

Biblical Fellowship Week 6: Listening and Empathizing

True Listening and Empathy Definitions:

- True listening is when you are silently paying full attention to and taking in both what someone is saying and what they aren't saying (e.g. implied messages, emotions, body language).
- Empathizing goes one critical step further. Empathy takes what you now know and communicates to the person talking that you've heard them, that you see what they see, that you can feel what they feel.

To be better listeners and empathizers:

1. Be fully present.

- a. Put your phone on silent and out of view when fellowshiping with others.
- b. Before you meet with others, take a few seconds alone to clear your mind of distractions.
- c. Watch for the urge to prepare an answer in your head while the other person is still talking.
- d. If you can't be present (e.g. your kids have needs, you're too overwhelmed, etc), let the other person know that you'd love to meet later when you can give them your full attention.

2. Listen to the unspoken.

- a. What are they saying? What are they *not* saying?
- b. What words or phrases are they repeating?
- c. What are they meaning to say?
- d. What's the essence of what they are saying?
- e. What's the perception/belief behind what they are saying?

3. Watch for judgements.

- a. Stall the desire to filter information as "good or bad", "like or dislike", "agree or disagree".
- b. Later, we will learn how to confront, exhort, or challenge our friends, but we need to first practice developing connection.

4. Make sure you can get an agreement on your listening.

- a. Repeat the other person's viewpoint in your own words: "I'm hearing you say ABC."
- b. Then ask, "Is that right?" or "Am I off?"
- c. If the person says that you've got it, great! But if the person has more to add or corrects you, keep trying: "Oh, okay, I'm seeing BCD now. Is that right?"
- d. Don't move forward until you've gotten agreement!

5. Learn from others.

- a. Observe someone in action, who you feel like does an exceptional job of listening and empathizing. What do they say or do differently that builds connection and understanding? What mannerisms do they bring into the conversation to let the other person know they can be heard? What emotions do they express that shows they're listening?

6. Practice the 80-20 rule.

- a. If you want to practice listening in a vacuum, aim for 80% listening, 20% talking. Sometimes, the barrier to listening well is just that we have a lot we want to say!

7. Express your listening.

- a. Lean in and nod occasionally.
- b. Try to maintain eye contact. Be careful of watching other things while someone is speaking, even if you can multitask.
- c. Add in periodic "hm's" or "yeah's" to show you're tracking.
- d. Mirror emotions by smiling when they smile or frowning when they frown.

8. Feel what they feel.

- a. Even if you have never been in their specific situation, take note of what emotion they are expressing, and then think of a time when you strongly felt that same emotion.