

#2 Listening and Asking in Evangelism

Purpose of Living on Mission: Equip students to walk by faith, communicate their faith, and multiply their faith. Top 20 things to help you not just survive but thrive in your faith for a lifetime!

Goal of Seminar: Teach students about the benefits of listening well and asking good questions in evangelism, compared to simply the “telling” approach. Walk through the Listening Cycle and how they can demonstrate an authentic care for the other person through growing their listening skills. Discuss Randy Newman’s book, Questioning Evangelism, particularly Chp 2: “How do Questions Pave the Way for Answers?”

HOOK: What are you doing during the “safety announcement” at the beginning of an airplane flight? How would you describe your listening in those moments?

ILLUSTRATIONS:

Add your own thoughts and illustrations in this column.

Often when we think about taking part in evangelism, a couple things come to mind. Maybe it’s telling your faith story, or sharing the 4 points of the gospel, or knowing answers to apologetic questions. Those are great things! But today, we’re going to flip that around and talk about 2 skills that are imperative to evangelism that you may have not thought too much about before.

These skills are Listening Well and Asking Good Questions.

LEARNING THE SKILL OF LISTENING WELL

If you’re sitting down with a good friend and sharing about a hard day, what would be some actions your friend might do to indicate they are listening well?

What would indicate to you that they are not listening, and possibly don’t care about what you’re sharing?

Sadly, we often employ the skills of a “bad listener.” We can be preoccupied with our own to-do list, too busy to slow down and care, lack gentleness and trust, focus on the words the other person is using and miss the meaning of what they are saying, thinking about advice we can give to solve a problem, and jump in with our own agenda and perspective. And in evangelism, it is that much more important to grow in our ability to truly listen, so that we can understand where others are coming from and meet them where they are.

We’ll be using the “Listening Cycle” from Interpersonal Communication Programs, Inc., Evergreen, CO. It is a great resource to evaluate how you’re doing in the realm of listening, and in what listening skills you can take a step of growth.

The **Goal to Listening... is to Understand** (not to respond)

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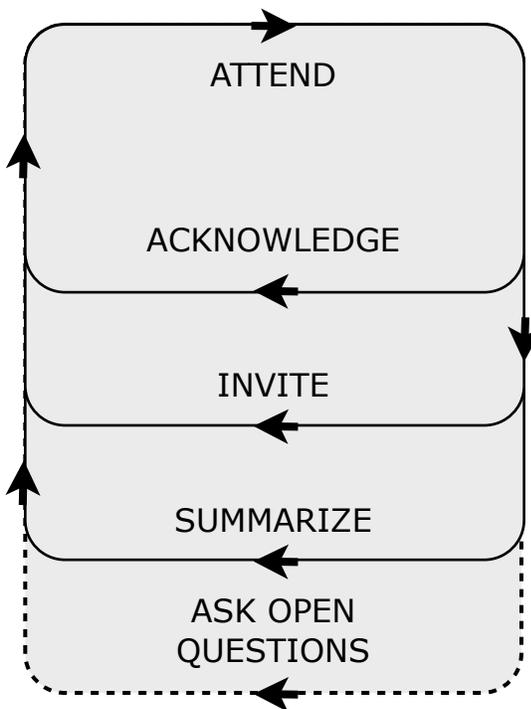
When we are not listening well, our goal is usually to respond or come up with our own defense. This usually doesn't go well! Instead, let's try to make it our goal, especially when we're sharing the gospel, to understand. This is at first, quite unnatural. Christians often get on the defensive or offensive when it comes to sharing the gospel. I think it's best to simply stay neutral and demonstrate love and care.

The first skills to listening are based in non-verbal communication.

Why might non-verbals be the best place to start with listening well?

Our thoughts and beliefs are written all over our face, in our posture, and in the way we carry ourselves. Whether or not we make eye contact, is significant in what we're communicating to other person - without even saying a word!

Draw the Listening Cycle on the board. Not necessarily in order... the Cycle is composed of continuous loops, always going back to Attend. Repeat and use skills in any order, except ask open questions last.



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ATTEND:

Attend is to look, listen and track. It is giving someone your full attention, making good eye-contact, facing your body directly towards them and allowing them to lead and set the pace of the conversation. It is to demonstrate with your non-verbal communication that you are fully engaged, you care about what they are saying, and you're committed to listening to only them, not being distracted by your surroundings or other things.

How do you feel when someone you are talking to is scanning what is behind you or not looking into your eyes when you're speaking?

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ACKNOWLEDGE:

Acknowledge is the use of non-verbals like nodding, smiling, or facial expressions that correspond to what they are sharing. It is also one or two-word answers like, “Exciting,” “Hmmm,” “Uh-huh,” “How frustrating,” “That’s hard,” etc. You want to acknowledge what they are saying and validating their emotions. Acknowledging isn’t agreeing with the content, but simply demonstrating active listening. It also gives the speaker the opportunity to clarify and re-direct the conversation. You will want to be careful to not lead, nor interpret more than what they are offering themselves.

When the listener is acknowledging, what might be the speaker’s response?

INVITE:

To invite, is to allow the speaker to share more information. Conversations have natural pauses, but it doesn’t mean the speaker is done sharing or is ready to move on. They might need more encouragement to share the deeper story. And in fact, they may be fearful of rejection or apathy towards what they are saying. They might be thinking, “Are you listening? Are you with me? Do you care?” This isn’t the time for asking open questions or giving advice. Simply say during a pause in the conversation, “Tell me more,” or “Is there anything else you want me to know?”

What else could you say to invite the speaker to share more?

SUMMARIZE:

Summarizing is helpful to check to be sure you are understanding what the other person is saying. It is reflective listening, capturing the main points of the conversation. For instance, say, “I think what you’re saying is _____. Is this what you shared? Is that right?” Ask for correction and clarification. It’s always best in summarizing to use the speaker’s words and language. That way, there is less confusion and room for misunderstanding. This might be obvious, by avoid phrases like, “I know exactly how you feel,” or “I totally understand.” Chances are, you don’t!

ASK OPEN QUESTIONS:

As you can see here, this part of the cycle is optional, indicated by the dotted line. It’s not a time to take the conversation somewhere off course, or where it hasn’t already been. The essence of “following” is giving somebody the opportunity to direct and guide the conversation wherever they feel comfortable. In the “invite” section, is when you can say, “is there anything else?” This is when you say, “I noticed you frowning, tell me more about that.” Or “Is there anything else you’d like me to know to understand you more?” Most importantly, these questions shouldn’t be leading, but should allow the speaker to go in the direction they desire.

How might utilizing the Listen Cycle help you in evangelism?

Listening intently and effectively to others when we are engaging in spiritual conversations is so important if we want them to experience our care for them and not just “our agenda.” Our hope is that people would hear the gospel and come to Christ, but often it doesn’t happen in that first or second encounter. The key to any good dialogue is listening well and asking good questions. If we do these things effectively, we have won the opportunity to share and tell about Jesus.

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The listening cycle can take a really long time, especially if you are chatting with a good friend. We want you to utilize these skills, possibly in a shorter time frame, when talking with folks you don't know in ministry mode evangelism.

ASKING GOOD QUESTIONS IN EVANGELISM

When you begin a dialogue about faith, it's always great to start off or transition with some spiritual questions.

What are some questions you have used before to start a spiritual conversation?

Here are some ideas we talked about in LOM 101-2. "So _____, tell me, what is your spiritual background?" "What do you believe about God?" "Did you grow up going to church with your family?" "Do you ever think about all this God stuff?" "Do you think spiritual life is important?" "Who do you think Jesus is?" "Do you think there is meaning to this life?" "Where do you think people go after they die?"

Now, we want to take asking questions to the next level. 9 times out of 10 the questions above begin some awesome conversations. But sometimes, once you're in a spiritual conversation, you realize the person you're chatting with is very, very far from God. And in fact, they might very well have no spiritual background and have no real beliefs in the mere existence of God. Growing in our skills to ask good questions, could help us in times like this!

According to Randy Newman in *Questioning Evangelism*, "Supporting facts and ideas build 'plausibility structures,' making belief in something more probable. Without plausibility structures, an idea is unlikely to get even a hearing, let alone adherents... The church's calling, then - in addition to proclaiming the gospel, feeding the poor, building up families, and encouraging the down-trodden - must also include intentional efforts to build plausibility structures."

Read **2 Corinthians 10:3-5**

3 For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. **4** The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. **5** We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

What are weapons of the world, when it comes to promoting an idea?

(According to Randy Newman, jargon, rhetoric, flash images, emotional manipulations, sales techniques)

What might be the "weapons" a Christian might use?

(Again, according to Randy Newman, praying for people, quoting Scripture, handing our tracts, proclaiming boldly the good news... But less often used to "demolish strongholds and arguments - are dialogue, discussion, challenging questions, well-crafted explanations about life's difficulties.)

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1) Sometimes people need to be challenged

For instance, if someone says, "I think all religions are the same," you might respond with "**Really?**" And then follow-up, "Do you really think your religion is the same as all others?" Or when someone says, "I think all people are basically good," we could respond with, "Really? Does that include Osama Bin Laden? Hitler?" Randy encourages the Christian to not be on the defensive when it comes to apologetic questions. And when you use the word, "Really?" it is best to be gentle and respectful, not at all sarcastic.

2) Some things can't be true

It's the law of contradiction. Some things, just can't be true. If someone says the common phrase, "All religions are true," we can gently press the issue and probe a bit more. Responding with the simple question, "**Can you explain that to me?**" is a great way to dialogue. That question can help a non-Christian work through their beliefs and opinions and sort out what can be true, and what simply cannot.

3) Some things can be partially true

Often people will say there is truth in many religions. Christians tend to go on the defensive and try to disprove all other religions. But, there is truth in many other world religions. For instance, Muslims believe in a monotheistic religion and Buddhists believe in the spiritual realm. C.S. Lewis says, "all those religions... contain at least some hint of truth." Randy encourages Christians to concede when statements are partially true, but in a loving and again, not sarcastic tone, respond with, "**So?**" ... "Buddhism does have some truth... you want to find the one that gets it all right. Have you studied Buddhism much?"

4) Some things might be true

We are confronted all the time with people's doubts. "Why should we believe what the Bible says about Jesus, or Moses, or anyone else?" That's a good question... and instead unloading 10 reasons why the Bible is valid, try this, "Let's just say there is a god and that he wants to communicate with us, that's possible, theoretically, isn't it? And let's just say that he's chosen to do so by inspiring people to write stuff down. Then, this same God also makes sure they stay that way. Isn't that possible?" Try adding the question, "**Isn't it possible that _____?**" to your evangelism dialogues!

5) We can know the truth

When confronted with an idea like, "No religion has the whole picture," the fifth question you can use is, "**How do you know that?**" Here are other variations, "What makes you believe that?" "What convinces you of that?" These questions get below the surface and must precede questions of gospel content. "Determining how we know something, must come before deciding what we know." (Randy Newman)

Questions can continue the dialogue in a loving, gentle, and honest way! As we listen well - our spiritual conversations will go deeper and become more effective. Try using these listening and asking skills in your next spiritual conversation!

Take 5 minutes and turn to a neighbor and practice the Listening Cycle while having a spiritual conversation using these 5 questions. (Really? Can you explain that to me? So? Isn't it possible that ___? How do you know that?)