

Pa232 Counseling

Lesson Pa 232-43 Be a Good Listener

Humans feel shame, for things that we have done and for things that have been done to us. Sometimes such shame can become so heavy that a person feels condemned. The apostle Paul assured the Roman believers, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). This lesson discusses the third conclusion for counselors taken from Jesus’ example at Jacob’s well. There he had met a Samaritan woman and asked her for a drink of water. He showed her respect and acceptance. He made himself vulnerable and dependent on her to meet his need. And then he became a good listener as she continued the conversation.

When Jesus mentioned he could give her living water, she responded, “Sir, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?”

Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water” (John 4:11-15).

Jesus then spoke more plainly so she would realize that he was talking about more than natural water. He asked her to call her husband. She told him she had none. Now Jesus already knew the woman’s story. He had actively listened to her and answered her questions, until their conversation had reached this point. But there are no secrets from Jesus, the Christ. He had no condemnation for her, but he knew she was not telling him the whole story. Jesus simply said, “You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”

Jesus was saying, “I know about your complicated private life. I am not shocked.” In that culture at that time, women were totally dependent on their father, husband, or son for food and shelter. And under the Jewish law, only a man could initiate a divorce. The reason for the divorce could be as simple as burnt bread or the husband’s desire for a younger, more beautiful wife. Even abused women could not get a divorce. If a divorced woman had no son, she became destitute. She had to become a beggar or prostitute. This Samaritan woman’s story meant that she had been rejected and divorced by five different men. The man she was with, seems to have been providing for her, but not marrying her.

Listening means the counselor is ready to ask the right question at the right time. For Jesus, it was asking the woman to go get her husband and come back to talk with him. Talking with a couple would have been more culturally correct. The woman was honest and admitted that she did not have a husband. At this moment, the most important thing occurred in their conversation. Jesus reached into her life and addressed her shame, her ‘secret.’ We do not know how many people

knew of her being married over and over again. Perhaps some did know the fact that Jesus noted in his statement to her: “The man you now have is not your husband.”

Imagine if Jesus and the woman had not discussed this business of multiple husbands. Some gossip from the town could later have come up to Jesus, and whispered in his ear, “But did you know she has had *many* husbands, and lives with a man who is *not* her husband?” Imagine the shame and humiliation of the woman as she glanced over to see the gossip whispering in Jesus’ ear. She would have feared public ridicule. They would all say that she was not worthy to be the one to discover the Messiah coming to their town.

That did not happen. Jesus saw to that. He already knew her shame and he erased it with his love and forgiveness. That was a good lesson to the townspeople. She came telling them, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” Jesus did not blame and condemn. If he had forgiven her sins, he would forgive their sins, too. There was no need to be afraid of being discovered in their shame, which they hoped was well hidden. Jesus listened during the conversation for the root of shame and then brought it out in the daylight of his unconditional love. There it shriveled and died. As a counselor, you will have the chance to help people resolve the shame in their lives. It takes God’s forgiveness and the love of God’s children. When you talk with each person, respect her or him and ask for God’s guidance in listening and knowing what to say.

Jesus demonstrates in this story that he is a good listener. That does not mean that he did not respond and take part in the conversation. What he was *not* doing was thinking about what he was going to say as soon as the woman stopped talking. Too often counselors may behave this way in a conversation. Instead of listening to the speaker, we are planning what *we* will say next.

Listening is a sure way to get information about how the person feels. Learning what they are thinking and what they believe is happening to them is helpful to the counseling process. As you listen you will realize that the person is the only one who can tell you how they understand their situation. It is most important to get this information from their point of view to give them effective counsel. Proverbs 18:13 says, “To answer before listening – that is folly and shame.”

When listening to a person, there is no need to get pulled into an argument. Nor is there any need to respond in judgment or evaluation of their words or the actions they describe. The Samaritan woman brought up religious differences, and Jesus did not enter into that debate. He did point out the future for everyone who believed on the Messiah. They would be worshiping God in Spirit and in truth. This was a discussion from the woman’s point of view, to get to her need, not a platform for argument.

This lesson is **important** because it explains why active listening is vital to the counseling process. The Spirit led Jesus on a mission to reach a woman who may have felt forgotten by God. He taught her about living water and reminded her of God’s faithfulness. He fulfilled all his promises to send the Messiah. And he will fulfill his promises to us as well.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that God cares about people in need, especially those who are seeking him. He wants to use you to be his ears and his mouthpiece to men and women who

need a friend's counsel. Listening and waiting for the Holy Spirit to direct your words will bring people to the Lord.

To **review** this lesson—

1. What is the next step in counseling a person, after making them feel accepted, and making yourself humble and vulnerable? [Pause]
 - A. If you said, “The counselor should be a good listener and make that person feel safe while speaking,” you are correct.
2. Is it good to correct a person's point of view while listening to them? [Pause]
 - A. If you answered, “No, your focus should be on getting their understanding of the situation; you need their point of view to give effective counsel,” you answered correctly.
3. How should a counselor listen to a person?
 - A. If you said that a counselor should listen intently, with unconditional positive regard, not planning what they will say next, you are right.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to think about how Jesus listened with respect and love for the person. Discuss the story with some of your fellow Christians, asking questions like: “Have you ever felt the Spirit telling you to talk to someone you did not know? Were you afraid to start a conversation with them? How did they respond when you greeted them kindly? Did you end up listening to learn more about them?” Then pray together and ask God to help you be bold in reaching out to people in need. Memorize this verse: “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life, has set you free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1).