is that right?”

2. Good listening is an act of **LOVE**

Half eared listening, according to Bonhoeffer, “despises the brother and is only waiting for a chance to speak and thus get rid of the other person.” Good listening is an act of love. “Just as love to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love to the brethren is learning to listen to them.”

Q – “In what ways is half eared listening unloving?”

LEADER NOTE: Half eared listening is unloving because it prioritizes my opinion and myself over others. It overlooks the fact that to reject their chance to speak it to reject them. We don’t have to agree with every opinion, but we can show love by giving them a full opportunity to make themselves known.

READ Philippians 2:3-4

Q – What does Jesus’ example teach us about how to love others by listening to them?

LEADER NOTE: Have someone in your group look up and read Philippians 2:3-4 out loud to the group. Note the practical ways we are to have the same attitude as Jesus and show love in the way we listen. We are to be humble by thinking of others as better than ourselves. Rather than being self-centred, we are to genuinely care for others in the way we listen. Rather than looking out for our own interests, we are to take an interest in others by getting to know them. Why do they believe what they do? What led them to the place where they are today? Seeking these answers helps us to love the person behind the words.

3. Good listening asks perceptive **QUESTIONS**.

One of the lost arts of our day is asking questions that draw out the best in others. A well-asked question communicates genuine care about both the perspective and the person.

READ Proverbs 18:2, 13

“Fools have no interest in understanding; they only want to air their own opinions.” “Spouting off before listening to the facts is both shameful and foolish.”

Q – Where do you see this kind of foolish dialogue happening these days? How might asking perceptive questions help?

LEADER NOTE: There is no doubt that social media can be a place where “foolish dialogue” can happen. Having a degree of separation from others because we are not face to face or perhaps do not know them well allows for us to type things we would never say in person. Sadly, this is not confined to social media. We see foolish dialogue happening in groups and events covered on the news. (think of the angry shouting across lines in public protests). We experience it behind the closed doors of our homes. A well timed question can bring perspective and help restore our minds. Jesus asked these kinds of questions – “Who do you say I am?” for example, turns the conversation to who Jesus is and why He is relevant. “Do you believe?” compels a faith response. “Do you want to get well?” drills down to motives and heart direction.

READ Proverbs 20:5

“Though good advice lies deep within the heart, a person with understanding will draw it out.”

Q – have you had a conversation lately where someone asked you perceptive questions that drew you out? Share your experience with the group.

LEADER NOTE: Asking perceptive questions is a skill we can grow in. The posture we have in asking is essential. Three helpful postures are warmth, genuineness and empathy. When you ask questions, be warm (kind, supportive, gentle) be genuine (sincere) and show empathy (relating to the person, who they are, why they feel as they do).

4. Good listening is **MINISTRY**

Janet Dunn, in her article, “How to Become a Good Listener” says, “The best ministry you might do today is to listen to someone’s pain all the way to the bottom.”

Dr. Larry Crabb, in his book, *Encouragement: The Unexpected Power of Building Others Up*, says – “People committed to the ministry of encouragement must listen. Rather than thinking through their response while the other speaks, they will be listening. Active listening requires concentrated effort. It notices facial grimaces, slumped shoulders, quiet sighs, lifeless tones of voice and moist eyes.”

Q - What does it look like to “listen to someone’s pain all the way to the bottom?”

LEADER NOTE: What does it look like to “listen to someone’s pain all the way to the bottom”? Perhaps someone in your group has a story of doing this in someone’s life, or of having someone do this for them. Encourage your group members to share practical examples of what it is like to practice the ministry of listening

5. Good listening prepares us to **SPEAK** well.

Bonhoeffer - “We should listen with the ears of God so that we may speak the Word of God.”

READ Colossians 2:16-17

Q – What does Paul tell us here about how to speak well?

LEADER NOTE: In Colossians 2:16-17, Paul says we should “let the message of Christ fill our lives”. Don’t pass quickly over this one. It is the foundation for speaking well. Ask your group members – “what does it look like to do this?” “How do we know if we are living from a Jesus focused or worldly focused message? It will show in the words we speak.

6. Good listening reflects our **RELATIONSHIP** with God.

Bonhoeffer warns:

He who can no longer listen to his brother will soon be no longer listening to God either; he will be doing nothing but prattle in the presence of God too. This is the beginning of the death of the spiritual life. . . . Anyone who thinks that his time is too valuable to spend keeping quiet will eventually have no time for God and his brother, but only for himself and for his own follies.

READ Psalm 131:1-2

“Lord, my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty. I do not concern myself with matters too great or too awesome for me to grasp. Instead, I have calmed and quieted myself, like a weaned child who no longer cries for its mother’s milk. Yes, like a weaned child is my soul within me.”

Q – How is your relationship with God these days? Is it filled with noise and endless talking? Is there space for quiet?

LEADER NOTE: Here is a another opportunity to give practical application to the art of listening. This kind of listening comes from a heart that has quieted itself before God. What does it look like to “be still and know that I am God?” (Psalm 46:10). What might I change in my daily routine, what habit might I take on, to allow myself to be quiet in God’s presence?

Q – What has been a key takeaway for you from today’s session on the art of listening?

- * Source: Six Lessons in Good Listening: David Mathis

PRAYER

Creekside supports Hannah Miller, director of the **Power2Change Farsi Online Mentor** program. Please pray with us for the following:

- For God's wisdom and guidance in leading the ministry.
- For the Farsi speaking mentees and mentors that the Holy Spirit will give them wisdom and guidance as they seek to know Jesus and help people to know Jesus.
- For more prayer and financial partners.
- For God's protection for mentors and mentees when they reach out to Persians.
- Pray for Mana that her experiences this summer will shape her for a godly future in the coming years.

