

#### S E T Ν

WMBC is setting out on a **ten year journey** of **50k stories** of **God's love** through the movement of his church! We want people to see the church in a **new light** so that they discover Jesus, and the first step in that journey is training ourselves to

# LISTEN VELL

We will never be able to change our neighbours and culture's negative stereotypes or perceptions of the church if we don't take the time to listen to what they are.

We live in an age where the church has to earn the right to be heard, and we know of no better way to do that than to listen first. What if, instead of coming to church to be preached to, people came to church to be heard? And I think we can all attest from personal experience that listening "speaks" in ways far more powerfully than talking ever could.

This resource guide is a companion for our fall teaching series on listening and we encourage you to begin the journey with us as we learn to love others through unhurried listening. If you are unsure what to do and who to help, listen to the person nearest you, and prepare to be changed by what you hear.

- Terry Dueck (Lead Pastor)

ТΟ  "Listen to the voice who calls you beloved, because otherwise you will run around begging for affirmation, for praise, and for success."

- Henri Nouwen

#### The Importance of Listening to God

God speaks. He speaks in many different ways, with different tones and messages. On Mt. Sinai, God spoke to Israel with smoke, thunder, and fire. Later, on the same mountain, a huddled, broken Elijah heard God speak in a still, small voice. God is speaking all the time, with messages of comfort and conviction, of rest and rousing, of purpose and plan.

When we listen to God, we understand that He is the only one who can meet our deepest needs and desires. We understand His goodness, His heart, His love for us, and we accept that He approves of us without us having to earn it. Without truly listening to God, we look for these things from the people around us and we become a drain on them. We end up asking people to do what only God can do.

#### How Can I Listen to God?

If we want to listen to God, it's good to know the key ways that God speaks to us:

- PRAYER God speaks when we take time to have a conversation with Him. God's Spirit is with us constantly, and He can speak whenever He wants, we just have to be ready to listen.
- SCRIPTURE God has spoken powerfully through the stories, poetry, history, and biography that we have in the Bible. When we take the time to listen to what God has said, we attune ourselves to hear what God is saying.
- 3. COMMUNITY God loves to get people involved in what He's doing, and that includes bringing them into the conversation He wants to have with us. When we're connected to a Christian community, and we pay attention, we allow God to speak to us through the people around us.

#### What Makes Listening to God Hard?

Our world is full of voices competing for our attention. Many of these voices come to us through our phones, computers, or TVs. God's not always going to shout over these other voices, so if we want to hear Him, we need to quiet the other voices first.

Another thing that keeps us from hearing God is living our lives against His will. God's voice is like a Wi-Fi signal: if we're not close enough to Him we won't pick it up. If we want to hear what He's saying, we need to go where He is, think like Him, and see the world through His eyes. Living for His mission on earth is a great way to hear what He's saying.

"Every person, on coming to the knowledge of themselves, is not only urged to seek God, but is also led as by the hand to find Him."

– John Calvin

#### The Importance of Listening to Self

Adam McHugh has said that "What takes place in you matters and has meaning." We listen to ourselves by paying attention to what takes place inside us: our thoughts, emotions, motivations, physiology; everything happening within us.

The way we listen to ourselves has a direct relationship with the way we listen to others. If we quickly suppress our own negative emotions or the internal voices that say hurtful things about us, we will be quick to do the same when it comes to listening to others.

We all have brokenness and hurt that shapes how we think and behave. Without listening to ourselves, we can very easily cope with this brokenness through unhealthy habits, and we act according to our pain.

#### How Can I Listen to Myself?

Taking time to quiet the external voices actually makes our internal voices louder. In these times of intentional quiet, we can begin to truly listen to ourselves::

- 1. IDENTIFY YOUR VOICES AND EMOTIONS When we begin to listen inside ourselves, we start to pick up on common phrases, or recurring ideas or scripts that run through our heads. Recognizing these voices helps us begin to evaluate whether their message is helpful or hurtful; true or false. The same is true of the emotions we feel: taking the time to ask questions of our emotions and identify them helps us begin to evaluate why we're feeling them to begin with.
- 2. HAVE AN INNER DIALOGUE Don't be quick to dismiss the voices/ emotions you hear. Let them speak and listen without judging or condemning. These voices speak that way because we have been wounded somewhere along the line. Listen for the unmet need underneath the negative voice. When we do respond, do so with empathy and love: this voice doesn't have to be an enemy, it can be someone you comfort.
- 3. LISTEN TO YOUR BODY What goes on inside us is communicated through our bodies. Listen to your physiology: when you do what you do, what gives or saps your energy, how much sleep you get, what you eat, whether you're relaxed or tense. What do these things tell you about what's going on inside you? Are they pointing you to something?

#### What Makes Listening to Myself Hard?

**Dismissing Our Voices/Emotions** – We can quickly get into the habit of dismissing or ignoring the negative voices we hear inside our heads. We can also quickly dismiss emotions as "getting in the way" of what we ought to be doing. When we dismiss these things, we become deaf to what they would tell us about what's going on inside us, the things we're carrying with us, or the things we've come to believe about ourselves that might not be true.

**Avoid the "Shoulds"** – Scolding ourselves for having internal voices that are irrational, or feeling emotions that are unhelpful, doesn't actually take these things away. And often, these things are not irrational or unhelpful, we simply aren't aware of what they're trying to tell us, likely because we're not open to listening to them. "Shoulds" get in the way of genuine listening.

# LUFSTERN TOOTHERS

"O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love."

– Anonymous, in the tradition of St. Francis of Assisi

#### The Importance of Listening to Others

Loving someone can be described as caring enough about someone to care for their needs and work for their wellbeing, even at the expense of our own. Doing this requires listening: to hear what their needs are and understand how we can work towards their wellbeing. To love someone well, we need to listen to them. We need to hear their experiences, beliefs, thoughts, feelings, fears, and hopes. By doing this, we show them that they truly matter to us and to God.

#### How Can I Listen to Others?

- REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE LISTENING TO PEOPLE We are listening to more than just a political stance or a theological view. We are listening to people. Every person is a wonderful, beautiful, complex, layered, beloved image bearer of God, and we should listen in such a way that we honour that in them.
- UNDERSTANDING OVER BEING UNDERSTOOD The goal of listening is understanding the other person. If we are intent on being understood, we will not be truly listening. Set aside your need to be understood and focus on understanding them (asking good questions helps).
- 3. REMEMBER THE PRESENCE OF GOD Listening can be a way of partnering with God in serving the people around us. Ask Him to open your ears to the words, sayings, or subtext in the conversation, to hear how He is or how He wants to be at work, and how His story of redemption is being played out in this person's life.

#### What Makes Listening to Others Hard?

**Listening FOR Instead of Listening TO** – When we listen FOR something, we're listening with ulterior motives. We weigh incoming information; we sit in judgment on someone else's story: collecting data, waiting for the right moment to respond. This is a sure way to miss the whole person that we could be listening TO.

**Assuming We Know Their Response** – If we're talking to someone we know well, or someone we can "easily" slot into a particular camp or category, we can start to assume what they will say and begin to prepare a response. This keeps us focused on ourselves and being heard, while simultaneously defeating the purpose of listening, as we've already determined who they are and what we'll hear.

## LISTEN TO OTHERS IN PAIN

"Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking when they should be listening."

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

#### The Importance of Listening to Others in Pain

Jesus said that the world would know that we are His disciples by the way we love each other. It is in the midst of pain and suffering that this love for each other is tested most. In times of suffering, people need the presence and the listening of others the most. If we resort to speaking to others in pain instead of listening to them, we jump over a very important part of what Jesus taught us to do: suffer with those who suffer, especially those who suffer within the Church.

#### How Can I Listen to Others in Pain?

- ENTER INTO THEIR PAIN The Apostle Paul calls the Church to suffer with each other because the bitterness of pain and loss is sweeter when it's shared. Jesus offers His comforting presence to us when we suffer, and we can follow Him in doing the same for others.
- 2. GET COMFORTABLE WITH THE IN-BETWEEN Often it's not just immediately after a loss or in the middle of pain that people need to be listened to or walked with. They also need co-sufferers in the in-between stage where they now have to deal with all the questions and doubts that their pain brought up. To listen well, we need to be willing to take that journey with them, and embrace the waiting involved.

#### What Makes Listening to Others in Pain Hard?

**Preaching and Pre-mature Assurance** – When we preach to grieving people, we make it seem like they don't believe the right things or believe them strongly enough. If we offer assurance too soon, we make light of their suffering. Either way, we're also likely more interested in what we have to say to them than we are in listening to what they need to say to us.

**Giving In to Anxiety and Fear** – When we are confronted with pain and suffering, our bodies are built to start feeling those same emotions. The closer they are to us, the more powerfully we start to feel the same things they're feeling. If we are afraid of those feelings, or they cause us anxiety, we will run from listening to them and entering into their pain.

## WHO'S IN YOUR 100?

We believe that our culture's view of the Church is keeping many people from encountering Jesus and the true identity, purpose, and life that God has for them. If we want to change this, we have to begin by changing our culture's view of the Church. We believe that the first step to this is listening to the world around us.

Each of us has a role to play in this. We are all connected to roughly 100 people: friends, family, co-workers, the student who serves us our coffee, the woman who lives in the house next door. Listening well to these people is the first step in showing them a different vision of the Church, and bringing them closer to their Creator.

So to kick things off, start making a list of the people you can be listening to. *Who's in your 100?* 

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#### FAMILY

#### **COWORKERS**

#### **EXTENDED FAMILY**

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#### **ACQUAINTANCES**

#### **OTHER**

FRIENDS

### **GOOD LISTENING PRACTICES**

- **1. Take Time:** It's hard to listen to someone when you've got somewhere you need to go, or something else on your mind. Listening well involves giving the other person the gracious gift of taking the time to go at their pace.
- 2. Silence Your Inner Critic: When someone talks, we can get into the habit of analyzing what they're saying or preparing our response. When we do that, we're really listening to ourselves, not to the other person. Quieting our internal critic lets us actually listen to what the other person is saying without judging them or putting them into a category.
- **3.** Listening is Physical: You listen with your whole body, not just your ears. Make eye contact with the person you're listening to and turn your body towards them. Nod your head when you understand, shake it when they share something hurtful Set aside physical objects that could divide or divert your attention from the person in front of you.
- 4. Ask Open Questions: Open questions require more of a response than just a "yes" or "no" answer. Instead of asking "did you have a good weekend?" ("yes" or "no"), ask "what did you do this weekend?" ("There was this huge bear . . ." or "I've never eaten so many pierogis!")

- **5.** *Give Up Control:* Sometimes the opinions, beliefs, or thoughts that someone shares go against our core values, or are somehow threatening to us. When this happens, it can be easy to stop listening and try to protect ourselves, or control the conversation. Giving up control allows the other person's words to actually impact us.
- **6. Empathize:** Try to put yourself into the other person's shoes, or feel the things they are feeling.
- 7. Let Them Know you Heard Them: You can let someone know you heard them by paraphrasing what they said, clarifying that you heard them correctly, or by asking questions that engage what they've already said.

## **GETTING STARTED**

While listening itself is a valuable act of love, we're also hoping that our listening will reveal how the people in our lives view the Church and how that affects their understanding of who God is. These are not conversations we stumble into, if we want to listen to these things, we'll have to ask good questions, and we'll have to be trustworthy and safe people to talk to. With that in mind, here are some ways that you can start talking about how people view the Church.

- 1. **PROVIDE A PREFACE:** Let's face it, talking about religion or the Church is uncomfortable for most people, but having an understanding about why they're talking about it can be helpful. We recommend introducing your question to help them get a sense of why you're talking about it, and clears up any fears about an ulterior motive. Feel free to let them know that your church wants to know what people think about the Church in general, and that there's no pressure to say the right thing here, we know that we haven't been perfect, and we want to know what we need to work on.
- THE QUESTION: A great question to ask is "What has been your experience of the Church?" This encourages people to reflect on their own experiences with the Church, not just the popular cultural view of the Church.
- THE FOLLOW-UP QUESTION: Depending on how someone responds to your first question, you should have an idea of what they're opinion is. If they say they haven't been to church ever, or for a while, your follow-up

question could be, "If I can ask, why is that?" If it's clear that they've been hurt by someone in the Church, you can offer an apology, and ask about their experience. If they're positive about the Church, ask what it is about the Church they appreciate.

4. EMPATHIZE: Whatever their response, we can empathize: if they're positive about the Church, we can celebrate that with them. If they've been hurt by the Church, we can apologize and mourn with them. If they're negative about the Church, we can agree that the Church is imperfect and has a checkered past and present. In every case, empathizing helps show them that we have heard them, that we understand, and that we see what they see.

## **SMALL GROUPS**

Starting in our Listen series, we're encouraging small groups to change their meeting format to create space to listen to each other. Below is a sample of what a listening-focused group night could look like:

**Discussion** - Talk about Sunday's teaching, using the previous section and your own notes as a guide. What stood out to you? What did you agree or disagree with? Was there anything that was new to you?

**Listening** - Start by praying for God to speak through His Spirit as you share and listen.

Have someone share something personal, something that's had a big impact on who they are or how they see the world: being bullied as a child, a parent's words of advice that guide their lives, something someone said that has changed the way they see themselves for good or bad. It would be a good idea to decide who is sharing the week before so that they have time to think about what they could share.

While they're sharing the rest of the group can practice good listening (see above).

Once they're finished, take time to ask questions, share what you heard from them. Also, keep in mind that God loves to speak through His people, and often has messages for us to give to others. Listen to what He might be saying during this process as well, and be ready to share that with others.

**Prayer** - After each person shares, pray for them based on what they shared and what you heard.

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