

Matthew 28:16-20, James 1:19-21
Sermon Series: Sharing the Love of God
“Listening”
WRCoB 4.16.23

When someone asked theologian Francis Schaeffer
What he would do
If he had one hour with a non-Christian

He replied by saying he would listen for fifty-five minutes.
In those last five minutes
He MIGHT have something to say.

Schaeffer’s words sum up for me
The whole point of this 3-part sermon series
On sharing the love of Christ.

We do an injustice to Christ
When we spend more time with our mouth open
And our tongue wagging
Then with our ears listening.

There’s a reason God gave us two ears
And only one mouth.

At the heart of sharing the love of God
Is the well-being and wholeness of the other

At the heart of evangelism
Is the transformation of not only the soul
But body and mind, as well.

You can't do that without a relationship
 Made through listening, learning
 And ultimately loving the other person.

For this is the way of Jesus.

Over the course of the next three Sundays
 We want to look at Jesus' call for evangelism.

I know in some circles
 The word evangelism doesn't go over too well.

I get that!

We don't discuss religion
 Much less try to push ours onto someone else!

We learn from society
 Three things not to bring up.
 Religion, politics, and sex

And I suppose the Red Sox/Yankees rivalry!

It's okay to express our faith with acts of kindness
 Everybody appreciates that!

But if we bring up why we feel compelled to do such things
 We're accused of proselytizing!

Current social norms consider evangelism
 Inappropriate, presumptuous, and arrogant.

Today's motto is live and let live.

However, it seems pretty clear to me

In his final instructions

Jesus taught his disciples to share their faith.

The question is not whether one should or shouldn't.

The question is how might we effectively go about it.

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In an article from Christianity Today aptly entitled

*A Lesson in Listening:
Why the best witnesses use their ears first
And their mouths later*

Christine Herman writes that when Tim Keller
Pastor of the Redeemer Church in NYC
Announced his retirement

He shared how to better connect with skeptics.

We could do a far better job of patiently listening. And we should not talk until we can represent the skeptic's viewpoint with empathy so that a skeptic friend says, 'Yes, that is my hang up; I couldn't have put it better myself.'

Has it ever occurred to us

That the most effective way to share God's love
Is by listening?

I know, it seems counter-intuitive.

A good friend and fellow minister in Nigeria
Toma Raginjia spoke of his relationships to Muslims.

He had wonderful relationships with Muslims.

Toma stated that before ever engaging
In conversations relating to faith
He built a trusting relationship first.

If not, the conversation inevitably became volatile.

Frankly I don't know of anyone
Who has successfully argued anyone
Into the kingdom of God.

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It is a rare thing indeed today
To have civil conversations
On controversial subjects from opposing views.

Disagreements regularly turn into shouting matches
Where everyone talks and no one listens.

When sharing the love of God there is a better way.

If we have any hope in fulfilling the call of Jesus
To be witnesses to all nations

If we have any hope in bridging divisions
Between family members, churches, and communities

If we have any hope in toning down the vitriolic arguments
The first thing to learn is the art of conversation..

There is nothing worse than someone with evangelistic zeal
Coming off as having all the answers
To life's complex problems.

It is rude, disrespectful and hardly ever successful.

The key to sharing the love of God
Is building healthy, trusting relationships.

The primary purpose of friendships
Is not to convince or convert
Someone to your way of thinking
But to make and be a friend.

If there's going to be transformation in a person's life
The Holy Spirit is quite capable of doing that.

Trusting friendships don't have hidden agendas.

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There are some "do's" and "don'ts" in relationship building.

The first "do" in friendship building is listening.

James 1:19-21 CEV ¹⁹ My dear friends, you should be quick to listen and slow to speak or to get angry. ²⁰ If you are angry, you cannot do any of the good things God wants done.

I mean, how relevant is that for today?

Good listening is not easy.

It takes energy, discipline, and intentionality.

Let's face it, it's a whole lot easier to express your opinion
Pay no attention to what the other person is saying
And be done with it.

But you'll never gain a true friend that way.

Nor will you share God's love effectively.

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The second "do" in the art of friendship building
Is to ask a question that provokes a weightier answer.

A good question invites deeper dialog.

Tailor the discussion to fit the context.

Follow the direction the person is heading.

Perhaps, there's a reason
The conversation is heading that way.

Don't try and control the conversation
Let it go where it will.

If you are serious and really want to share the love of God
Your basic concern is the well-being
Of the person you are engaged with.

Learn to listen, to know and to love
In building trusting, high quality friendships.

Another “do” in conversation is to let silence be silence.

A thought-filled silence is not a bad thing.

In good conversation, don’t fill the silence
With needless words.

If in silence, you sense a time to speak . . . speak.

But, the 4th “do” in conversation is
Make sure you think before you speak.

Because if, as you are speaking
The listener’s eyes start to glaze over

No matter how important
You think what you are saying is
You’re just sucking up oxygen in the room.

If you think before you speak
It might just give God a chance
To place on your lips
Something worthy of hearing.

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Okay. Now about some “don’ts” in conversation.

Don’t be a conversational narcissist.

That is a person who can only talk about themselves.

Celeste Headless describes a conversational narcissist
As “hogging the ball” in a conversation.

If you dominate the conversation . . . stop it!

Seriously, very few people want to hear it!

If the person you are engaged in conversation with
Is a conversational narcissist
God have mercy

Be patient.

Most conversational narcissists are hurting people.

In time, with patience
The brokenness can surface and healing may occur.

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The 2nd “don’t” is don’t interrupt.

A 1954 magazine article from *Esquire Etiquette*
Describes two forms of interruption:

“The obvious one, interrupting the speaker in mid-sentence, is easy to avoid: just wait until the other has stopped talking before you start. (And don’t ever say, “Have you finished?” You might as well say right out that he’s a windy numskull and you thought he’d never run down.)

The other kind of interruption, equally culpable, is often prefaced by “That reminds me...” or “By the way.” Such phrases usually signal a digression or irrelevancy. When you interrupt another’s train of thought, or send a discussion off into a tangent, you indicate that you are either stupid or rude, either unable or unwilling to stick with the speaker’s point.

The 3rd “don’t” in good conversation
Is not to dig too deeply too soon.

We must respect the privacy of others.

If the one you’re talking to
Shies away from a sensitive subject
Leave it alone
Don’t push it!

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And finally, the last “don’t” in good conversation is
Don’t have your phone handy!
Put it away

There is nothing worse
Than being in a conversation with someone
Who constantly checks their phone.

The message is clear.
You’d rather be on the phone than in the conversation.

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To effectively share the love of God
We are to establish relationships with people.

We are to build lasting and meaningful friendships.

In a mutual friendship, there will be mutual value.

You will gain as much as you give.

God will enrich both of your lives.

In effective evangelism, listen more, talk less

Empathize, encourage, enable, empower
Through a listening spirit.

The good news of Jesus Christ will touch someone
When it meets the person in their greatest need.

That doesn't happen when you're doing all the talking.

The truth of the matter is
When we listen to someone
We are listening to more than one voice.

We are listening to God's voice within the person's voice.

We listen for how the Spirit
Is already present in a person's life.

The late, great, Anglican church leader John Stott
Called it "double-listening".

We are called to the difficult and even painful task of 'double listening'. That is, we are to listen carefully (although of course with differing degrees of respect) both to the ancient Word and to the modern world, in order to relate the one to the other with a combination of fidelity and sensitivity.

Being a good listener conveys love

And ultimately that is the work of the evangelist
To convey the love of God.

It's simple really

Be a friend and offer a listening ear

God is quite capable of doing the rest.