

Learning to Listen: The Paradox of Evangelism

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A paradox exists in evangelism. When we listen, evangelism moves forward rapidly, yet we feel that little is happening. When we talk, we think we are doing something important, but we are usually accomplishing less than we think and evangelism moves forward more slowly.

Evangelism has significant parallels to **coaching**. Some coaches think their job is to tell others what to do, but the best coaches are always listening. Listen first, facilitate learning, explain as a last resort! Why is listening essential?

Listening expresses **caring**. Counselors and doctors are trained to listen and take the patient seriously. If you want someone to know you care, ask questions and then listen carefully. Seek to understand.

Listening is **creative**. Listening creates safe spaces to share thoughts, feelings, and doubts. Learn to ask open questions (without an easy 'yes' or 'no' answer). Learn about families, health, what matters. Take time. Develop relationships. You may think you are wasting time but you are accomplishing much. Listen and then pray with understanding.

Listening expresses **confidence**. Listening says that others can think for themselves, that what they think matters. Listening equalizes the relationship. Evangelism depends on effective mentoring more than teaching. *The gospel is more caught than taught.* How can we help a person learn actions—not just facts?

Listening builds **conviction and commitment**. Silence is golden. Do not shift to "telling" the first time there is a pause in the conversation. The art of asking questions is crucial. When others come up with answers and solutions, when they learn for themselves, they are **convinced and committed** to act on what they learn. If someone tells them what they should do, they may not be as convinced. They may react negatively. They may not follow through. And for those who do follow through (are baptized), they may not continue faithful.

Listening helps others make decisions. When people find answers for themselves, make decisions, and then act, they are less likely to blame others when things do not go well. They are more likely to **continue** to seek answers, adjusting and adapting.

There is a time for speaking. There is a time for sharing experience and wisdom. There is a time for sharing illustrations. But my goal is to ask another open question. The need to "tell" is infrequent. When tempted to "tell," first think about asking another open question. *What in that verse causes you to think that? How did that experience work out? (Tell me about....) What did you learn?*

Who will you talk to this week about Jesus? We sow and water. God gives the increase. God will give the harvest as we share Jesus—always remembering the importance of being a careful listener!