



A Compassionate Heart:

Session 4

Listening with the Heart

Pastoral care is most fundamentally a relationship - a ministry of compassionate presence. This was Jesus' caring stance toward all people, especially those who were hurting or in need.

The Ministry of Pastoral Care, United States Catholic Conference of Bishops

Gathering: (15 minutes)

Welcome and Greeting

Group Members Share:

- One word that describes me today is...
- What did I commit to in Session 3?
- How did I follow through with my commitment?

Praying: (15 minutes)

Songs

Traditional songs to sing/play or select a contemporary personal favorite.

- Companions on the Journey, Carey Landry
- Give Me Ears to Listen, Timothy R. Smith
- Hosea, Weston Priory
- They Will Know We Are Christians, Peter Scholtes
- Whatever You Do, Willard F. Jabusch

Quotation for Silent Reflection

Consider a word or phrase for possible sharing.

All genuine loving begins with this attentive, sensitive listening. This is the 'dying to self' about which Jesus speaks – the giving up, at least temporarily, of my own point of view. It requires turning aside for the moment, from my own perceptions, in order to be present in the world of another: to see what the other person sees, to feel what the other person feels. Few other sacrifices on my part are so difficult. And probably no other sacrifice treats you with such exquisite reverence and respect.

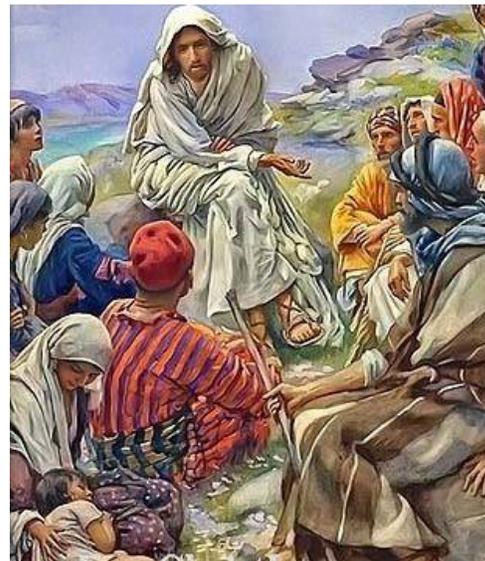
Fr. James Sullivan, Diocese of Brooklyn

Scripture for Inspiration

Matthew 5:1-12

Question for Group Reflection

- Words or verses that spoke to me are?



Prayer Conclusion (Together)

Lord, sometimes it is so difficult to listen to another. Grant us your patience so that we might extend your care and compassion to each person who reaches out to us. Help us to put aside the busyness of our day to stay focused and supportive of those who are in most need of a listening ear. May we reveal your loving spirit to all that you place in our care today. We ask this in the name of your Son. Amen.

Love is our true destiny. We do not find the meaning of life by ourselves alone - we find it with another.

Thomas Merton, Trappist Monk

Consider This: (38 minutes - If participants have not read content prior to gathering, please take a moment to read aloud, rotating willing members.)



A Compassionate Heart: The Healing Power of Listening

A Healing Presence

Jesus could have spent his time on earth with anyone he chose. From the gospel stories, we know he was clearly attracted to those who had physical or emotional struggles or were social outcasts. His ministry to the downtrodden must have been an extraordinary experience for the people of his time. They would do just about anything to be in the healing presence of Jesus. They brought paralytics on stretchers, blind men cried out to him, they came to the Synagogue, lepers begged to be made clean, they beseeched him to lay his hands on the deaf, and cried out for him to save the dying.

Jesus was very clear on how we were to treat one another. He focused on the poor in spirit, those in mourning, the meek, and those who hunger and thirst for justice. Jesus challenges us out of our comfort zones asking us to provide the gifts of reverence and dignity to everyone no matter what their status or state in life is. One of the greatest gifts we can give to another is a listening presence. Listening is a way of accepting another person, witnessing to them that they are cared for, and that they are deserving of time and attention.

Jesus' healing was experienced as relief, gratitude, love and joy. His presence offered safety and security. Time and time again the gospel passages reference the popularity of Jesus and the great crowds that came to him. Jesus was not seeking personal praise or distinction and often asked that those healed tell no one. It is an honor and a privilege to be invited to walk in loving support of another person. When we are a listening presence to those who are suffering, our hearts often receive more than we give.

Mother Theresa of Calcutta is often quoted that "we can do no great things, only small things with great love." A humble woman, who was thrust into notoriety, remained faithful to her life of simplicity. She was often approached by people begging to join her in her work in the streets of Calcutta. She encouraged others, not to follow her to Calcutta to do good works, but to find their own Calcutta. She lived and believed that we can only love one person at a time and challenged us to realize that is why we are put on this earth. A ministry of presence extends our compassion and care to each individual that we meet and has the power to change the world.

Quotation for Reflection

Only the silent hear and those who do not remain silent do not hear.

Josef Pieper, Philosopher



Listening – The Art of Compassion

Listening to others requires a lot of vulnerability, personal inner work, and prayer. We have to let go of control, allow the other person to be in the driver’s seat, and in humble quietness assume the backseat. This can be even more challenging when we think the other person might be lost on the road. To really be present, we have to let go of our judgments and trust in God, the ultimate GPS system, to guide each one of us on our personal path. “We are not called to fix people, we are called to love them.”

Deacon Steve Meyer and Tony Pichler

As compassionate listeners, we accept others exactly where they are and honor the wealth of their lived experience by hearing their stories. Listening is a skill. Like any skill, if we have the desire to improve and practice, we will get better. Pray for the ability to listen with the heart of Jesus.

A few questions for pondering:

- When I listen to someone, do I really want to hear what they have to say?
- When I visit with someone, do I talk more than I listen?
- When I listen to someone, am I preoccupied with what I am going to say next?
- Do I bring a spirit of optimism and calmness to each person that I listen to?
- Is my body language attentive - do I let the person know that I am glad to be spending time with her/him?
- Do I feel frustrated when I cannot give advice?
- Can I set my judgments aside to listen to the story of the other?
- Am I comfortable with silence to allow the other person time to ponder what they would like to discuss?
- Am I discovering that if I listen attentively, people open up to me at deeper levels?
- Do I pray for guidance before pastorally visiting with someone?

Pastoral listening is both a blessing to those we visit and a blessing for each of us in ways that we could never imagine. When we listen well, we invite the sacred and a place for hope.

Questions for Reflection:

Think of someone who has truly listened to you? Why did you choose that person to talk with? What qualities did they have? How did you know that they were really listening to you? Is listening more than hearing? Does listening have anything to do with compassion? In what ways might you strengthen your listening skills?

Notes: _____

The first duty of love is to listen.

Paul Tillich, Philosopher and theologian

Following the Path of Jesus (21 minutes)

Take Action

Consider how your prayer, reflection and sharing in Session 4 might have inspired you to serve compassionately this week. Share ideas that reflect your personal situation or consider one of the simple ideas below.

- Ponder the people in your life who truly listen to you. Thank one or more of them.
- Prayerfully begin each day listening to God.
- Use the additional scripture passages found below for reflection.
- Spend time with a family member or friend and really listen to them. Journal on the experience.
- Read a book, listen to a CD or view a clip on You Tube to enhance your listening skills.
- Think about one specific area of listening that you would like to improve. Practice this week.

Commitment:

- In light of this, what commitment will I make for the week(s) ahead?

Wrap Up: (1 minute)

Date for Session 5 _____

Closing Prayer: (Together)

Jesus you called us friends and asked us to love one another as you love us. We thank you for the invitation and challenge to follow in your footsteps. Strengthen us to love others through attentive listening and bless our words with kindness and patience. We ask this in the name of Jesus, your son, our healer. Amen.

Additional Resources:

Listening: The Forgotten Skill, A Self Teaching Guide,
Madelyn Burley-Allen

What Can I Say? A Guide to Visiting Friends and Family Who Are Ill, Simon and Karen Fox

Handbook for Ministers of Care, Genevieve Glen,
Marilyn Kofler, Kevin O'Connor

Dating God: Live and Love in the Way of St. Francis,
Daniel P. Horan, OFM

Anyway, The Paradoxical Commandments, Kent M. Keith

The Art of of Being a Healing Presence: A Guide for Those in Caring Relationships, James Miller and Susan C. Cutshall

The Good Listener, James E. Sullivan

Scripture Passages:

Matt 5:43-48
Matt 22:34-40
Mark 4:21-25
1 John 4:7-12
1 Cor 12:4-11
1 Cor 12:12-26



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The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing...not healing, not curing...that is a friend who cares.

Henri Nouwen, Priest and Author