

Life-on-Life: The Art of Personal Ministry (201)

Class Five – February 7, 2021

Step Three: Gathering Data¹

He who answers before listening, that is his folly and shame. Proverbs 18:13

- I. The Challenge – Gather Data to Discover the Problem**
 - a. Pitfall #1 - Friend coming for help thinks they know the problem
 - b. Pitfall #2 - Friend giving the help rushes the issue – assume they know the problem without asking probing questions (Prov. 18:13, Jeremiah 6:14)
 - c. Typically two types of issues, but it takes time to fully evaluate the specifics:
 1. Personal sin
 2. Suffering (from other people’s sin or from circumstances outside of their control)
- II. Different Types of people (1 Thess. 5:14) – Be patient with everyone**
 - a. Admonish the unruly
 - b. Encourage the fainthearted
 - c. Help the weak
- III. Most data gathering comes about during “story-telling.”**
 - a. Three goals should drive your interactions during story-telling.
 1. Getting to know them and building the relationship
 2. Gathering data
 3. Identifying/isolating the heart issues you will be working on (Prov. 20:5)
- IV. What Kind of Data to Gather?²**

P – Physical - sleep patterns; medications; diet; activity level; illness

R -- Resources and Relationships - job situation; finances; school; intellectual; social; spiritual

E – Emotions (feelings) - extremes; “feelings oriented”

A – Actions - behavior; sins of commission and omission

C -- Conceptual (thinking) - goals; values; desires; motives

H – Historical - good and bad in past context; present context; failures; school/job problems

¹ Portions of notes adapted from Dr. John D. Street’s notes from Data Gathering - BCDA SoCAL training - <https://bcdasocal.org/>

² PREACH acronym developed by Wayne Mack

- V. Data gathering will come about through open- and close-ended questions**
- Start with open-ended questions
 - With talkative person, be prepared to use close-ended question
 - Close-ended (“Yes/No” type) help clarify facts and direct conversation
Ex. – Do you want to have children?
 - Open-ended have explanations attached which reveals the heart, attitude, beliefs, motivations
Ex. – Tell me your thoughts about having children?
 - Test your hypotheses with more questions
 - See Appendix for more details about questioning
- VI. Recognize Thoughts/Attitudes/Beliefs Challenge Discovery of Facts**
- Pure facts – car is red, church attendance of 2 times in the last six weeks, age of children, number of times a couple went on a date in the last 2 months, number of hours worked last week
 - Apparent facts mixed with thoughts/attitudes/beliefs – “Fred constantly works 12-14 hours a day”; “Karrie hasn’t smiled in 3 months”; “He hasn’t asked me on a date in 4 months”
 - Generalities that appear to contain facts, but are driven by thoughts/attitudes/beliefs - “Karrie is constantly giving me the silent treatment, she hasn’t spoken to me in a week”; “He always wants to play golf on Saturdays”; “She hasn’t said anything nice about me since Thanksgiving”
 - Thoughts/Attitudes/Beliefs that are sinful and derail discovery of the truth– “I don’t have an anger problem [spoken with clenched jaw]”; “I am a humble person [spoken after a string of prideful statements]”; “She only wants to control me and she won’t let me be my own person [spoken after a fairly gentle wife has approached her husband about a legitimate sin area in his life]
- VII. Be quick to listen (James 1:19-20)**
- One common problem is losing the person in the conversation. Stay with them by listening carefully to their answers and not getting ahead of them.
 - What do they say the problem is? Their appraisal of the problem is usually slanted by the biases of their heart. It gives insight into their perspective, thought processes, maturity and discernment, which in turn help you know how to counsel them.
 - Look for this specifically during discussion time (case study of Fred Smith).
 - For example, the most common complaint John has heard in 35 years is some form of “*My husband rarely involves himself with me in conversation or emotion. He doesn’t pursue me, listen to me or share himself. He watches TV, is on the computer or pursues hobbies, and he does not really invest himself in us having a good marriage.*”
Any man who aspires to be a godly, Christ-centered husband really *should* learn to die to himself and live in an understanding way.
(See Romans 6 / Eph. 4:22-24 / Eph. 5:25, ff./1 Peter 3:7)

That is the way she could experience love on earth. No question about it. But if the woman is speaking with you and not her husband, is his failure to love well her real problem? That may be her real circumstance, but from a biblical counseling standpoint, it is not the real problem.

- e. **What someone says is the problem gets you into their life, but never defines the problem biblically.**
- f. How are they responding to the problem?
- g. What underlying factors or beliefs contribute to the problem?

- h. Six **Impediments** to Good Listening
 - 1. Rehearsing
 - 2. Mind Reading
 - 3. Over-Identifying
 - 4. Dreaming
 - 5. Derailing
 - 6. Placating

- i. Six **Components** of Good Listening
 - 1. Waiting
 - 2. Attending
 - 3. Clarifying
 - 4. Reflecting
 - 5. Summarizing
 - 6. Agreeing

VIII. Intake Form (See attached example for Fred Smith – Discussion Exercise)

This is the written instrument Biblical Counseling office uses to get information on the person/s, the problem/s and where they are in understanding their problem/s.

IX. Specific Areas To Probe

- a. Probe “extensively” (general, more overview) *These are areas you ought to get a sense of pretty early on.*
 - 1. Spiritual life
 - 2. Family Life
 - 3. Work / School
 - 4. Physical Well-Being
 - 5. Financial status
 - 6. Social connectedness
 - 7. Current concerns

- b. Probe “intensively” (specific areas problems are likely to lodge). While you process their data sheet and have initial contact, it is not uncommon for your mentee/counselee to have problems in areas common to their age or stage in life. This is not always the case, but pay attention for themes such as:

1. **With children**
 - Relationships with parents, siblings, peers, teachers
 - Relationship between parents
 - Occupation of parents
 - School issues
 - Physical strengths and weaknesses
 - Interests and activities
2. **With youth and singles** - Previous list *PLUS*
 - Sexuality and Dating issues
 - Communication breakdown with key people in their life
 - Meaning of life and Identity issues (Keyed around self-concept as it relates to work or purpose and relationships or connectedness)
 - School/work success and direction and finances
 - "Addictions"
3. **With older singles**
 - Identity (who am I in a "married" world)
 - Spiritual development holes
 - Unresolved past relationship issues
 - Resentment about marital status
 - Bad habits, immorality or unresolved guilt (e.g., over abortion)
 - Disorganization and lack of responsible follow through
4. **With married persons**
 - Key relationships (husband-wife, children, extended family)
 - Work and/or financial issues
 - Health concerns
 - Immorality and/or addictions
5. **With men**
 - Anger and depression issues
 - Disconnected relationships
 - Sexual issues
6. **With women**
 - Husband issues
 - Loneliness
 - Depression
 - Fear issues (especially about money, children or the future)
 - Anger and bitterness
 - Sexual or relational temptations
 - "Abuse recovery" issues
7. **With retired or older persons**
 - Health, physical limits and fear of death
 - Grown children and grandchildren
 - Loneliness and grief that may metastasize into self-pity
 - Depression and lack of purpose
 - Finances

8. With disabled persons

Managing life

Finances

Resentment & Self-Pity

Loneliness, Uselessness and Depression

Manipulation of others

II. Group Discussion

A. Share memory verse, Hebrews 11:13.

B. Read the Intake Form for Fred Smith and formulate some questions

C. After 15 minutes of discussion – read the Supplemental Conversation with Fred Smith

III. See Homework Below (60 minutes)

A. Article (next three pages = 15 minutes)

B. Listening Assessment (next page = 15 minutes)

C. Listening action points (one page = 15 minutes)

D. Memory verse (3 minutes/day for five days = 15 minutes)

Appendix - Example Questions for a Conflict Between Two People³)

1. What was the problem/conflict/fight about and when did it happen? What were the basic facts of the situation—who, where and when? What were you fighting about? You need to get this straight before you can do anything else. Take your time here.
2. What were each of you coveting, desiring, or hoping for? James 4:1: “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from the *desires (or passions)* that battle within you?” With every fight, there is something you want. When you are angry or frustrated, you spend so much time focused on the other person that you might forget (or even ignore) the war going on in your own heart. What desires or cravings or hopes rule your heart?
3. What fears, lies, rationalizations, or self-justifications are you wrestling with? Which of these have a grip on your heart? Fears, lies, rationalizations, or self-justifications will shape and define what you do and say.
4. At what point did you get disappointed, annoyed, frustrated, or angry with your spouse or friend? In the midst of the mess created by conflict, you need to consider *your* reaction to your spouse or friend.
5. Did you *really* understand the other person’s perspective? Solomon warns that the fool is not interested in understanding someone else, but only in stating his or her own opinions (Proverbs 18:2). The fool is impulsive; he answers before he hears (Proverbs 18:13). To sort through a fight, you must understand the other person. If you don’t take the time to understand him or her, you can be misled by your assumptions.
6. What are your typical rules of engagement in a fight? If you don’t have any, what should they be? Slamming doors, screaming, cursing at your spouse or friend, throwing things, walking away, or ignoring others are not acceptable options. A Christian should be defined by grace, kindness, and love, even in the heat of “battle” (1 Corinthians 13:4-6; Galatians 5:22-23; Colossians 4:6).
7. Explore the patterns that characterize the conflicts. Do you scream? Do you pout? Do you make accusations? Do you use exaggerated language—“you *never* come on time” or “you *always* forget”?
8. What sins do you need to own up to and confess to God and your spouse or friend? Godly sorrow leads to repentance, and *leaves no regret*, but worldly sorrow brings death (2 Corinthians 7:9-11). Are you truly and genuinely grieved over your sin in your conflicts? Or have you grown *comfortable* with your conflicts and with your sin? After you reconcile with God, go back to the other person and confess your sin to him or her.
9. When you fight, what helps you to reconcile with each other? Every couple learns in the midst of fighting what works for them. I know one couple, who after a fight in the morning, start texting each other as soon as they get to work, so that they can work through the different parts of the conflict. By the time they get home in the evening, they’ve worked through a lot. They desire to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9). They are quick to reconcile and keep short accounts. In conflict, what helps you to deal with sin and build greater understanding? Do you initiate reconciliation in the midst of the conflict? If not, why not? Are you willing to humbly compromise, or are you stubborn as a bull with your opinions?
10. Do you typically apologize to each other and ask for forgiveness? Reconciliation is not complete until you grant forgiveness to each other. Withholding forgiveness, holding onto grudges, or ignoring the problem is not an option for Christians.

³ Extracted from “Ten Questions to Ask after a Nasty Fight” by Deepak Reju; www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org

Reading Assignment (15 minutes)

Please read **with a marker** this article on listening. It repeats a few principles we have laid out and elaborates on a few more.

Taken From The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity

"Listening" by R. Paul Stevens © 2004 IExalt Publishing (WordSearch)

Our basic anatomy of two ears and one mouth is highly suggestive. We probably should do twice as much listening as speaking. If speaking is a spiritual discipline, refraining from speech to listen to the words of others or to God's word is equally crucial to living Christianly. The control factor, however, is more subtle and more demanding in the case of listening. Marshall McLuhan makes the rather obvious suggestion that nature has not equipped us with ear-lids. So we compensate for what he calls "nature's oversight" by selective listening (McLuhan and Fiore, p. 111). Rather than consider this internal control as an oversight, we could regard it as a divinely planned opportunity for spiritual growth. So Jesus says, "*Consider carefully how you listen*" (Luke 8:18), not only because all will be revealed eventually (Luke 8:17), but because if you listen well, you will gain even more to hear. So listening is a key to the inner treasures of the soul.

Listening and Self-Discipline

James says, "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak" (James 1:19). The context refers to both listening to others and listening to the Word of God (James 1:21), two facets of listening that are inextricably related. Instead of finishing another's sentence, we should listen to the soul expressed in the words. She who holds her tongue in check is in control of her whole person (James 3:2-4). Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his classic *Life Together* says, "Thus it must be a decisive rule of every Christian fellowship that each individual is prohibited from saying much that occurs to him" (p. 92). So both speaking and listening involve discernment. Speaking metaphorically, Job says, "Does not the ear test words as the tongue tastes food?" (Job 12:11), a point with which the young man Elihu fully concurs (Job 34:3-4) as he invites Job along with the three unfriendly "comforters" to "learn together what is good."

So the self-discipline involved in the ministry of listening is not just *how* we listen but *to what*. While we are inundated by a thousand advertisements and siren appeals to the flesh every day, we should heed Solomon's advice of "turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding" (Proverbs 2:2; compare Proverbs 23:12), whether it is a life-giving rebuke (Proverbs 15:31), the law (Proverbs 28:9) or the cry of the poor (Proverbs 21:13). Listening not only *is* selective; it *should be*. We must systematically reduce certain influences in order to attend to those that make us truly wise.

Listening as a Relational Gift

The apostle Paul expounded the metaphor of the body suggesting that some people are like the ears (1 Cor. 12:17). He was, however, promoting interdependence rather than delegation of listening ministry to certain specially endowed members. James exhorts all believers to be "quick to listen" (James 1:19), which he links in the same verse to "slow to become angry."

We are less likely to feel thwarted and, therefore, get angry if we know what is going on inside another person. Further, if we listen deeply to the soul of another, we will more likely be confronted with our own shortcomings (James 1:21), more willing to listen to ourselves and less likely either to provoke to anger or to be so provoked. By listening, we renounce control over the one who is speaking and communicate worth.

Listening is a relational compliment. This is true not only for fellow human beings but of God himself. By opening our hearts to hear God's word, we worship God and pay the greatest compliment possible. The reverse is also gloriously true: that God speaks "with his ears." By patiently attending to our cry (Ps. 17:6; 31:2; 34:15; Isaiah 59:1), God communicates his love as eloquently as in his articulated speech. His silence is both revelatory and evocative. In the same way, our willingness to cultivate the discipline of solitude is a profound statement of the esteem with which we hold God and our availability to his speech. Richard Foster says, "One reason we can hardly bear to remain silent is that it makes us feel so helpless. We are so accustomed to relying upon words to manage and control others. . . . One of the fruits of silence is the freedom to let our justification rest entirely with God. We don't need to straighten others out" (p. 88).

How to Listen

It is widely recognized that the starting point in all relationships is listening. The same is manifestly true for friendships and in deepening a marriage relationship. By listening we convey our desire to understand, to take seriously the viewpoint of another. When we listen, we refrain from giving advice, preaching or even expressing an opinion until we have first taken the person seriously and gained trust (Collins, p. 290). Adapting the advice given by the psychiatrist Armand Nicholi, we can summarize the following dimensions of listening: (1) having enough awareness of one's own conflicts to avoid reacting in a way that interferes with the person's free expression of thoughts and feelings; (2) avoiding subtle verbal or nonverbal expressions of negative judgment; (3) waiting through periods of silence or tears until the person summons up the courage to say more; (4) hearing not only what the person says but what he or she is trying to say; (5) using both ears and eyes to detect messages that come from tone of voice, posture and other nonverbal cues; (6) avoiding looking away while a person is speaking; (7) limiting the number of mental excursions into one's own fantasies while another is speaking; (8) practicing the full acceptance of the person no matter what is said (Collins, pp. 26-27).

The last point deserves more comment. To accomplish acceptance through listening without condoning or condemning is spiritually demanding. To do this without condemnation, one must have experienced deep forgiveness in one's own life, since we condemn or condone what is still unresolved in our own past. And to show acceptance of a fellow sinner without excusing sin cannot be done without compassion, that quality that links us so closely with the heart of God. So listening, like speaking, reveals the person, casts us on God for his grace and invites us to move forward in the life of discipleship.

Listening as a Spiritual Discipline

Just as speech reveals the person, so the quality of listening reveals the soul within. Stopped-up ears come from hearts “as hard as flint” (Zech. 7:11-12). Open ears reveal a tender and responsive soul. This is true whether one listens to God or to another person. By learning to attend to the thoughts, feelings and values of others, we are positioning ourselves to attend to God. Of course, the reverse is equally true. Bonhoeffer puts it negatively: “But 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” (p. 98).

That prattle leads to the famine prophesied by Amos, not of food or water but “of hearing the words of the LORD” (Amos 8:10-12). Good speakers are good listeners. They have the “instructed tongue” of those who have learned from God in their own lives and so are able to sustain the weary with their words (Isaiah 50:4).

God opens the mouth of his servant by wakening the ears of that servant, just as Jesus opened the mouth of the mute person by opening his ears (Mark 7:33), a sign that the day of salvation had truly arrived (Isa. 35:5-6).

Those unready to obey what they hear from God are called “dull of hearing” (Matthew 13:15 KJV), implying that they have their internal ear-lids down (Mark 8:18; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29). Sometimes this willful stoppage is accomplished by externally plugging the ears (Acts 7:57), but more commonly it is an internal predisposition *not* to hear because they are unwilling to obey, something that the apostles of Jesus called “uncircumcised in heart and ears” (Acts 7:51 NRSV). The ear as an organ of reception has not yet heard the full joy and beauty of heavenly sound (1 Cor. 2:9). Heaven will be the ultimate listening experience, as the book of Revelation shows (Rev. 4-5), and we live with true heavenly mindedness by practicing the disciplines of faithful (that is, faith-full) listening to Scripture, to the hearts of others and to the voice of God speaking to us in our life experiences.

References and Resources

- D. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. J. W. Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row, 1954);
G. R. Collins, *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide* (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1980);
R. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978);
M. McLuhan and Q. Fiore, *The Medium Is the Message* (New York: Bantam, 1967);
J. Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, 4 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1963);
H. W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, trans. M. Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964).

—R. Paul Stevens

Homework: Assessing My Listening

Listening is a skill tied to how well we listen to those close to us in our family. Ask someone who knows you well to fill it out. Ask them to rate honestly from 1-5.

- 1** = No. Not really. Almost Never.
- 2** = Occasionally does this but not normally.
- 3** = Not strong one way or the other.
- 4** = Usually, but occasionally needs some help with this.
- 5** = True. Almost Always.

- 1. He/she listens well to you/kids when you/they say something. _____
- 2. He/she does not interrupt while you/others are speaking. _____
- 3. He/she asks questions for clarification and follow-up. _____
- 4. He/she is not quick to share their opinion or reflect poor understanding. _____
- 5. He/she not only hears your words but grasps your meaning. _____
- 6. He/she maintains good eye contact and interested body language as you speak. _____
- 7. He/she seems content when you are talking, not preoccupied or looking at their watch or looking to rush off to whatever else they need or want to do. _____
- 8. He/she is not overly quick to judge the meaning of another. _____
- 9. He/she is able to accurately summarize for others new to the conversation what you/others have said. _____
- 10. He/she refers to what those in the group have said when they speak. _____
- 11. He/she remembers accurately what others have said in the past. _____
- 12. He/she is able to draw out quiet people with questions. _____
- 13. He/she encourages people to share by the way they listen. _____
- 14. He/she shows care for others by the way they listen. _____
- 15. In a group, he/she does not monopolize and relates well in a group. _____
- 16. In one-on-one contacts, he/she is willing and able to understand struggles people have and communicate in such a way that they feel understood and known. _____
- 17. He/she understands and can restate each side of a conflict, whether they participate in the conflict or are trying to help others. _____
- 18. He/she values the input of others and others recognize that. _____
- 19. His/her emotions do not get in the way of good communication. _____
- 20. He/she is quick to listen, slow to anger, slow to speak. _____

TOTAL _____

80-100 is a very good listener. Keep it up and please try to help others develop this skill
60-79 is an average to above average listener. Decide on one skill today to enhance your skill.
40-59 is not a very good listener. Observe where you do well and continue. Look for ways to improve 2-3 of the areas where you may struggle, maybe with an accountability partner.
0-39 suggests that you need to get with a mentor or friend who is a good listener to work on this some. Don't get too discouraged. Just realize that without some learning, you can't accomplish your goals as a one-on-one people helper.

Listening Action Points and Questions (15 minutes)

You have had your listening evaluated. You have read a good, brief article on listening. You have participated in a class that was focused on listening and understanding. Please take 15 minutes answering these three questions, and be ready to discuss it next week.

What do I need to work on in my listening?

What are my next steps in improving my listening?

What are the situations where I do not know how to listen well?

Memory Verse for Next Week: Proverbs 18:13 (2-3 minutes/day 5-6x/week)