

Life Group Lesson

March 21st, 2010

**Just for the leader...(this is not your group lesson – it is just for you)
Your lesson is below this...**

How To Be A Good Listener

The apostle James is pretty clear about what our priorities should be when speaking and listening to others: "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry" (James 1:19). This is especially true in a small-group setting. Whether we are leaders or members, facilitators or hosts, we all need to abide by that mandate. Therefore, listening skills are a vital component of healthy and fruit-filled communities.

QUESTIONS:

1. In your opinion, what are the main characteristics of a good listener? What characteristics or habits would disqualify someone from being a good listener?
2. Who are some people in your life that you would categorize as good listeners? What is it like to be around them?
3. When it comes to listening well, what do you find most difficult? Why?
4. What comes naturally to you in terms of listening to others?

Listening is a crucial skill for small-group leaders to master. Here are ten practical tips for improving our listening habits.

1. **Be quiet.** This should be obvious, but it often is the biggest obstruction to listening. The leader should be part of a discussion without monopolizing it.
2. **Try to understand.** The goal of listening is to understand what the person is really saying.
3. **Eliminate distractions.** People feel comfortable sharing when they are not interrupted. Turn the phone ringer off. Make sure you have childcare arranged. Don't look at your watch or lesson plan when someone is speaking.
4. **Empathize.** Interject short statements to show you understand and accept what the person is saying. "That sounds exciting!" or "That must have been a hard decision to make" are good examples of how to show empathy.
5. **Don't judge.** Especially when someone is already hurting, a judgmental attitude can do more harm than good. Don't condone sin, of course, but recognize the difference between acceptance and approval.
6. **Avoid advising.** Unless they ask for it, people usually do not want or need you to try to solve their problem. They just need someone to listen.
7. **Verify and clarify.** If you don't understand what someone is saying, ask. "Here's what I hear you saying. Am I right?" is one good clarifier.
8. **Listen for what is not said.** Try to hear the meaning behind the words. Watch body language and listen to tone of voice. Sometimes what a person is saying is lost behind a clutter of words.
9. **Watch body language.** Sometimes a person's posture or gestures can say more than words.
10. **Affirm.** "Thanks for sharing that. I'm sure it isn't easy to talk about right now." This builds acceptance for talking about difficult things and makes it easier for someone else to share.

THIS IS YOUR GROUP LESSON

7 SIGNS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH

There is no way to cover all 7 signs of a healthy church in this Life Group lesson. (If you tried, you'd be there several hours and never get to the prayer time or anything else). I have highlighted a couple of them hope you will have great discussion in your group time talking about them.

1. A healthy church is a church that is filled with people who see Scripture as the FINAL AUTHORITY

The term “*sola Scriptura*” or “*the Bible alone*” is a short phrase that represents the simple truth that there is only one special revelation from God that man possesses today, the written Scriptures or the Bible. Scripture states this concept repeatedly and emphatically. The very phrase “*It is written*” means exclusively transcribed, and not hearsay. The command to believe what is written means to believe only the pure word of God.

In the very last commandment in the Bible God resolutely tells us not to add to nor take away from His Word.

“For I testify unto every man that hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the Book of Life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” -Revelation 22:18-19

His Word is absolutely sufficient in itself (Psalm 119:160).

The Word is a revelation by God - 2 Timothy 3:15-16
God has inspired was His written word -2 Peter 1:20-21
God's written word cannot be broken -John 10:35

The Bible is this final authority in all matters of faith and morals. Thus, there is only one written source from God, and there is only one basis of truth for the Lord's people in the Church – Scripture.

Read 2 Timothy 3:14-17 out loud and ask the following questions to your group.

QUESTIONS:

1. Is scripture your final authority in all matters? What about problems?
2. Scripture should have the last word, but is it the first thing you run to when you have problems in life?
3. Is God's word active in your life enough (i.e. reading it, listening to it, studying it, memorizing it, quoting it) so it can have the final say?

Read Acts 17:11 NIV together.

2. A healthy church is a church that is filled with men and women who genuinely love one another and participate with one another in BIBLICAL COMMUNITY

God made us for relationships. As human beings created in the image of God, we operate best when we connect with others in community. Experiencing genuine biblical community (Acts 2:41-47) in a society that drives us toward isolation is not easy. That's why Life Groups are so important. They drive us back to real Biblical Community.

Read Acts 2:41-47 NLT together and ask these questions:

QUESTIONS

1. Are you devoted to the teaching at Family Church? Do you live it out?
2. Are you devoted to the fellowship – breaking of bread? (Life Groups)
3. Are you devoted to prayer as a Life Group?
4. Are you devoted to being together and having everything in common (unity)?
5. Are you devoted to sacrificing for the Life Group?
6. Are you devoted to daily staying connected to your Life Group? What does that mean? How is that lived out?
7. Are you devoted to breaking bread in your homes and eating together outside of Group time?
8. Are you devoted to praising God for his favor on your group?
9. Are you seeing God adding to your Life Group those who are being saved? Who are you witnessing to/reaching out to? Now may be a good time to talk about Prayer Triplet Cards.

Read Hebrews 10:23-25.

3. A healthy church is filled with men and women who are willing to ENGAGE with one another over sin and are also willing to be ENGAGED

Accountability is necessary in the Christian life.

(Leader, I wouldn't try and read all of this to the group. Read it for yourself and be able to tell the story about King David and his sin and the pitfalls he entered into without accountability.)

The tragedy of King David's sin with Bathsheba shows us what can happen when leaders fail to create a structure in which they are answerable for how they spend both their private and professional time. Ultimately, as he did with David, God will hold every leader accountable. The Bible shows us the dangers of living our lives free of accountability:

In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.

One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" Then David sent messengers to get her. She

came to him, and he slept with her. (She had purified herself from her uncleanness.) Then she went back home. The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant." - 2 Samuel 11:1-5

By this point in time, David was about 50 years old, had been king for about 20 years, was a gifted musician, mighty warrior and capable leader. He enjoyed an intimate walk with God, a healthy family, a stable political position and an unbroken string of military victories. David was the king who had it all. The one thing he didn't have was Uriah's wife. And that was what he wanted.

One tragic factor that often gets overlooked in this story is that Uriah wasn't just a faceless soldier in David's army. Uriah was one of David's mighty men (cf. 2 Samuel 23:39). This was a man with whom David had a relationship.

Most leaders don't experience a sudden blow-out in their lives. More often it's a slow leak that leads to disaster. Small steps, taken consistently, add up to a great distance. Small compromise has a snowball effect; momentum develops, and before we realize what's happening, life spins out of control.

David didn't just wake up one morning and decide to trash his life by committing adultery with one of his mighty men's wives and then having that man killed. David had already begun the descent by making small compromises. He began by taking an additional wife, then another and another and another. Eventually David had seven wives in all, but even that wasn't enough. So, he stocked a harem. David had a slow leak of self-control. And he compounded that problem by not having anyone around who would tell him about the problem.

Now, while the rest of his army was at war, he stayed at home. Apparently, nobody dared question the wisdom of his hiatus. With nobody to answer to, he broke three of the Ten Commandments by coveting his neighbor's wife and committing the acts of adultery and murder. As the details of David's affair unfold, we can't help but wince. David looks; David wants; David takes; David tries to cover up the consequences; David thinks he's gotten away with it.

One day the Lord sent the prophet Nathan to confront David, and the king discovered that even kings are accountable for their actions. When David was confronted with his sin, he had two options: Confession or denial. He will either be a man after God's own heart, or he will go the catastrophic way of King Saul. Being a man after God's own heart doesn't mean we are flawless in our performance. Being a godly leader does not require us to practice sinless perfection. It does require us to be honest about our failures. David heard Nathan pronounce judgment from God, and he replied with six short words: "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Samuel 12:13).

Jonathan had been a friend to David. He provided David with comfort and protection. There was a tremendous bond between these two as young men. Nathan cared enough for David to counsel or rebuke him when it was necessary. Both types of relationships are necessary for us. If David had invited Nathan into his life, perhaps Nathan could have given David advice rather than reprimand.

If we are not intentional about inviting someone like Nathan into our lives, God will provide a Nathan for us. But by then it may be too late to spare us from the consequences.

Wise leaders don't wait for a crisis to establish accountability. Accountability relationships cannot be imposed; they must be invited. The onus is on leaders to establish structures and relationships that harness their sin and unleash their potential. We must seek out godly people of mature character and give them permission to ask us the tough questions. This requires risk on our part. It requires honesty and vulnerability – risky things that leaders are often skittish about. However, as anyone who has suffered the consequences of a fall will tell you, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Everyone needs someone who has their back and their best interest in mind. We need people who are going to tell us when we are right and when we are wrong. We need people who are going to help us look more like Jesus.

QUESTIONS:

1. Do you have accountability in your life? Who? How often?
2. Are you willing to invite someone into your life to help keep you accountable?
3. Are there areas in your life that you are not comfortable revealing to another person?

ACCOUNTABILITY QUESTIONS

1. Have you been with a woman/man anywhere this past week that might be seen as compromising?
2. Have any of your financial dealings lacked integrity?
3. Have you exposed yourself to any sexually explicit material?
4. Have you spent adequate time in Bible study and prayer?
5. Have you given priority time to your family?
6. Have you fulfilled the mandates of your calling?
7. Have you just lied to me?