COMMUNITY CARE SPIRITUAL FORMATION: LISTENING TO THE HEART

Icebreaker: Name, favorite song/music group

Much has been said and written about the need to listen. We live in a world of many words, but unfortunately few people seem to be actually listening to each other. Husbands struggle to communicate with their wives, and children often feel unheard by their parents. Frequently, people find themselves struggling in life situations where they have such deep feelings they can find no one who will listen to them, or no one who really understands. This should never happen in the Church of Jesus Christ.

Listening is one of the most crucial tasks of anyone who truly wants to show the love and compassion of Christ. It is very easy to give someone a quick blessing, promise to pray for them, and send them on their way. It is much more difficult to listen carefully to what the person has to say, and attempt to truly understand what they feel. You have probably heard, or even been taught, the principles of active listening, but this training takes these basic principles, adds to them the heartfelt compassion of one who has shared similar experiences, and teaches us to rely on the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. This combines to lead us to understand and practice the art of “deep listening” that has more to do with what’s in the heart than what’s in words.

This training is designed to help the participants look beyond mere words, and even body language, and try to understand what is really going on in the depths of a person’s heart, especially as they struggle with agonizing life experiences such as the loss of a loved one, a painful divorce, serious illness, etc. This will be accomplished by the following:

1.) To help the participants appreciate the value of “deep listening”.
2.) To teach participants to sort through communication style and content to find truth.
3.) To give practical training on how to:
   a. Listen fully, without responding.
   b. Pray while listening.
   c. Respond without giving advice, or trying to “fix” the person or his/her problems.

Exercise: write down a time in your life you really desperately needed someone to listen to you. Did you have someone in your life that “deeply” listened to you? If so, what did they do? If not, what do you wish they had done?

Class brainstorm: What does effective listening look like?

I. “Deep Listening”

A. Based on active listening James 1:19, 26; 3:3-12
   1. Active listening involves some very important elements. It involves hearing what is being said.
   2. Active listening also involves demonstrating open body language, giving appropriate verbal and non-verbal feedback. Don’t be afraid of “Godly gaps”.
   3. Finally, active listening includes empathizing with the individual.

B. Going beyond active listening. Psalm 143:1
   1. Deep listening involves a more relaxed, open, and inviting style of communication because the individual is in crisis. Their intensity will provide the impetus for the rush of information, feelings, and emotion.
   2. Deep listening includes the Christian components of unconditional love, conditional praise, compassion, empathy, and yes, even sympathy.
   3. Deep listening is also full of “flash prayers”, with an absolute reliance on God and His Spirit to create the necessary environment and thereby provide hope and healing for the individual in a crisis.
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C. Listen carefully to distinguish between distorted perspectives, and the “real deal”.
   1. Critical fact: all emotional pain is the result of perspective. James 1:2
      a. Scriptures that change perspective
         1. James 1:2
         2. Romans 8:28
      b. Most importantly, God’s perspective is that difficult times are a good thing
         1. It leads us to Jesus, who bears our burdens Matthew 11:28
         2. It leads us to help each other Galatians 6:2

Exercise: critique the role play. What was good and what was not so good?

II. How do you filter content? Listen carefully and organize their content for them
A. People in pain, because of their high emotional level, tend to ramble, lack organization in their presentation, and repeat themselves.
B. The enemy of high emotions is rational thought. Content questions deescalate.
C. At times we may interject some organization, or stop them if we are unclear, but one of the goals of deep listening is to get a comprehensive picture of what they’re trying to tell us, facts as well as feelings, letting them do it their way.

III. Listen carefully to see if the person is being manipulative.
A. Is it a situation where they have a problem with another individual, and they are trying to get you on their side?
B. The keys to this are if they try to get you to say something negative about the other person, judge their behavior, or to take action against the other person.

Exercise: partner up with someone and listen as they share one of their more emotional life experiences (five minutes, then switch). How do you feel? Did you do OK?

III. Bearing the emotional burden
A. Like Jesus promised, and did. Matthew 11:28
   1. Being open to another’s pain, and raw emotion Mark 9:22-24
   2. Seeing them through the process once the flood-gates have opened.
B. Sharing one another’s burden like commanded in Galatians 6:2
   1. We help them with their burden, then give it to Jesus
   2. We will feel drained, but good.
   3. We will have done one of the most important things a person in this world could ever do for another.

IV. Summation: What have you learned?
A. __________________________________________________________
B. __________________________________________________________

V. Prayer and dismissal

HOMEWORK: Chapters 5-6 in “Boundaries”, by Cloud and Townsend