



2. Eyes and ears

[8.00] Arrival, welcome and introduction

Please feel free to have your video switched on or off as you prefer during our time together. We'll have some times of input in a big group like this, and other times in some small groups. As far as we are able, you will be in the same small groups as last week. In the small group discussion feel free to share as much or as little as you feel comfortable. Don't feel in any way pressured to share more than you want to. While we are in the large group it would be helpful to put yourself on mute to avoid any distractions.

[8.05] Recap from last week

Last week we looked at the heart and the goal of loving others. When we come across someone who is struggling, there are lots of things we would like to do to help. There are lots of things we *can* do, and lots of things we cannot as well. But we saw last week that God has a goal for each one of us, which is to make us mature in Christ. While there are lots of things we might like to do for someone who is suffering, we can be involved in that work which God is doing.

So with that foundation in place, let's move on to this week's topics.



Activity: Think about a time when you really felt cared for by another person. What did they do to make you feel that way?

We are moving from this week onwards to consider some practical things we can do to love those in need. And it might seem a bit tricky to connect that with the goal that we thought about last week – to bring people to maturity in Christ. But just consider those things we have listed for a moment. Who is the ultimate example of those things? Jesus! So as we love people practically we are pointing people to the person of Jesus. We aren't working toward a different goal, we are directing people to Jesus, the lover of their souls.

So, what we can do to love others? In the remainder of the course we are going to think about things we can *all* do. You may bring specialised skills, which is great. But what can any Christian do to love others with the love of Jesus? One of the fundamental this we can do is *listen*.

The power of listening

[8.10] Okay, I'm sorry if that seemed a bit anti-climactic! Listening? Isn't that really simple? Surely we need something more detailed and in depth?

Don't look down on listening because listening is vitally important. Consider these Scriptures:

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak... (James 1:19)

To answer before listening—that is folly and shame.
(Proverbs 18:13)

We *need* to listen. Those are the warning passages if you like, of the danger of not listening. But consider the positive power of listening to others.

God listens

The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to their cry; (Psalm 34:15)

In Mark 10, Jesus was surrounded by a huge crowd as he left Jericho. Yet when he heard a blind beggar calling out to him, Scripture says, "Jesus stopped." He called Bartimus to himself and listened to him.

When we listen, we are demonstrating something of God's character.

Listening shows value

Listening to another person shows that we think they are important; it demonstrates that we care for them in a fundamental way; it allows them to be honest and open. You listen to those people or things that you think are *worth* listening to. Listening shows worth.

Listening helps us to understand

Listening *always* comes before speaking. Even if there is much that we might want to speak into that person's life, listening well first allows us to understand what that person is going through. When it comes time to speak, it means we will speak well and accurately into that person's life and situation. It means we aren't flippant or dismissive. It means that we don't assume we know what's going on, but really get to know the person before we respond. Very often listening also allows a person to express themselves and in doing so clarify their thoughts and ideas – listening does achieve a great deal!

Finally, consider that listening to others demonstrates something of the health of our own spiritual life. Listen to these words from Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

He who can no longer listen to his brother will soon be no longer listening to God either; he will be doing nothing but prattle in the presence of God too. This is the beginning of the death of the spiritual life Anyone who thinks that his time is too valuable to spend keeping quiet will eventually have no time for God and his brother, but only for himself and for his own follies.

How not to listen

[8.20] Okay, I hope that has motivated us to get listening! So let's think about how we can do that. Sometimes it can be helpful to consider the opposite of something in order to learn to do it well. So that's what we are going to do first - we are going to think about how *not* to listen.



Watch the following video. Then in your small groups, ask yourselves: What ways of listening badly did you spot?

How to listen well

[8.35] Okay, now we know how to not listen, let's flip those things around and consider practical ways to listen well. Please note, there is no formula to listening to someone else. This is not a checklist to go through but more good practice to follow. Make it work for your own style and personality!

- Be attentive. Put aside distractions and give your attention fully to the person in front of you. Sounds obvious doesn't it? But actually quite tricky to do! Put aside your phone, ignore your smartwatch. Go to a place where you won't be distracted either. I find it very hard not to watch a TV when it's on in the background, so I need to sit with my back to it!
- Use eye contact. Eye contact is very powerful and fosters a great deal of trust, value and intimacy. Very important to use, and very important not to over use! One of the reasons Zoom is so tiring is that we are essentially giving eye contact to another person for a long period of time, which is exhausting!
- Use the 80/20 rule: 80% listening to 20% talking. We do need to talk in order to keep the conversation going, and we'll consider what to say more next week. But make sure you are doing far more listening than talking.
- Watch body language. People speak with their bodies as well as their mouths. How a person sits, or the gestures they use, can tell a lot about what they are thinking and feeling. Is this person closed off, or open? Are they angry, sad, confused, happy? Again, Zoom is really difficult for this, especially if you can only see someone's head!
- Don't interrupt. Hopefully you noticed that one quickly in the video! Interrupting not only stops someone saying something, it communicates that what they were saying is unimportant, and what I am saying is more important.
- Don't assume. It's easy to hear what someone is saying and fill in the blanks. You hear "I'm worried" and assume that this person is worried about the pandemic, or the health of their mother that they were just talking about. But their worry could be deeper or different. Keep listening and make sure you haven't jumped to conclusions



Discuss in your groups: Which of these practical steps do you find most challenging? What can you do to help develop this skill?

[8.45] As we saw before, we listen in order to understand someone. So as well as listening *to* a person, we also want to listen *for* certain things. What does what they are saying reveal about themselves? What does it show about what is truly going on in their lives? The words we speak in conversation say a lot more than we often imagine. They reveal our desires, our goals, the things we value, the things we trust, and the things we fear.

We'll think about this a bit more next week as we look at asking good questions. For the moment, consider that every person is in connection with four main circles: themselves, others they know, the world in general, and God. What does what this person is saying reveal about all four of these circles?

Dealing with confidentiality

[8.50] Before we finish for this week, as we have been thinking about listening to what people say, we need to say a little bit about confidentiality.

It's quite possible that someone might come to you and say, "Can I talk to you about something just between us?" We cannot give an absolute guarantee of confidentiality. If there is a risk of danger to themselves or others, or if sharing information could prevent a crime, we have a duty to inform the relevant authorities.

Most people, however, don't want complete confidentiality, and the reason you know that is that they are willing to share it with you! What they want to avoid is gossip and not knowing who knows what about them and their situation.

So do not promise confidentiality but instead say something like: "There might be some circumstances where I would need to share information with someone else. But I can promise that I won't tell anyone else without letting you know." Within the bounds of those who need to know about your conversation, then keep the details confidential.

It can be useful, if you have had a detailed pastoral conversation to make some brief notes about it. This will help you to remember some of the details and in case you need to pass some of that on to another person. Write down brief notes about what was said (not your own opinions!), use initials to keep some level of anonymity, and store those notes somewhere safe.

It can be very helpful to share a pastoral burden with someone else. Be transparent and tell the person this is what you are going to do. Then find an appropriate person to talk that through with: a life group leader, a member of staff, church warden, myself.

If you have any concerns about the safety of children or vulnerable adults, you need to speak with one of our Safeguarding Officers, Graham or Michelle. If you can't get hold of them, please speak to me or one of the wardens. If you aren't sure if this is a safeguarding matter, get in touch!

Please note that GDPR is not a barrier to sharing information but simply provides a way for personal information to be shared appropriately.

[8.55] Questions

[9.00] Finish