

The Art of Listening

Goals

- To recognize the importance of listening as we seek to develop a climate where communication may occur and God's grace flow
- To explore what the Bible says about listening
- To practice active listening and paraphrasing
- To build community
- To build leadership capacity

Materials

- Bible study information
- White board or paper and markers
- Bible Study page

Preparation

Review ground rules with the group. This could be rules that they have already worked on or a few that you bring to the meeting.

Bible Study

Insights from the Book of Proverbs

Read or adapt this statement:

The Book of Proverbs is one of the most interesting – and perhaps neglected – books of the bible. It does not plow much new theological ground. Rather, accepting Israel's faith in God as its context, Proverbs is a collection of saying about how to live day to day life in a way that is personally fulfilling, helpful to neighbors, and pleasing to God. Included in the wisdom of Proverbs are many sayings about to talk about tough issues without hurting people or destroying community.

Take turns reading the verses from proverbs.

Ask the group to reflect on "What do the proverbs remind us about communicating in potentially conflicted situations?"

Our Experiences of Listening

Invite the participants to remember one or more experiences in which someone failed to listen to them.

Ask the participants to consider: "How did you know the person was not listening? What were the subtle and not-so-subtle cues that that person was not listening?"

Invite the participants to remember one or two experiences in which someone listened to them.

Ask the participants to consider: "how did you know the person was listening? What were the subtle and the not-so-subtle cues that that person was listening?"

Write the responses on the white board or large paper. What do the responses have in common? What are the differences? What did we learn overall?

Listening Well

Divide the group into equal numbers. Line chairs facing each other with each group sitting in one line.

Explain: Each person will have an opportunity to speak and to listen about potentially divisive subjects. One of the pair will speak for one minute while the other listens carefully and silently. The listener is not to challenge or argue with the speaker. When the speaker's minute is up the listener will have one minute to paraphrase what the speaker had said. The purpose of the paraphrase is to show that one person has really heard what another said. A paraphrase might begin with words like: "What I understood you to say is..." or "What I heard was...". The pair repeats the process with one who was listening speak and the speaker listens.

After each has had a time to speak and listen one side shifts over one chair. The group begins again with a new sentence prompt.

You may use the following sentence prompts or create similar prompts based on divisive issues within the community or congregation.

- My perspective on Immigration is...
- My feelings about racism are...
- My understanding about White Privilege is....
- I believe that the church should work to stop gun violence by....

- Or use a topic that is of concern to the community or congregation

What did we learn?

After all have had several opportunities to speak and listen invite the group to reflect on the following:

- When you were speaking, did you feel you were being heard?
- What clues and cues helped you feel you were being heard?
- What was the hardest part about listening?
- What might you do differently the next time you are in a position to listen to someone with whom you disagree?
- Overall, what did you learn?

Insights from the Book of Proverbs

An evasive eye is a sign of trouble ahead, but an open, face-to-face meeting results in peace. (10:10 The Message)

Whoever heeds instruction is on the path to life, but one who rejects a rebuke goes astray. (10:17 NRSV)

Rash language cuts and maims, but there is healing in the words of the wise. (12:18 The Message)

A gentle response defuses anger, but a sharp tongue kindles a temper-fire. (15:1 The Message)

Kind words heal and help; cutting words wound and maim. (15:4 The Message)

Hot tempers start fights; a calm, cool spirit keeps the peace. (15:18 The Message)

The one who knows much says little; an understanding person remains calm. (17:27 The Message)

Answering before listening is both stupid and rude (18:13 The Message)

If one gives answer before hearing, it is folly and shame (18:13 NRSV)

Words satisfy the mind as much as fruit does the stomach; good talk is as gratifying as a good harvest. Words kill, words give life; they're either poison or fruit—you choose. (18: 20 -21 The Message)

Knowing what is right is like deep water in the heart; a wise person draws from the well within. (20:5 The Message)

Smooth talk from an evil heart is like glaze on cracked pottery. (26:23 The Message)

