

FOR TIPS ON HOW NOT TO LISTEN WELL...

...look at the example of Job's friends. Job is in the midst of great suffering and distress, yet his friends fail to truly listen to and understand him. Poor Job is led to exclaim, *O that someone would hear me!* (Job 31v35)

PRAY – LISTEN IN THE SPIRIT

As we seek to listen to others with understanding and empathy, its vital that we are also listening to the Holy Spirit, who understands perfectly and can help us to empathise with people. Pray constantly, and ask God to help you demonstrate His love, acceptance and truth.

Ask God now to transform your heart and character and help you truly listen to people.

ACTION POINTS

Practise active listening and reflecting back with someone who knows what you are doing and has agreed to help you work on your listening skills. With their feedback, develop expressions and phrases which fit with your natural style of speaking and way of being.

DIGGING DEEPER

Read chapter 5 of **“God Space”** by Doug Pollock (ISBN 0764438719) – *Listening Your Way into Spiritual Conversations*

LISTENING

Think about the last time you felt that somebody had really listened to you.

What things did they do? How did it make you feel? What qualities make someone a good listener?

“I’m willing to bet the farm that in our postmodern Christian society, the most important evangelistic skill is listening.” Todd Hunter, former CEO of Alpha USA

In what ways do you think that listening is important in evangelism?

"The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters but a man of understanding draws them out"
Proverbs 20:5

READ

James 1:19; Proverbs 10:19; Proverbs 18:13. What do these verses teach us about listening?

Listening is not passive. It is not the same as being silent, switching off, or even asking a ton of questions. Listening requires entering actively and imaginatively into another person's situation and trying to understand a frame of reference different from your own.

Active listening means...

- Laying down your own agenda and entering into someone else's frame of reference, making an effort to understand the world through their eyes
- Laying aside your assumptions and preconceptions about a person
- Putting a lid on your favourite stories, personal disclosures of similar experiences, and stunning anecdotes while you devote yourselves fully to hearing their story

PRACTICAL SKILLS - REFLECTING AND CLARIFYING

One really effective listening skill that can be learned and practised is reflecting. This involves mirroring back the content and meaning of what someone has said to you. It helps you to clarify what you think you have heard someone say, as well as communicating to the person speaking that you are really seeking to **understand** and **empathise** with them. It also helps to draw the person out, and enables them to clarify their own thinking.

For example:

"I've had so many essays to write this term and I handed most of them in late. I really started to feel guilty and helpless about it. I think I should probably drop out of university."

People's stories are generally a mixture of:

- Their experiences – what happens to them
- Their behaviours – what they do (or don't do)
- Their feelings – the emotions that are associated with either experiences or behaviour
- Their thoughts – the ideas or beliefs they have about feelings, behaviours and experiences.

You don't want to reflect back everything that has been said. But choose one aspect, perhaps their feelings or thoughts, to draw out more from them.

E.g. "So you've been feeling quite guilty about this?"

Or "So it makes you think that you should drop out of university?"

Accurate reflections create safety and build trust, and help people to become more aware of their own thoughts, feelings, behaviours and experiences. It's not about analysing or editing what people say, but it's about understanding and helping people know that they are understood.

REFLECTING WELL IS NOT...

- "Parroting back" whatever the person says so frequently that it feels like a tennis match
- Using overly eloquent or precise language in your paraphrasing
- Putting thoughts and feelings into someone's mouth that they have not expressed