



WEEK 6:

LISTEN INCARNATIONALLY

Key Scriptures: James 1:19, Philippians 2:4-7, John 1:1-3, John 1:14

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak....

-James (James 1:19)

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

-Paul (Philippians 2:4-7)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

-John (John 1:1-3)

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

-John (John 1:14)



WEEK 6: PRE-GROUP READING

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

–John (John 1:14)

In the ultimate mystery in the history of the universe, Jesus “incarnated” as a human being. The Son of God became fully human, while also remaining fully God. Life would have been much simpler for Jesus if he had stayed in heaven with the Father. By entering our world, Jesus invited difficulty and pain into his life, but he also restored us into relationship with himself and his Father.

To *listen incarnationally* is to follow the example of our leader. When we choose to incarnate, we hang between our own world and the world of another person. We are called to remain faithful to who we are—like Jesus did, while at the same time entering the world of another person by how we listen. It won't cost us what it cost Jesus, but it will cost us time, energy, disruption, and risk. We can be assured, however, that as Jesus' incarnation brought great life, so our choice to do the same will also result in resurrection life in us and in others.

The Gospels are filled with accounts of Jesus' interactions with individuals: Matthew, Nathaniel, Nicodemus, a Samaritan woman, Zacchaeus, and many others. When the rich young ruler came up to him, for example, Jesus “looked at him and loved him” (Mark 10:21). He listened. He was present, never distracted or in a rush. He took the time to explore their stories. Many of us have heard sermons about the need to listen well and to be slow to speak (see Proverbs 17:27–28; James 1:19), but listening does not come naturally to anyone.

Author David Augsburger notes that listening is so closely linked to loving that the two are almost indistinguishable. Most of us did not learn to be good listeners while growing up in our families, but it is a crucial skill that can be learned. It remains one of the most significant ways we can practically demonstrate our love for one another.

“Being heard is so close to being loved, that for the average person, they are almost indistinguishable.”

–David Augsburger



WEEK 6: GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Take some time to catch up and connect as a group. Pray to transition into discussion.

Growing Connected

Turn to the person next to you and share a time when you felt listened to. What did the other person do that caused you to feel heard?

Bible Study

God entered our planet and forever changed it. God became incarnate, taking on human flesh. He knew there was no better way to show human beings his love than by fully entering our lives. Jesus modeled incarnational love when he entered our world and walked in our shoes. Read aloud John 1:1–3, 14:

*1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

*14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory,
glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

1. Step into Jesus' shoes. What feelings might he have experienced in leaving heaven and entering a world so different from heaven?

Jesus serves as a beautiful model of listening:

1. Jesus left his world. (When we listen incarnationally, we leave our 'world')
2. Jesus entered our world. (We enter another's world by listening)
3. Jesus held onto himself. (When we listen, we do not have to agree)
4. Jesus hung between two worlds. (I may not like what I hear, but I can hang between the tension of our different perspectives)

2. Describe a time when you listened to someone who made you "leave your world" and enter a perspective very different from your own. What was that experience like?

There are two mistakes that can keep us from listening *incarnationally*:

- **Being unwilling or unable to "leave our world"** – we hold rigidly to our own perspective, often thinking about our response while the other person is still speaking.
- **Being unwilling or unable to "hold onto ourselves"** – we listen to the other person, but aren't able to represent ourselves. We may agree externally, while we secretly disagree, faking peace. Or we may explode with anger, or go silent, unable to respond at all. Both are examples of being unable to 'remain myself' while visiting the other person's 'world.'

3. We all struggle with both of these, but generally will have a 'favorite' between them. Which of these two do you default to in listening? Do you struggle to 'leave your world'? Or do you struggle to 'hold onto yourself'?

This week we are going to practice *listening incarnationally* to each other in our groups. For this activity you will need a partner. **Find a partner now and walk through the Tool of the Week included on the next page of this guide.**

When you are finished, come back together as a group for the following questions.

Follow-up Questions:

- 4. What was that experience like for you as the speaker? The listener?**

- 5. In your family of origin, how did people listen to each other? How did they speak to one another?**

- 6. Name one or two obstacles you will need to overcome to become a person who listens well.**

Conclusion

Listening incarnationally can be hard for many reasons, but it is both effective and essential. If Jesus had not chosen to leave the comfort of His world to enter ours, we would have no relationship with Him. Learning to enter the 'worlds' of other people as we listen, while holding onto ourselves is fundamental to cultivating emotionally healthy relationships.



WEEK 6: TOOL OF THE WEEK

This week we are going to practice listening incarnationally to each other. To practice this tool you will need a partner.

Each of you will respond to the following questions:

1. What is the biggest thing impacting you right now?
2. How are you feeling about it?

Listening Incarnationally

You will take turns answering the questions **and listening incarnationally** to each other. The purpose of this exercise is to listen at a heart level with empathy, attuned to the words and nonverbal communication of the other person.

As the speaker, remember to:	As the listener, remember to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Speak in the "I."• Keep your statements brief.• Include your feelings (see next page).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Give the speaker your full attention.• Step into the speakers 'world' – feel what he/she is feeling.• Avoid judging or interpreting.

When the speaker is done, the listener should ask any clarifying questions they have, then summarize what they heard from the speaker. e.g., "What I heard you saying was...is that correct?"

Switch your roles as the speaker and listener, answering the same questions.

Distinguishing thoughts from feelings

In order to answer the second question: *how are you feeling about it*, the answer should be a feeling. E.g. I feel sad, disappointed, anxious, excited, etc.

In our culture, we often say "I feel like..." to share a thought or opinion. A key principle to remember is when the word *like* follows "I feel," what's being shared is not a feeling but an opinion or a thought. E.g., "I feel like grocery prices are too high." What you are really saying is: "I think or my opinion is that grocery prices are too high."

See a helpful appendix of feelings from Peter & Geri Scazzero on the next page.



WEEK 6: FEELING WORDS

Afraid	Angry	Hurt	Sad	Doubtful
Anxious	Annoyed	Abandoned	Ashamed	Confused
Desperate	Bitter	Cheated	Depressed	Distrustful
Fearful	Defensive	Crushed	Disappointed	Hesitant
Helpless	Frustrated	Defeated	Discouraged	Indecisive
Nervous	Furious	Deserted	Disillusioned	Puzzled
Pressured	Humiliated	Heartbroken	Hopeless	Skeptical
Shocked	Offended	Lonely	Miserable	Uncertain
Terrified	Resentful	Misunderstood	Moody	
Worried		Upset		

Interested	Loving	Happy	Physical	Miscellaneous
Amazed	Appreciative	Comfortable	Aware	Bold
Challenged	Compassionate	Contented	Awkward	Bored
Concerned	Honored	Grateful	Empty	Cooperative
Curious	Sympathetic	Hopeful	Exhausted	Determined
Eager	Tender	Joyful	Refreshed	Distant
Enthusiastic		Lighthearted	Repulsed	Impatient
Excited		Peaceful	Strong	Indifferent
Inspired		Pleased	Tense	Jealous
		Relaxed	Weak	