

Helping Hurting People Session 3 – Student Notes

Much of what we do as Christians to help people involves talking. However, effective counseling always includes quality listening also. Today, our focus is on how to listen well and how to combat impediments to listening.

Proverbs 19:20

Listen to advice and accept instruction,
That you may gain wisdom in the future.

Proverbs 25:11-12

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.
Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold is a wise reprover to a listening ear.

Our goal in counseling with people is that they would hear our advice and accept instruction so that they would overcome whatever they are facing. However, if we seek to speak words of wisdom, we often must begin by accurately listening and seeking to understand what is going on in a situation.

Sometimes it is hard for us to listen. Here are a few reasons why:

1. You may think you already know the truth of the matter.
 - Proverbs 18:13
If one gives an answer before he hears,
It is his folly and shame.
 - We do well to remember humanity's first sin resulted from our propensity to fall into deception (Gen 3:13). Later on in Israel's history, God gave them specific, clear, and repeated commands to avoid idolatry (Deut 11:16-18). Yet, they still somehow rationalized worshipping other gods. Even though God sent prophet after prophet to urge the people to repent, they would not listen (2 Chron 36:14-16).
2. You may be impatient because the person is taking a long time to make his or her point.
 - Proverbs 18:2
A fool takes no pleasure in understanding,
But only in expressing his opinion.
 - Sometimes, people struggle to convey their issue succinctly. Asking questions may help you get to a quicker understanding; whereas offering advice just to cut to the chase may cause more harm than good.
3. You may get angry with what someone is saying, and that could cause you to stop listening.
 - James 1:19-20
19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.
 - If you are too emotional, you are probably not the best person to help in that situation. Our emotions, especially anger, make it hard for us to listen clearly and problem solve.
4. You may be distracted and allow your mind to drift so that you miss key parts of their explanation.
 - Romans 12:10
Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

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- One aspect of showing people honor is listening to them intently. If you have more pressing issues to attend to, then just be honest, and make a time to return to have the conversation.

It's important that we remain sensitive to God's leading in the moment. God can give you insider information to the situation (John 4:15-19) or miraculous wisdom to resolve a problem (1 Kings 3:25). If we would like God to guide us, then we cannot quench His spirit (1 Thess 5:19). It is hard to hear God speaking if your inner world is in disarray, but if you do the work of cultivating a relationship with God daily, you'll be more likely to hear Him in the critical moments of life.

Some of us are much more comfortable listening than speaking, especially if we disagree with someone. However, it's problematic if you say nothing and just actively listen the whole time. We should not allow someone to go on living in deception (Jer 29:8-9). We have to say the hard things, but we must always do it in love.

In any situation, we want to do what we can to point people to God. One of the most effective ways to do this is by bringing Scripture into the conversation. The Bible is God's primary way of communicating His truths to us (2 Tim 3:16-17). Sometimes, God's perspective on an issue is so different from our own that we can't even hear it at first. It takes a lot of effort to hear accurately what Scripture says, but the rewards are worth it.

Proverbs 2:1-12

1 My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, 2 making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; 3 yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, 4 if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, 5 then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. 6 For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; 7 he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, 8 guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints. 9 Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; 10 for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; 11 discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you, 12 delivering you from the way of evil, from men of perverted speech,

Silence is an important part of listening. Silence is difficult for most of us. It is very important to allow for silence when listening to another's problems. When a silence begins, we usually rush in with advice, direction, and personal stories.

There are times when a person just needs to think and not talk. Let the person have a few minutes to think through thoughts/feelings in order to respond. Sit quietly, not fidgeting, to wait for the response. Sometimes it takes a bit for people under stress to come to grips with what is going on inside themselves. (Some people process inside, some out loud.) If after several minutes have gone by and there is still no response, you could say something like, "Can I help you sort out your thoughts?" or "If you'd like, I can begin talking, and we can sort this out together." Or "Let me know when you are ready to talk again." Do not push. Maybe the person just isn't ready now but will be next time.

The opposite is when people talk and talk and talk, hardly taking a breath. It takes patience to listen intently, but it is necessary to use your good listening skills. If the person begins repeating the same story over and over, it is generally time to intervene by either summarizing or asking a clarifying question. Some people need to vent. This is fine within reason. Reflecting back to the person what you are hearing and their emotions as often as you can will help the talkative one to feel heard and will become less intent on trying to convince you to "hear" her or him.

Avoid giving answers or solutions too quickly. We tend to want to "fix" things. In the discovery phase, do not rush to provide solutions. Focus your attention on helping to get to the root(s) of the confusion, denial, and numbness that are present. When the person accurately articulates the problem, the solutions and conclusions are readily identified. When you jump to *your* conclusions right away, you rob the person of using his/her insights, understandings, prayer, and trust in Yahweh to deal with the problem. Advising or telling others what to do (take this job, not that one, for example) puts the focus on you. Your goal is to help the person to rely on Yahweh for answers and make wise decisions himself.

Take the time needed to explore the problem. Make sure the phase of uncovering the problem is given enough time to really process the actual problem. (The person is not the problem.)

Self-disclosure may or may not be the right thing to do. The timing of self-disclosure has to be on-point. Be aware of bringing attention to your "stuff" instead of focusing on the other person. Trading "war" stories is generally not a helpful way of relating to others. You can share at times, but briefly and only the necessary and important parts of your story. Again, it is not about you but about the other person. If you feel the need to talk a lot about your situations, it is advisable to find someone to talk to and work through these problems.

Our responses are to assist in comforting, encouragement, providing information, and, if necessary, correction.

Assertive Quotient Assessment -

At the end of the session you were given an assessment concerning your assertiveness.

Assertiveness is an important quality to have in the normal range.

1. If we are not assertive at all, we will ignore or shy away from times to get involved or challenge something;
2. If we are too assertive we rob the person we are talking with of being able to process and think for him/herself.
3. We can also fall into a very bad habit of giving advice from either end of assertiveness.

Some skills of being a good listener.

All of these skills that are listed are basic skills to use when talking with others. These are good to use all the time, not just when we are having a serious conversation with someone.

James 1:19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;

1. Pay attention to God and the Holy Spirit as you listen and respond.

“One of the most powerful concepts in helping others is to realize that three are present in any conversation. God may be invisible, but he is present, aware of every need, and willing to participate by imparting truth and grace.” Clinton, T. , Springle, P., Break Through, p. 72.

2. Importance of confidentiality.

Involve professionals and pastors when needed. **DO NOT Hesitate** to get help. You are not a professional and professionals are able to make assessments that could be a life or death situation for an individual. If in doubt at all, ask for help. We will discuss these situations more in the later sessions.

3. Separate ourselves and the other person from their problems. The person and you are NOT the problem. The problem is treated as an objective thing that is outside of ourselves. The problem can be viewed as a “thing” or item.

4. Needs are multifaceted, come in many forms, and are unique to each person. (Death, debt, age related issues, natural disaster, dead-end job, education, family working with an addicted relative, etc.). As Helpers we develop a good tool box that we can utilize. The tools are flexible enough to adapt to different situations.

5. Our physical presence.

- How do you look at people – are you being attentive, aware of what is going on around you?

- Appropriate gestures are: relaxed facial expression; easy nodding of head meaning “I am listening”; normal eye contact.
- Eye contact – People generally look up and away when processing and telling something, a direct stare is not needed when listening, but making good eye contact is crucial to connecting with others.
- Avoid distractions - What are some distractions when you are trying to listen to people?
- Body language: Have an interested look on your face. Be genuine. Yawning, slumping in your chair, rubbing your hands or eyes excessively, etc. is distracting and says “I’m not interested in you.” You can “lean in” if needed.
- Practice of these things is vital to see how you are with others. Set video record on your phone and practice talking with a friend and see your body language. We think we are doing everything right, but we don’t actually see what it is that we do and how we can appear to others.
- Silence – be peaceful when no one talking. It is a time of processing. Silence Handout
- Remain peaceful - not get shocked or have to cry, or become morose when others tell us of their troubles. Do not be dismayed. How you respond will determine if that person will ever trust you again.

6. Complexities of communication

- What I said;
- What I thought I said;
- What you heard; and
- What you thought you heard.

7. Initiating - How to begin a conversation:

- Would you like to talk about this?
- What would be something that might help you?
- Is there something you would like to talk about – the problem?
- What you are telling me sounds pretty serious. Let’s talk about it.
- Is now a good time or would you like to meet later when we can have time to really talk about what is going on?

8. Attending – What is the body language of the person? Does the person look as he normally does? Or distracted, upset, “blue”, etc.

- It is very annoying to be guessing what it is that is going on with someone. We do not know unless we ask. Do not assume you “know” what the other is thinking and feeling.

9. Active listening – Summarizing in your own words what the other person just said. Eggerich’s book Love and Respect has a section on good communication.

10. Responding - Moving into solution stage by being collaborative. Example: “What have you tried before that has worked?”

11. Referring – Having a list of community services would be helpful to have.

12. Use “why” questions carefully. They sound judgmental.

13. Be as non-judgmental or impartial as possible. When it comes to the Word, the Word does the judging but we need to keep our personal opinions quiet, at least at first.

14. Clarifying Questions. At specific times we can ask clarifying questions only about valuable information.

- Allow the person to tell the story without a lot of interruptions, like “Who is Sally? Where were you? Or other clarifying questions. What matters is the telling of the story. You can ask for important details later. Let the story flow.

15. Be able to summarize every so often without any comment or affect that gives your spin to their story.

16. Do not pry. Inserting yourself into the problem when not invited to partake.

- People have to know they can trust you before they will invite you in.
- Some have no boundaries at all and appear to require that you are to fix it all.

Session 2 Community Activity

Open and closed questions – Both have important purposes.

Open questions give the person that is questioned opportunity to share more than one word answers thereby giving us more information and insight into the problems.

Closed questions require a “yes” or “no,” “fine,” or some such one word answer. These questions give us more factual or precise information.

i. Examples of open and closed questions:

1. What time is it? closed
2. Where do you live? closed
3. How old were you at the time? closed
4. What are some things you remember that you and your mother did together that were enjoyable? open
5. How do you tend to organize your day? Open

In groups of 4, have two people be the speaker and the listener. The speaker is to have some sort of story or problem, and the listener will use open and closed questions, clarifying questions, and summarize. The two listening should take note of how the questions are being used properly. It is okay to critique and encourage one another gently with love.

Further information:

Remember that God has given us the ability to change. To be able to change, He has given us the spiritual resources of prayer, Scripture, holy spirit, one another. We cannot change without the help of Yahweh, Jesus Christ, and the holy spirit within us.

Getting an idea of what the person’s spiritual life actually looks like will assist you in determining where your work begins in helping the person to apply Scripture effectively in his/her life.

Practice using open and closed questions, mirroring, and summarizing with a partner in the class.

Talk about any event or circumstance you would like to that is not too personal or negative. (Below are some ideas if you would like to use one.) Work on rephrasing the question until it is what you really want to ask. The group is to help the person asking the questions in the conversation to ask something else or phrase the questions differently. It is good to hear how others would respond to the same situation. The one role playing can also say how the different questions impacted his or her thinking/emotions.

Situations:

1. A person has trouble with being late to work. He is about to lose his job if he is late again.
2. A teen is failing in math and doesn’t want her parents to find out.
3. A young woman you just met mentions that she has cancer and is giving up on living.
4. A co-worker who confides in you about her depression mentions that today is especially hard because her boyfriend just broke up with her.

Only true Christian ministry can put grace in the heart so that lives are changed and problems are really solved. The best thing we can do for people is not to solve their problems for them but so relate them to God's grace that they will be enabled to solve their problems and not repeat them.

"It has been said that "the heart of every problem is the problem in the heart;" but the statement is only partly true. Sometimes it isn't what we have done that creates the difficulty but what others have done...People may not cause their own problems, but if they relate to their problems in the wrong way, they will make the problems worse. What life does to us depends on what life finds in us, and that is where the grace of God comes in." Warren W. Wiersbe, *On Being a Servant of God* (Quoted on pg. 1 in *Promoting Change through Brief Therapy in Christian Counseling*)

People have the ability to change and grow.

Focus on the problem at hand. There may be a long history of problems or even related problems, but the one in the present is the one to be attended to. We easily may become bogged down in a labyrinth of issues. After the attending problem is resolved, the individual may need some more help with past problems or a referral to a counselor. Phil. 1:6 - "God, who began the good work within you, will continue his good work until it is finally finished on that day when Christ Jesus comes back again."

Assess what the person has done already to help with the problem. Pick up on the person's strengths, and help him/her see them as strengths to apply again or possibly in a modified way. Helping people see they have skills and have used those skills successfully is a great way to encourage them to deal with their problems.

Example:

You: Tell me, what are some things that you have done to solve this problem?

Person: Hmm, I don't have any idea.

You: I appreciate that, but I am wondering what you actually did to help the situation before we began to talk.

Person: Well, I talked with my husband about it, and he said he didn't know what to do either.

You: Did just talking it out with him seem to help?

Person: Yes and no. I think I was wanting him to figure it out and make it go away. I was disappointed that he couldn't help, but I did feel good that he listened.

You: Is there anything else that you have tried?

Person: I talked with Sally, but she was not going to budge. I felt like it is a lost cause. Although after I called her, she did reach out to me and asked me to meet up with her. That did seem to help me think this is not so hopeless.

You: So then you reached out to two people and received mixed responses, and still felt like it was a positive move to talk to them about the issue. Sounds like you do well at reaching out for help. Can you think of some other ways you could help resolve this other than talking with people?
