



WEEK FIVE: LISTENING THE GIFT OF UNDERSTANDING

This week we will be exploring one of the most important relationship principles of this series: if we want to love others well, we have to learn to listen well! The reason is simple. Listening leads to understanding and understanding equips us to love. We will do this by studying several passages in the Bible that highlight the importance of listening—both for our personal growth and our relationships. We will also read several excerpts from *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*, and *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Before starting your study this week, you may want to download the excerpt from *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (“Principles of Empathetic Communication”) from the lovingpeople.rockypeak.org website. To do so, go to Week 5 and click “download resource.”

DAY ONE

DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** James 1:19-20
- ◆ **READ:** *Everybody's Normal Till You Get To Know Them*, pgs. 105-113
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On the importance of listening to both words and body language

◆ EXPLORE

As you start the study this week, ask God to show you how to truly listen to others. Then read **James 1:19-20** in the New International Version (NIV) and answer the following questions.

- 1) How would you paraphrase James 1:19 in your own words?
- 2) Why is this so important (v. 20)?

◆ READ

Read pages 105-113 in *Everybody's Normal Till You Get To Know Them*. Start at the beginning of Chapter six and stop at the heading *Sobriety Checkpoint Ahead* (Audible ch. 4 – 00:00- 17:52).

◆ REFLECT

- 1) What was your favorite insight, principle, or illustration from today's reading, and why?
- 2) How would you rate yourself as a listener on a scale of 1-10, and why?

1 – Novice

5 – Average

10 – Excellent

How do you think those closest to you (spouse, fiancé, friends, kids, co-workers) would rate you—and why?

3) In today's reading, John quotes Daniel Goleman, author of the best seller, *Emotional Intelligence*. Goleman writes that listening is the "single most important relational skill a person can develop" (p.112). This is quite the claim by this respected researcher! Why do you think listening is so important for building healthy relationships and loving others well?

4) In Chapter 6, John writes,

God wants us to know one another, to pay attention to what's going on underneath the surface, to listen to what's happening in someone else's

heart. ... People's hearts (feelings) are not usually put into words. Most of the time they are expressed in subtle ways: body language, tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures.

-Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them, p. 107

Do you find that reading someone's body language during a conversation comes easily for you, or is it more of a challenge?

How do you discern what someone is really thinking and feeling apart from their words?

5) A few pages later, John writes,

The good news is that relational intelligence can be learned. Develop this skill, get it right, and you will have opportunities to influence, comfort, challenge, and love people on a regular basis. You will have friendships characterized by a deep sense of openness and intimacy. You will be sought out by others at work. You will be much more effective as a parent or friend.

-Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them, p.109

Do you believe that relational intelligence can be learned? Have you experienced this kind of growth in your own life or seen it in others? If so, explain.

6) Write a prayer asking God to help you become a better listener, based on what you've learned today.

DAY TWO

DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** Proverbs 18:13
- ◆ **READ:** *The Emotionally Healthy Church*, pgs. 187-193
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On the concept of “reflective listening”

◆ EXPLORE

The Old Testament book of Proverbs is full of relational wisdom. This week we will explore several proverbs that highlight the important role listening plays in both our personal growth and our relationships. Read **Proverbs 18:13** in the New International Version (NIV) and then answer the following questions.

- 1) How would you summarize this proverb in your own words?
- 2) Do you ever find yourself violating this proverb in your life? If so, when, where, and why?

◆ READ

Read pages 187-193 in *The Emotionally Healthy Church*. Start at the heading *Entering Another’s World* and stop at *Holding Onto Yourself* (Audible ch. 13 – 17:25-29:46).

◆ REFLECT

- 1) What was your favorite insight, principle, or illustration from this reading—and why?
- 2) In the reading today, Peter quotes Christian counselor David Augsburger who says that listening is “so close to being loved that for the average person, they are almost indistinguishable” (p.190).

Do you agree? Why, or why not?

Can you think of someone who has made a big difference in your life simply by listening to you deeply? If so, what impact has this had on your relationship with them?

- 3) In Chapter 10, Peter writes,

Reflective listening is simple. One person has the floor, speaking a few sentences at a time. You don’t go on and on. Then the listener repeats back to him or her exactly what has just been said. The person listening

attempts to enter into the world of the person speaking, laying aside questions, agendas, defenses, and simply seeks to understand the other person's experiences.

-The Emotionally Healthy Church, p.188

Have you ever practiced “reflective listening” during an important conversation? If so, how did it go? What did you learn?

4) Later in this chapter, Peter writes,

Exploring, put simply, is to function as a good news reporter and ask questions. “Tell me more. Help me understand. How did you draw that conclusion?”

-The Emotionally Healthy Church, p. 192

Have you ever used these types of simple questions to take a conversation to a whole new level? If so, explain.

5) If you could only remember one key insight from today's study, what would it be, and why? Summarize it in your journal and ask Jesus to help you grow in this area.

Extra Credit: Set aside some time this week to practice “reflective listening” with your spouse, a family member, a friend, or someone you're dating. Ask them to select an important topic to discuss with you. It could be a personal challenge, a relational issue, a work situation, a spiritual issue, etc. Follow the instructions on page 191 (Audible Ch 13 – 25:39-27:13) of *The Emotionally Healthy Church* and journal any insights you gain from this experience.

DAY THREE

DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** Proverbs 12:15
- ◆ **READ:** *Principles of Empathetic Communication*, pgs. 236-243
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On “empathetic listening”

◆ EXPLORE

Read **Proverbs 12:15** in the New International Version (NIV).

- 1) How would you summarize this proverb in your own words?
- 2) Can you think of a time in your life when listening (or not listening) to wise advice made a major difference in your life? If so, explain.

◆ READ

Read pages 236-243 in the “Principles of Empathetic Communication” (PDF). This is an excerpt from *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey. Start at the beginning of the section and stop at the heading *Diagnose Before You Prescribe*. You can download this PDF on the lovingpeople.rockypeak.org website. Simply go to Week 5 and click “download resource.”

◆ REFLECT

- 1) What was your favorite insight, principle, or illustration from this reading?
- 2) In this chapter, Stephen writes,

If I were to summarize in one sentence the single most important principle I have learned in the field of interpersonal relations, it would be this: Seek first to understand, then to be understood. This principle is the key to effective interpersonal communication.

-The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, p. 237

How would you explain this principle in your own words?

- 3) Later, Stephen writes,

...if you want to be really effective in the habit of interpersonal communication, you cannot do it with technique alone. You have to build the skills of empathetic listening on a base of character that inspires openness and trust.

-*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, p. 239

What do you think he means when he says we cannot be effective by “technique alone”?

4) On the same page, Stephen writes,

“Seek first to understand” involves a very deep shift in paradigm. We typically seek first to be understood. Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply. They’re either speaking or preparing to speak. They’re filtering everything through their own paradigms, reading their own autobiography into other people’s lives.

-*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, p. 239

Do you find this to be true in your own life? If so, why do you think you tend to do this?

5) If you could ask God for just one thing based on today’s study, what would it be? Write a prayer in your journal.

DAY FOUR

DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** Proverbs 14:13
- ◆ **READ:** “Principles of Empathetic Communication,” pgs. 243-248
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On the challenges of empathetic listening

◆ EXPLORE

Read **Proverbs 14:13** in the New Living Translation (NLT). (You can find this on YouVersion.)

- 1) How would you summarize this proverb in your own words?
- 2) To listen well, we need to hear more than the words someone is speaking. How does this proverb illustrate that principle?

◆ READ

Read pages 243-248 in the “Principles of Empathetic Communication” (PDF). Start at the heading *Diagnose Before You Prescribe* and stop on page 248 at the sentence: “The skills, the tip of the iceberg of empathetic listening...”

◆ REFLECT

- 1) What was your favorite insight, principle, or illustration from this reading?
- 2) On pages 246-248, Stephen describes a typical conversation between a father and his teenage son. This conversation illustrates four types of “autobiographical responses” (p. 245) that can hinder us from listening to others well. They are:

- Evaluating
- Probing
- Advising
- Interpreting

Which of these four types of responses comes most naturally to you when listening to others?

Have you ever had a conversation like this one with a spouse, child, friend, co-worker, etc.?

What insights or lessons stand out to you the most from this conversation?

3) Journal any key lessons or insights you want to remember from today—and process them in prayer.

DAY FIVE

DAILY FOCUS

Today we will . . .

- ◆ **EXPLORE:** Proverbs 19:20
- ◆ **READ:** “Principles of Empathetic Communication,” pgs. 248-253
- ◆ **REFLECT:** On how to practice empathetic listening

◆ EXPLORE

Read **Proverbs 19:20** in the New International Version (NIV).

- 1) How would you summarize this proverb in your own words?
- 2) Can you think of a time when someone you love did not listen to wise counsel and it led to pain, hardship, or disaster in their lives? Please explain.

◆ READ

Read pages 248-253 in the “Principles of Empathetic Communication” (PDF). Start with the sentence, “Can you see how limited...” and stop at the heading *Understanding and Perception*.

◆ REFLECT

- 1) What was your favorite insight, principle, or illustration from this reading?
- 2) On pages 248-250, Stephen illustrates the four stages of empathetic listening through the conversation between this father and his son. They are:
 - Mimicking the content
 - Rephrasing the content
 - Reflecting the feeling
 - Rephrasing the content and feeling

Which of these stages comes most naturally for you? Which is the most difficult, and why?

What lessons or insights stand out to you the most from this conversation?

- 3) Later, Stephen writes,

Even as the father begins to counsel, however, he needs to be sensitive to

his son's communication. As long as the response is **logical**, the father can effectively ask questions and give counsel. But the moment the response becomes **emotional**, he needs to go back to empathetic listening.

-*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, p.251

Can you think of any relationships in your life where practicing this principle might be helpful?

4) Let's switch gears. Flip to page 189 of *The Emotionally Healthy Church* (Audible Ch 13 – 20:39-22:57). Here you will find a simple listening test. Take a couple minutes to take the test and score it.

How did you score? Does your score seem accurate?

Do you see any practical implications for any of your relationships?

5) As we close out this week's study, consider this quote by the famous Christian counselor Dr. Paul Tournier:

It is impossible to overemphasize the immense need we have to be really listened to, to be taken seriously, to be understood... No one can develop freely in this world and find a full life without feeling understood at least by one person.

That's a powerful statement, and so true. This is the gift we give when we listen well—the gift of understanding.

Spend some time in prayer, asking God to teach you how to listen well so you can love others well.

WEEKEND MESSAGE REFLECTION

After you listen to the fifth message in this series (Listening...The Gift of Understanding), answer the following questions.

1) What was the most helpful insight, principle, or illustration from this weekend's message, and why?

2) How would you summarize what you've learned this week (through this study and the weekend message) about listening, relationships, and love?