

Session #5

Listen Incarnationally

Pre-Reading

Incarnation explained:

Jesus claimed that he was God incarnate. In camp terms we would say, “God with skin on.” Although Jesus was fully man, he was also fully God. This enfleshment of God is known as the incarnation. God becoming man, without ever stopping being God (It is a mind bender I know). We see this claim in a scripture.

(Jesus) “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;” (Philippians 2:6, NIV)

“The Word *(God)* became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14, NIV)

After Jesus returned to the Father, he sent the Holy Spirit to indwell believers. God living in us.

“Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;” (1 Corinthians 6:19, NIV)

As followers of Jesus then, we incarnate Christ and are his representatives on the earth.

“We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.” (2 Corinthians 5:20, NIV)

Incarnational Listening:

The Gospels are filled with accounts of Jesus’ interactions with individuals. When the rich young ruler came up to him, Jesus “looked at him and loved him.” He listened. He was present, never in a rush or distracted. He took the time to explore people’s lives and stories. He listened.

How well would you say you listen? Give yourself this listening test from the Emotionally Healthy Church book. Circle all the statements you can affirm.

1. My close friends would describe me as a responsive listener.

2. When people are upset with me, I am able to listen to them without being defensive.
3. I listen not only to the words people say but also to the feelings behind their words and their body language.
4. I have little interest in judging other people or quickly giving my opinion to them.
5. I am able to validate another person's feelings with empathy.
6. I am aware of my defensive mechanisms in stressful conversations (e.g. appeasing, ignoring, blaming, distracting).
7. I am profoundly aware of how the family I was raised in has shaped my present listening style.
8. I ask for clarification when listening rather than "fill in the blanks" or make assumptions.
9. I don't interrupt to get my point across when another is speaking.
10. I give people my undivided attention when they are talking to me.

If you circled 8 to 10 statements, you are an outstanding listener; If you circled 6-7, you are very good; 4 – 5, good; 3 or fewer, poor — "you are in trouble." If you want to be really brave, after you score yourself, ask your spouse or someone close to you to rate you as a listener. You may be surprised. "Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person, they are almost indistinguishable" (David Augsburger).

Incarnational listening then, is a skill that helps us listen like Jesus listened. It is a shared experience between us, the other person, and the Holy Spirit. People who enter other people's world are available and present. In the words of Henri Nouwen:

To care means first to be present to each other. From experience you know that those who care for you become present to you. When they listen, they listen to you. When they speak, they speak to you. Their presence is a healing presence because they accept you on your terms, and they encourage you to take your own life seriously.

Daily Office

Introduction

Many of us have heard sermons or teaching about the need to listen well and being slow to speak (Proverbs 17:27-28; James 1:19). But listening does not come naturally to anyone, it is a skill that must be learned. David Augsburger notes that listening is so closely related 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 crucial we learn this skill. It remains one of the most practical ways we can show love for each other.

Growing Connected

Handbook to Renewal Day by Day Debrief: What obstacles, difficulties, or success did you experience in meeting with God this week using the daily resource?

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

Bible Study

Have someone read the “Incarnation Explained” section in the pre-reading (Page 30).

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.

Have someone read John 1:1-3, 14 and explore the questions on the next page.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” (John 1:1–3, NIV)

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14, NIV)

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

Describe a time when you left your "world" and entered one very different from your own?

Video

Purpose: To listen incarnationally is to listen at a heart level with empathy, attuned to the words and nonverbal cues of another person.

Speaking:

How did the family you grew up in speak to one another?

We speak differently in the new family of Jesus. We speak...

1. Respectfully
2. Honestly
3. Clearly
4. Timely

Listening:

Attunement—not just listening to words but the nonverbal communications (facial expressions, tone of voice, tears, body posture, intensity of words).

Jesus serves as the best model of listening

1. Jesus left his world
2. He entered our world
3. He held on to himself
4. Jesus hung between two worlds

Guides for the listener and speaker

As the listener:

- Give the speaker your full attention.
- Step into the speaker's shoes and feel what they are feeling.
- Avoid judging or interpreting.
- Reflect back as accurately as you can what you heard them say
- When you think they are done ask, "Is there more?"
- When they are done, ask them "Of everything you have shared, what is the most important thing you want me to remember?"

As the speaker:

- speak in the "I."
- Keep statements brief.
- Stop to let the listener paraphrase.
- Include your feelings.
- Be honest, clear, respectful.
- It is critically important to help people distinguish a thought from a feeling.

Example of feeling statement:

"I feel this stores prices are to high." What you are really saying is: "I think or I believe this stores prices are to high."

If there are feelings behind it, it might sound like this: "I really like this store, but I feel sad that I can't afford to shop there."

Activity

In your groups have two people practice this and then switch to the other two

Decide who will go first. Allow 5 minutes for each person. This is designed to be a “win-win” exercise. As the speaker share honestly and respectfully, your goal is to listen to your partner with understanding, respect and empathy.

Each person will respond to the following questions: What is the biggest thing impacting you right now? How are you feeling about it?

As the speaker remember to:

- speak in the “I.”
 - “I miss your company John, and I feel lonely.” Vs. John, you are never emotionally available.”
 - I became fearful when you didn't show up on time.” Vs. “You were insensitive for not calling when you knew you'd be late.”
- Keep statements brief.
- Stop to let the listener paraphrase.
- Include your feelings.
- **Be honest, clear, respectful.**
- It is critically important to help people distinguish a thought from a feeling.

As the listener, remember to:

- Give the speaker your full attention.
- Step into the speaker's shoes and feel what they are feeling.
- Avoid judging or interpreting.
- Reflect back as accurately as you can what you heard them say
- When you think they are done ask, “Is there more?”
- When they are done, ask them “Of everything you have shared, what is the most important thing you want me to remember?”

Share your experience with your group

- “Most helpful from the listener was...”
- “what I would have liked more from the listener was...”

Although limited online note the following areas: Facial expressions, eye contact, head movement, body posture, word choice, tone.

Small Group

What was the experience like for you as the speaker? The listener?

How was your family of origin at listening? Speaking?

Name one or two obstacles you will need to overcome to grow into a person who listens well.

Closing

To be in communion means to be with someone. Accepting people just as they are with all their limits and inner pain, but also with their gifts and their beauty to love someone is not first of all, to do things for them, but to reveal to them their beauty and value to say to them, through our attitude, "You are beautiful. You are important."
-Jean Vanier

Personal Action Step

Practice the Listen Incarnationally skill at least once or twice before the next session.

I plan on practicing the Listen Incarnationally skill:

With whom? _____

When? _____

Handbook to Renewal Day by Day: Use days 21-25