

# TOOL: Begin with Listening

Speak blessing • Daily



## Introduction

For us to explore this practice, we begin with listening. In 2013 a study out of Britain saw that 4 year olds ask on average 390 questions a day. That means a question comes every 2.5 minutes. But as we grow, we stop asking as many questions. In place of curiosity, wonder, and openness about what we don't know, we become more certain, quick to judge, and comfortable with our assumptions.

One of the gifts we could be in this world is to be better question askers. In scripture, we see time and again that Jesus was an incredible question-asker. You would think being in Jesus' presence - the creator of the universe, the holder of all wisdom - people would be the ones asking questions of him, yet scholars have found after surveying the Gospels:

- people asked Jesus questions only 61 times
- Jesus asked others 339 questions.

To truly speak blessing, we must be present with others, hearing their stories, and noticing their needs. A blessing is not only a trope or cliché we pass out whenever possible - it is a thoughtful word and gift of grace in response to someone's circumstances. Jesus gives us many examples of this. Jesus was highly aware of those around him, carefully attentive for the opportunities to bless those who were in need.

Luke 18:35-43 shares this habit of Jesus.

*As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by."  
He called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"  
Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"*

*Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?"*

*"Lord, I want to see," he replied.*

*Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.*

Consider why the disciples rebuked this man. They had their agenda. They were skeptical of another *needy* person. They had a schedule. They might have thought, "What makes this man so important?" But Jesus began with *listening* to this man. Then, he drew near him. And when they were in close proximity, he asked questions, drawing out what was beneath the surface. And this man's life was blessed by Jesus. Not only did he have the ability to see, but Jesus also blessed him by stating that it was *his faith that healed him*. It was a physical healing and a spoken blessing.

People long to be heard. In this world full of noise, busyness, and chatter, to be listened to is a rare gift, and one we all desire. A skilled listener does more than just give their undivided attention, they ask thoughtful questions. Questions draw out one's thoughts, emotions, desires, dreams, and fears. Well-timed questions open up worlds and draw out what oftentimes goes undetected. As found in Proverbs 25:5, "The purposes of a person's heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out."

Questions draw out the deep waters within us all, and after it is drawn out and we listen with care and without agenda, then the light of God's love can shine through our words of blessing. To follow Jesus means we become a more skilled and compassionate listener.

### **Pause and consider**

- Who is a good listener in your life?
- What makes a good listener?
- How does beginning our day in silence before God help us to become more present with others?
- What are the biggest barriers that keep you from really listening to people? How can you overcome these obstacles?

## Practice: Become an active listener

There is a world of difference between hearing and listening. The crowds heard the beggar on the roadside. Jesus listened to him. We might hear those around us, but people are desperate to find those who are willing to listen. The surprising truth is that becoming a good listener is a skill – one that requires intention, practice, and effort.

The graphic below shares seven skills in becoming an active listener. Review the graphic and the descriptions below. Seek to practice listening throughout your day.



**1. Be attentive.** The currency of our day is our attention. Give your undivided attention- making eye contact and letting your body language share your desire to be present.

**2. Ask open-ended questions.** Rather than asking simple yes or no questions, open-ended questions give way to story-telling and a deeper conversation. It is the difference between the questions, "Was your day good?" vs "How would you describe your day?"

**3. Ask probing questions.** These questions share an interest and desire to know more. An example: After hearing someone say they grew up in NYC, you could ask, "What did you like about growing up in a big city?"

**4. Request clarification.** Clarification is simply ensuring that you understand what you heard. Oftentimes, giving people the opportunity to restate will be the opportunity to go deeper. "Could you share more about...?" or "What did you mean when you said...?"

**5. Suspend judgement and advice.** Be mindful to not jump to giving advice. You are not listening to solve or fix people's problems. Active listening is the expression of love by seeking to understand.

**6. Be attuned to and reflect feelings.** Notice the other person's body language, words, and tones to understand someone's feeling. You can reflect what you perceive by saying, "You seem very \_\_\_\_\_ when you think about this."

**7. Summarize.** This shares with the other person that you have heard what they have shared and care enough to remember it. Summarizing also helps ensure what you heard is what they care to have said.

Go through your day and try to practice these skills. You might even want to take one or two skills for that day and look for opportunities to employ them in active listening. Listening is a blessing on its own, but we will also explore how to speak blessing in the additional tools in this "Speak Blessing" tool box.

### Debrief your experience

After practicing with this tool, debrief your experience with your Praxis Group. Below are some questions to process together:

- Check in on life. (Where are you experiencing Christ's presence this week? What burdens are you carrying?)
- What did you learn from this practice?
- Describe your experience with this practice. (What feelings came up, what went well, what got in the way? How has it impacted your relationship with God?)
- What is the next step for you?