|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | * **23** | |
|  | **Helping Skills:**  **Helping Others By Hearing God** | |
| What’s the Point? | We cannot fully realize our potential as Christians if we don't shut up about our own opinions of how to fix things and listen to God speaking to us, and listen to others and react to them the way that Christ teaches us. Listening plays a key role in serving and ministering to others as well as helping us on our faith journey by helping us to hear what help the Church offers in order to understand what God wants for us and wants us to do in relation to our neighbors. | |
| **Background Information** | ***Reference***   * ***NAB****: 1 Sam 3:1-10, Lk 11:5-13* * ***CCC****: ¶ 1816;2044; 2087; 2232-3; 2471-4* * *You Can Have Excellent Listening Skills By Nancy Baker-Brown, MS, LPC, BCETS (attached)*   There is a feeling that our generation has traded old-fashioned listening skills for voyeurism. That and the disconnected connectedness of social media. To converse, to dialogue, to share with another person, face-to-face in vulnerability and complete acceptance – this, they say, is becoming a lost art.  Perhaps so. We pay people to listen to us. We have a voracious appetite for “reality” television shows where we can listen anonymously as other people bare their souls, or something like one. We retain our faceless status with Internet communication, and social media. We would often rather listen to ear-plug media players, stream videos, or go to movies than sit together and talk about what's going on inside of us. We telecommute rather than go to the office. We use phones to ‘text’ rather than to talk.  And yet, we all deeply desire that someone listen to us. To hear us. To hear what we mean, and not just what we say; to acknowledge us. Modern Existentialism struggles with this feeling; our desire to be meaningful, to assert our existence, to recognize that we are alive to ourselves and to others. That is the abyss the World has led us to. Fortunately we are not bound by the World’s limitations. We are disciples. We are God’s and God is ours. God is not like all the non-listeners around us. God is not more concerned about personal convenience (*Status*: “Busy” meaning “Don't bother me!”) or private agendas (“I'm already in bed, ready for sleep!”). Like the neighbor in the parable, non-listeners finally listen to us only because they're tired of hearing us (*c.f. Lk* 11:5-8). This is not like God.  At the same time it can be difficult for us to listen to God speak to us. Sometimes He says things we do not want to hear. Sometimes our status is “busy.” Sometimes we are overwhelmed with life and in those situations prayer is our best bet for getting things off our chests. But drawing near to God is not only speaking at/to Him, but it entails hearing God speak as well.  And that requires silence. It is difficult to be silent before Him; heck it is difficult to be silent anytime. And this phenomenon is nothing new. At the Transfiguration, Peter, standing before the Mystery and majesty of Jesus in his glory, fumbled the ball (*c.f.* *Mt* 17:4-5). He was quick to prattle on, unable to slow down, be quiet and to sit silently, just drink in the moment. We too are quick to jump in and start babbling, rattling off our needs, wants, desires, and petty problems when we need to be quiet and “*hear Him*.” It is far more difficult to be silent before God than to speak to God. In today’s hurry up, noisy, and distracting world, most of us have forgotten how to sit in silence and listen for God.  In order to be effective disciples, to be able to hear God and others, we need to cultivate the silence of the soul. In our multi-tasking, hurry-up world, many find it frightening to be still and silent. In our effort to be active instead of passive we move too quickly running past God as he sits and waits for us. This blind pass causes some to say that God is absent, that God does not speak as He used to in the old days (c.f. *Heb* 1:1). Perhaps the problem is simply that we do not listen like we did in the days of old. Perchance we need to look back to those days. May be we need to examine the old days to get a feel for it. We see the phrase in Psalm 62: “*My soul waits in silence for God only; From Him is my salvation*” (*Ps* 62:1). Certainly an old statement, so we need to do a bit of Scriptural study here to see what the psalmist is really telling us. The Hebrew word used in that passage which we translate as “silence” is broader than just “no noise”; it is more along the lines of ‘stillness, repose, or still, patient waiting” basically ‘the silence of the grave’. In that case we move from a sense of ‘active silence’ to one of a more passive activity; one where we have nothing but listening: death.  *To Tweet or not to Tweet, that is the question. Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous comments or to take tweet against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them?* (all apologies to Shakespeare) No need to be silent when you have everything at your fingertips: music, movies, TV shows, the attention of others…everyone with device in hand waiting for the next release, tweet, e-mail. Heck, even the Pope has a Twitter account, with millions of followers. On the one hand it does show that we can really get the message out through this explosion of connectivity, but on the other it also shows how it can also separate us from deeper relationships. Thoughts thrown out upon the waves are soon forgotten. Sound-bites which titillate but do not affect. We know but we do not understand, absorb, integrate, or care. In our desire to make ourselves be heard to God and others through our own Pharisaic bravado, we overwhelm God in the whispering wind, and forget to listen for His small quiet voice (*c.f.* *1 Kings 19: 1-15a*).  God still speaks, where do we go to listen?  “…*in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe,*” (*Heb* 1:2) to finish out the quote. Grace is God’s gift to help us fulfill ourselves and therefore help bring salvation to others. To receive that grace, we must first learn to listen in the places where he speaks; outside of our hearts, God primarily speaks through His Church, especially the written Word, the Bible. The Holy Spirit who is the divine author of the Scriptures, takes His word and speaks to our inner most being concerning “*sin and righteousness and judgment*” (*Jn* 16:8). He also speaks to us through liturgy and sacrament, that is, through our Catholic community.  Still, we need to cultivate the silence of the soul so that He may break in upon us anytime, anywhere He so chooses. It’s just as important that we recognize His voice when He does speak. After listening and hearing, the next important and crucial thing is that we obey God when He does speak. As we see in today’s scripture passage: “*Thus Samuel grew and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fail*” (*1 Sam* 3:19).  God still speaks, how do we respond?  Still we have freewill, for better or for worse. How tragic that we have the ability to turn a deaf ear to God. We can drown out the whisper of God's voice. We have to look around, to be aware to un-plug, tune-out, and, unlike Mr. Leary, not “turn on” but turn to God. If we just make ourselves aware of God speaking to us at all times, especially in our Catholic community then we will be more aware of the times when He chooses to come through the Word, the Liturgy, a devotional reading, a song, a spiritual longing, or someone who gives good advice.  Like Samuel, the important thing is to silently sit in His presence and listen, then rise up and run to do His will. Once we clear our minds and ears, once we are able to hear Him, we will naturally respond. The way he made us, the gifts and graces he has provided us will naturally lead us into a beautiful and life-giving response. If our lives are so enhanced by listening, then how much more will the lives of others be if we silently listen to them, and help them to silently listen to God.  Being a good disciple means being quiet, allowing God to speak to our heart, then do what He commands. The Church offers us many ways to connect to God, liturgy, rosaries, devotions, Reconciliation, the Eucharist, just to name a few. The simplest prayer is Samuel’s response: “*Speak, for your servant is listening*.” | |
| ,Materials Needed | * Laptop * Projector * Internet access * Bible PowerPoint Presentation | |
| **Attention Grabber** | ***Are we listening to God?* (5 min)**  **MISSING: Video at** [**http://www.mycatholicfaith.org/vlog/?p=9**](http://www.mycatholicfaith.org/vlog/?p=9)  This topic always reminds me of the joke about the old man caught in a flood prays to God to deliver him, and feels a great peace in response. Therefore he becomes steadfast in his hope. He hears on the radio to evacuation and where to go, but he holds fast, confident in God. Eventually, a sheriff comes by and offers him a ride to the shelter, but he informs him that God has promised to take care of him and refuses the offer.  The waters begin to rise and a boat comes by, offering to take him to safety. Again he informs them that God has promised to take care of him and refuses the offer. The water continues to rise and he is forced upon the roof of his house. A helicopter comes by and throws him a rope, but, confident in God he refuses.  Suddenly the water rises violently and he is swept away to his death. At the Gate, the Lord greets him to welcome him to paradise. A bit miffed, the old man says: “I prayed to you to deliver me and you said you would…how could you let me die?”  God replied: “*Let you die? I sent you a radio message, a sheriff, a boat, a helicopter….what else do you want from me?*” | |
| **Outline** | **Prayer**: | *1 Samuel 3:1-10* |
| **Activity**: | *Are we listening to God?* |
| **Presentation**: |  |
| **Table Discussion**: | *Table Questions*. |
| **Post Discussion:** | *None*. |
| **Closing Prayer**: | *Group Prayer.* |
| **Prayer** | **Introductory Prayer:** (**5 min**)  ***1 Samuel 3:1-10***  *During the time young Samuel was minister to the LORD under Eli, a revelation of the LORD was uncommon and vision infrequent. One day Eli was asleep in his usual place. His eyes had lately grown so weak that he could not see. The lamp of God was not yet extinguished, and Samuel was sleeping in the temple of the LORD where the ark of God was.*  *The LORD called to Samuel, who answered, “Here I am.”*  *He ran to Eli and said, “Here I am. You called me.” “I did not call you,” Eli said. “Go back to sleep.” So he went back to sleep. Again the LORD called Samuel, who rose and went to Eli. "Here I am," he said. “You called me.” But he answered, “I did not call you, my son. Go back to sleep.” At that time Samuel was not familiar with the LORD, because the LORD had not revealed anything to him as yet. The LORD called Samuel again, for the third time. Getting up and going to Eli, he said, “Here I am. You called me.” Then Eli understood that the LORD was calling the youth. So he said to Samuel, “Go to sleep, and if you are called, reply, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’” When Samuel went to sleep in his place, the LORD came and revealed his presence, calling out as before, “Samuel, Samuel!” Samuel answered, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”* | |
| **Pre-discussion Presentation** | (15 min) | |
|  | ***Listening Skills: Listening to Help***  What is the greatest trait Jesus exhibited?  Compassion. Compassion is the ability to “suffer with” someone else, to be Christ for them. In order to be able to minister to another, to be a disciple, to be Christ for others, we must diminish while the Christ in them increases. If we saw Christ then would we drop down at his feet to hear what he had to say, right? Then we should do the same for the Christ in another.  In order to be compassionate we must hear the needs of others. We must be silent in the face of their fears and sufferings so that we can hear their need and respond. | |
| **Table Talk** | Group Questions (30 min) | |
| **General Group Questions:**   1. What are “helping skills?” 2. Do you think that your peers are generally good listeners? Why or why not? 3. Do you think that your parents are good listeners? Why or why not? 4. Are you a good listener? Why or why not? 5. How do you feel when you're expressing your opinion in this class and no one listens to you or interrupts you? Why? 6. List the attributes of a good listener? Why are each of these attributes important? 7. Does a good listener always possess a solution to a problem of concern, or does a listener provide other functions other than being a “problem solver?” 8. How can a good listener facilitate help for someone in need? Give some examples. 9. Have you ever been in a situation where someone told you something important, controversial, or revealing, and you had difficulty determining whether to act on that information to help that person with a crisis?   **Read** *Luke 11:5 – 13*   1. What kind of listener is the friend in Jesus’ story? What motivates his “generosity?” 2. When has someone "listened" to you in this way, more to get rid of you then because of true caring? 3. In contrast to the friend in Jesus’ story, this verse also describes the way God listens. What happens when we ask something of God? Seek after God? “Knock” at God's door? 4. How do we know when God has listened to our asking, seeking, or knocking? 5. According to Jesus, what kind of listener is God? 6. How can listening to God help you to listen to others better? | |
| **Post-discussion Presentation** | None (0 min) | |
|  | **None.** | |
| **Closing** | **Prayer (5 min).** | |
|  | **Group Intercessions**  God is listening and always cares. Group members should silently complete each of the following prayer sentences read out loud:  God, I feel angry when…  God, I feel frightened when…  God, I feel hurt when…  God, I feel strong when…  God, I feel loved when…  ***Conclude by praying***: Loving, listening, and caring God, thank you for hearing and fully understanding the way we feel. Thanks for listening. Teach us to listen, too. Amen. | |
| Reminder | **\*\*\*\* REMEMBER IMPORTANCE OF RECORDING ATTENDANCE!!** This is a legal document! Please, write down on your attendance sheet the name of any teen at your table, whether they are on your roll or not. | |
| Attachments | * *You Can Have Excellent Listening Skills* | |

You Can Have Excellent Listening Skills

*By Nancy Baker-Brown, MS, LPC, BCETS*

Any professional counselor will tell you that one of the biggest problems they see among their clients is poor listening skills. People get into trouble in their relationships because they have not developed their ability to listen and communicate.

**Barriers to Effective Communication**

There are some good reasons why many people are less-than-effective communicators. These are the most common reasons:

* Lack of skill; not knowing how
* Not taking the time to think through what one wants to say
* Not taking the time to anticipate what another person might be thinking and feeling
* Fear of revealing too much of oneself
* Being afraid of another person’s anger
* Not wanting to hurt another person’s feelings

**Four Key Listening Skills**

Listening skills are the building blocks of effective communication. These skills enable you to demonstrate that you are interested in what the other person has to say, as well as hearing and understanding the other person. Four key listening skills are open-ended questions, summary statements, reflective statements, and neutral questions and phrases. They are easy to learn with a little practice.

Open-ended questions begin with *what, why, how do,* or *tell me.*

* These questions get the other person to open up and elaborate on the topic.
* Asking these kinds of questions gets the other person involved by giving him or her a chance to tell what they think or know.
* These questions are designed to encourage the other person to talk.
* They are useful when the other person is silent, or reluctant to elaborate.
* They are also useful in dealing with negative emotions (such as anger or fear), since they help encourage the other person to vent feelings.

Examples of open-ended questions:

1. “How do you feel about what she said?”

2. “Tell me all about this new project.”

3. “What do you think about the new offices?”

Summary statements sum up what you hear the other person is saying.

* A summary statement enhances the other person’s self-esteem by showing that you were listening carefully.
* It also helps you focus on facts, not emotions.
* It helps the other person clarify his or her own thinking by hearing your summary.
* Summary statements also help you deal with multiple disagreements so you can deal with them one by one.
* They help eliminate confusion by focusing on the relevant facts.
* Summary statements also help you separate the important issues from the trivial.

Examples of summary statements:

1. “So you’re saying you want to go to the library and the bookstore before you decide which books you need. Then you want to go over your choices with me.”
2. “You’re saying that you tried your best on this homework assignment, but it was beyond your control.”

Reflective statements rephrase what you heard the person say and reflect it back.

* A reflective statement is a way of demonstrating that you were listening carefully.
* It shows the other person that you take them seriously and want to understand what they are feeling.
* It helps you clarify whether you understand what the other person is saying and feeling.

Examples of reflective statements:

1. “You feel sad because your mother has to leave so soon after such a good visit.”
2. “You’re feeling upset because I was late again.”
3. “You sound frustrated that you won’t be able to finish the project on time.”

Neutral questions and phrases get the other person to open up and elaborate on the topic you are discussing.

* These questions are more focused than open-ended questions.
* They help the other person understand what you are interested in hearing more about.
* They further communication because they help you gain more information.
* When you ask these kinds of questions, you demonstrate to the other person that you are interested and that you are listening.

Examples of neutral questions and phrases:

1. “Give me some more reasons why we should buy the computer now rather than in January.”
2. “Tell me more about why you want to take this job.”

**Try Your Hand at Using Listening Skills**

Here are some common life situations where good listening skills would come in handy. Read each one and think about which of the four listening skills would help the most. Write an example of what you could say to the other person to validate his or her feelings and encourage further expression of emotion. Check your answers with those on the bottom of this newsletter.

1. Your spouse returns from an important business trip. He is very quiet. When you ask him how the trip went, he shrugs his shoulders and says, “Okay.”

Which listening skill would be effective in this situation?

What could you say?

1. Your coworker says, “I really wish I didn’t have to go to that conference next week. I know I have to, but I wish I could get out of it somehow. I don’t like traveling, I hate being away from my family, and I resent having to spend time kissing up to those field people!

Which listening skill would be effective in this situation?

What could you say?

1. “I wish I could just stay home and garden today,” your spouse says.

Which listening skill would be effective in this situation?

What could you say?

1. You are 20 minutes late to pick up your son for a soccer game. There was no way you could let him know you were going to be late. When you arrive, he opens the car door and glares at you. He growls, “I thought you’d be on time for once!

Which listening skill would be effective in this situation?

What could you say?

1. Your business partner wants to stay in your present office space, which you have outgrown. You want to look for a bigger place. She says, “It makes me so nervous to make such a big commitment! And what if we don’t like it in the new place? I think we should just stay where we are."

Which listening skill would be effective in this situation?

What could you say?

**Suggested Answers to Listening Skills Exercise**

Lots of different listening skills would be effective in each of the five situations. Here are some suggested answers:

1. Open-ended question: “Why don’t you tell me about it?”
2. Reflective statement: “You sound frustrated and upset about having to go to the conference.”
3. Reflective statement: “You really love gardening because it’s so relaxing.”
4. Reflective statement: “You are really upset with me for being late, aren’t you?”

Summary statement: “You’re afraid that we’ll be in over our heads and will think it’s a mistake.”