

## Hope for the uprooted woman



When was the last time you felt truly heard and understood? When was the last time you shared about a memorable experience and your conversation partner wanted to know more by following up with interested, clarifying questions?

Too often, instead of listening attentively, we're waiting to tell our own clever story that we think is even more interesting!

Granted, there is a time and place for quick banter, but in our world of quick soundbite communication, we may be losing the **generous art of listening**.

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### Are You an Active Listener?

In a world where communication is often fast-paced and fragmented, we sometimes forget the value of truly listening to the people around us. Whether it's a conversation with family, friends, or co-workers, active listening is an essential skill that fosters better understanding, stronger relationships, and more meaningful interactions. But what exactly is active listening and why is it so important?

### What Is Active Listening?

Active listening is more than just hearing words, it's about fully engaging with the speaker, paying attention not only to what they are saying but also to the emotions and intentions behind their words. It involves being present in the moment and showing the speaker that their message is valuable and understood. Active listening requires both verbal and non-verbal cues: making eye contact, nodding, paraphrasing what the speaker has said, and asking thoughtful questions to clarify their points.

### Why Practice Active Listening?

**Enhance understanding**—One of the most significant benefits of active listening is the deeper understanding it fosters. When we actively listen, we focus on the speaker's thoughts, feelings, and perspectives. This is especially important in situations where miscommunication can lead to misunderstandings, frustration, or conflict.

**Strengthen relationships**—Active listening is a powerful tool for building trust and empathy. When we listen attentively, we send a clear message to others that their opinions, concerns, and experiences matter. This creates a sense of connection, makes people feel valued, and helps nurture stronger bonds.

### Reduce miscommunication—

Misunderstandings are a natural part of communication, but many can be avoided by practicing active listening. By taking the time to listen carefully, ask follow-up questions, and restate what has been said, you can ensure that everyone is on the same page and that messages are clearly communicated.

**Promote respect and patience**—Active listening allows people to feel heard and respected. It creates an environment where conversations are not one-sided or rushed. Instead, people feel comfortable sharing their thoughts without fear of judgment or interruption. This practice promotes patience, as it encourages us to slow down, consider others' viewpoints, and engage thoughtfully with their words.

*"Generous listening is powered by curiosity, a virtue we can invite and nurture in ourselves to render it instinctive. It involves a kind of vulnerability—a willingness to be surprised, to let go of assumptions and take in ambiguity. The listener wants to understand the humanity behind the words of the other, and patiently summons one's own best self and one's own best words and questions." - Krista Tippett*



## Active Listening Improves Our Relationships

Active listening transforms our relationships by helping us truly understand one another. Here's how it benefits our connections with family, friends, and colleagues:

- **Family:** Whether it's a sibling sharing a personal problem or a parent discussing their concerns, listening actively allows us to offer meaningful support and guidance. It shows that we care and are invested in their well-being.
- **Friends:** True friendships are built on mutual understanding and trust. By listening actively to our friends, we show that their feelings are important and that we value their thoughts. This helps avoid misunderstandings and fosters a deeper emotional connection.
- **Co-Workers:** In a professional setting, active listening improves collaboration and teamwork. Active listening also ensures that feedback is understood clearly and any potential issues are addressed before they become problems.

## How to Practice Active Listening

- **Give Your Full Attention.** Eliminate distractions—put down your phone, turn off the TV, and focus on the person speaking. Make eye contact and show your interest through body language.
- **Don't Interrupt.** Resist the urge to jump in with your own thoughts. Let the speaker finish before you respond. If necessary, pause to reflect on what they've said.
- **Ask Open-Ended Questions.** Encourage deeper conversation by asking questions that invite elaboration. Instead of asking yes-or-no questions, try "What made you feel that way?" or "Can you tell me more about that?"
- **Reflect and Paraphrase.** Summarize or paraphrase what the speaker has said to confirm your understanding. For example, "It sounds like you're saying that you're feeling frustrated because..."
- **Show Empathy.** Respond with empathy, acknowledging the speaker's feelings. For example, "I can see how that situation would be really tough for you."



## Active Listening in Conversations with Those Who Disagree with You

In today's polarized world, disagreements are inevitable—whether at the dinner table, in a meeting, or on social media. Active listening can be the key to having patient, generous conversations with those who see things differently.

- **Create a Safe Space for Dialogue.** When you listen attentively to someone who disagrees with you, active listening shows respect for their opinions, which can encourage them to be more open and receptive to your point of view.
- **Foster Empathy.** Active listening requires us to put ourselves in the other person's shoes. This empathy helps de-escalate tensions and keeps conversations respectful, even when opinions clash.
- **Promote Constructive Dialogue.** When we listen carefully we're less likely to interrupt or respond impulsively. Asking clarifying questions or summarizing what the other person has said before sharing our own thoughts helps ensure that the conversation remains productive and respectful.
- **Avoid Escalating Conflict.** Listening actively to someone with opposing views can defuse frustration and anger. Instead of escalating the conflict, we can find common ground or at least agree to disagree in a respectful way. This kind of dialogue builds bridges, rather than walls.

*"Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry" (James 1:19, NLT).*

## Are You Still Listening? by Susan Miller, Founder of Just Moved Ministry

I don't know about you, but I'm a music lover, ranging anywhere from country and light rock to pop hits and praise. I'm all over the map with my choice of music.

While working at the computer, I'll tune in to Pandora and listen to whatever inspires me. Since I'm so cheap and listen to FREE Pandora, every now and then the music stops and gets my attention with this message:

**Are you still listening? It's no fun playing to an empty room.**

**Click here to return to station.**

The first time I saw this I smiled and thought, how smart is that?! The advertising and marketing people came up with something so clever. I have to take action to get back to the music.

But then, the more those words popped up, the more I began to wonder—does Jesus ever feel like saying that to me?

*Are you still listening, Susan? I've been trying to get your attention, but you're too preoccupied to hear me. Don't you want to hear my song of hope, comfort, peace, and encouragement? Return to me. It's so simple to reconnect. Be still and listen to me again. I'm waiting for you. **Click here.***

"Go out and stand before me on the mountain," the Lord told him. And as Elijah stood there, the Lord passed by and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. ...but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake, there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire, there was the sound of a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, ...he went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And a voice said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (I Kings 19:11-13).

Elijah knew the sound of that gentle whisper was God's voice. He realized that God doesn't just reveal himself in powerful and miraculous ways. Often, He is gently whispering in the quietness of a humbled heart.

I began to think about how easy it is for me to be distracted and not hear God speak to me in my heart and mind.

### Are you listening for God?

Step back from the noise and activity of your busy life and listen humbly and quietly for His voice. It may come when you least expect it.

God has something to say to you. It could be just a click away.



### Listening: a form of spiritual hospitality

*"To listen is very hard, because it asks of us so much interior stability that we no longer need to prove ourselves by speeches, arguments, statements, or declarations. True listeners no longer have an inner need to make their presence known. They are free to receive, to welcome, to accept. Listening is much more than allowing another to talk while waiting for a chance to respond. Listening is paying full attention to others and welcoming them into our very beings.*

*The beauty of listening is that, those who are listened to start feeling accepted, start taking their words more seriously and discovering their own true selves. Listening is a form of spiritual hospitality by which you invite strangers to become friends, to get to know their inner selves more fully, and even to dare to be silent with you."*

— Henri J.M. Nouwen, Bread for the Journey

"Three days later they finally discovered Jesus in the Temple, sitting among the religious teachers, **listening** to them and asking questions" (Luke 2:46, NLT).



## Questions to Stimulate Conversation

Getting to know someone can be a rewarding experience and the right questions can spark meaningful conversations. The key to making these questions flow naturally is to listen carefully to their answers, ask follow-up questions, and keep the conversation relaxed and engaging!

Here are some great questions to ask depending on the depth and context of your relationship:

### Ice Breakers / Light Questions:

- What's your favorite way to spend a day off?
- Do you prefer mornings or evenings, and why?
- What's your go-to comfort food?
- What kind of music are you into?
- Have you ever traveled somewhere that left a lasting impression on you?

### Getting to Know Their Personality:

- What do you value most in a friendship?
- What's something you're really passionate about?
- Are you more of an introvert or extrovert?
- How do you typically deal with stress?
- What's one thing you've learned about yourself in the past year?

### Life Experiences / Fun Questions:

- If you could live anywhere in the world for a year, where would it be?
- What's something you've always wanted to try but haven't yet?

- What's the most adventurous thing you've ever done?
- Do you believe in love at first sight?
- If you could meet anyone (dead or alive), who would it be and why?

### Deeper Questions:

- What's something that has significantly shaped who you are today?
- What's one of your biggest goals right now?
- What's a lesson you've learned the hard way?
- Do you think people can truly change, or are we shaped by our experiences forever?
- What do you think is the meaning of life?

### Questions About Relationships:

- What's your idea of a perfect relationship?
- How do you like to show love and appreciation?
- Do you believe in soulmates or that love is a choice?
- What's your love language (e.g., acts of service, words of affirmation, physical touch, gifts)?
- What qualities do you look for in a partner?

***"Don't be a topper.** If you say to me, oh I had a horrible flight. We were on the tarmac for 2 hours, I'm likely to say, 'Oh, I know what you were going through. I was on a flight and we were on the tarmac for 6 hours.'*

*It may seem like I'm trying to relate to you, but what I'm really saying is "Let's pay less attention to your inferior set of experiences and more attention to my superior set." - David Brooks*



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