

## Pa232 Counseling

### *Lesson Pa232-7 Active Listening Application*

This lesson is a continuation of the discussion in your last lesson, concerning active listening. One of the qualities of a successful counselor is becoming an active listener. When a person shares their information with you, you may inject a comment or a question. This helps both the counselor and that person clarify their real issue.

Matthew tells the account of a young person who came to Jesus asking about eternal life. He said, "What good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

Jesus, in turn, asked him a question, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments." Jesus asked the question to focus the man's attention on God and to see if he had kept God's commands. The man had kept the commands but was still not sure he had done enough. Jesus then gave directions to him to sell all he had and give to the poor, then come and follow him. The man refused to follow and went away sad, because he had great wealth (Matt 19:16-22). As an active listener, Jesus suggested the way to bring peace to the man. The person's first question had little to do with his real problem.

As you give counsel, be careful to use questions to help you understand the point a person is making. As you listen, the right questions will come to mind. Your leading questions will help you get a better understanding of what is happening. Often the fewer questions the better. Avoid being intrusive or merely curious. Your goal is to help the person discover what their real issue is.

As you listen to the following counseling interview, ask yourself, "What would I have asked or said? How would I have responded to her statements? Afterwards you could discuss your ideas with the others listening to this example with you.

*Several years ago, a counselor was teaching a college class. The subject that day was, "Death and Dying." Before class began, one of the students asked if she could speak with him after class. So after the other students had left the room, they sat down and she began speaking. "When I was four years old my mother left me. I am now 51 years old. I was put under the care of my mother's two sisters. As we drove away without my mom, neither of them said anything. I believed I had done something wrong and that was the reason for their quietness."*

**"Where did they take you?"** the counselor asked.

*"With them, away from my mother," she said.*

**"Do we take a child away from their mother when they have done a wrong thing?"**

*"No!" she responded.*

**"Are you trying to find out where your mother is, or are you wanting to know what caused her to leave you?"**

*"No, I want to know what bad thing I had done."*

**"No one will tell you?"**

*"No."*

**“Have you ever asked your aunts what you had done?”**

*“No.” She stopped there and said, “I must go. I will see you next week in class.”*

*When she again met with the counselor, she said. “I dream about my mother and often I see her, or someone in the dream tells me my mother is asking for me. They will say she is in the woods, or behind a hill. Sometimes in my dream I see her in my bedroom.”*

**“In your dream do you go to find her?”**

*“Yes.”*

**“Does she know it is you?”**

*“Yes.”*

**“Does she say anything to you?”**

*“No, she is lying there and says nothing. I speak to her.”*

**“What is it you say to her?”**

*“What have I done?” I ask. “Each time I have this dream, which is not as often as it was when I was younger, I always see her lying down. She does not answer me when I ask her what I have done.” She again stopped and said, “My son is waiting for me to give me a ride home. Can we talk again next week?”*

*The third week her adult son came with her to class. She went out to the car to leave at the end of the class. Her son stayed behind and spoke with the counselor. “Last night my mother had a dream about her mother. I knew she had dreamed of her mother before, but this dream she told me about. My mother asked her mother why she had left her and what she had done wrong. Her mother, in the dream, somehow made her understand that she had died back when my mom was four years old. She had done nothing wrong. And her mother had left everyone, not just her daughter.”*

*Her son finished with this: “I am a psychologist and for years I have listened to my mother. She would tell me of the few times she has spoken to her mother in her dreams. She would always say to her mother, ‘What have I done wrong?’ I was unable to answer the question for her. I believe talking with you has helped her find her answer. I want to thank you for the help you have given my mother.”*

The counselor had been forming an idea of what had happened during the three times they had spoken. This is what he had heard:

- “My mother left me.”
- “I had done something bad.”
- “In my dreams I always saw my mother lying down.”

It seemed more important for the woman to know what she had done, than knowing what had happened to her mother.

Unscheduled personal interactions will often provide the trust needed for a person to seek a counselor’s support. Often such interactions continue only two or three times. The confidence and trust placed in a counselor allows the Holy Spirit an open door to insert the solution to a problem. When a person feels safe with a counselor, this kind of counseling can be very common.

It was important that the woman understood she needed an answer from God. The answers to the questions of the counselor helped her find God's answers. The Bible says, "In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction" (Job 33:15-16, KJV).

This lesson is **important** because it gives an example of a counselor listening and asking questions. These helped a person understand the issues behind what they were saying. The counselor finally learned the whole story and how God had spoken to his student. It is not unusual for God to speak to people in dreams.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that, like Jesus, a counselor needs to be an active listener. They should not probe but ask questions that make a counselee think. Of course, such listening should be accompanied by prayer for God to reveal a solution and give the person peace. The woman who came to the counselor in the story had been tormented by guilt. She thought that she had somehow caused her mother to leave her.

To **review**, answer these questions for this lesson.

1. Who received help through the counselor's questions? [Pause]  
A. If you answered that both the counselor and the woman received help, you are correct.
2. What is the value of asking a question during the interview? [Pause]  
A: If you said, "It helps both the counselor and counselee understand the real issue," you are right.
3. How common is this type of counseling? [Pause]  
A. If you answered, "When a person feels safe with a counselor, it can be very common," you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to think about questions you would want to discuss with those who listen to the story with you. What kind of questions are best to use in such a counseling situation? What kind of questions or comments are best left unsaid in such a situation? Pray together with some of your fellow leaders, asking God to direct you by his Spirit as you help people find peace. The Spirit can give insights you would not otherwise have.