



Even the smallest act of caring for another person is like a drop of water, it makes ripples throughout the whole pond



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Equipped to Care



Workshop 1

Relating and Responding

(loving your neighbour through active listening)

A manual to assist people who care about people – bringing understanding and hope to those struggling with life issue

HOPE TRUST



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Assisting people with life difficulties through counselling and equipping people with skills to assist others.

Hope Trust is an Irish charity formed in 2006 to offer a Christian response to the high suicide rate in Ireland. All four branches of Hope, namely Hope Counselling, Hope Training, Hope Community and Hope Ministry, aim to assist people struggling with life's problems in a holistic manner.

Since its inception DVDs, literature, booklets, healing retreats, workshops, bereavement support groups and a counselling service have been developed to assist people to address life in a proactive way, particularly when life feels hopeless, overwhelming and lacking in purpose. Hope Trust aims to educate, equip and empower people with life skills and, where appropriate, offer counselling support to those who need it. Our goal is to be supportive in community outreach where meaningful connection is made with those who struggle with isolation and need to be integrated into society.

This manual is the first in the series.

Why we are concerned about improving good mental health in Ireland

In Ireland, there are approximately 500 suicides per annum, although these figures reflect a decrease in 2018. A conservative estimate suggests that there are at least 60,000 cases of self-harm occurring per year, most of these go unreported. On Christmas Day 2019, there were 800 calls to Childline (The Irish Times Thurs 2nd 2020) and Samaritans Ireland responded to nearly 3 million calls between 2014-2019 (<https://www.samaritans.org/samaritans-ireland/>). 1 in 10 of us are believed to be suffering from 'depression', while 1 in 4 of us are estimated to suffer from 'mental health issues' in any given year. Research evaluating the pilot sites for Suicide Crisis Assessment Nurse (SCAN) service found that approximately two thirds of those referred were not 'mentally ill', but were struggling with 'psychosocial issues' such as alcohol and drug overuse, relationship problems, financial crisis amongst others.

What can we, the church, do to help? Can we respond?

Professor John Swinton in *Resurrecting the Person*, observes that 'the church needs to begin its journey in a different place'. That is, not to replicate secular services, but to provide a distinctively Christian response to those in emotional and/or psychosocial distress. Providing a Christ-like response of love, care and acceptance thus allowing the church to become a place of hospitality and welcome, where a listening ear can be found; as reflected in (Matthew 22:37-39) 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart .. 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' However, for his vision to become an increasing reality, we believe there is a need for practical training in listening and caring skills, so that we might be better equipped to serve. 'God is the Father who is full of mercy and all comfort. He comforts us every time we have trouble, so when others have trouble, we can comfort them with the same comfort God gives us. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4 NCV)

Our hope is that these workshops will in some way be used as tools for the church, not as a replacement for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but as instruments that might lead to greater understanding of God and part of His creation – people.

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Relating and Responding

Why this is important and yet so often neglected, mishandled or misunderstood – our objectives are not just to listen but to hear with our hearts



God Is Love

'My beloved friends, let us continue to love each other since love comes from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and experiences a relationship with God. The person who refuses to love doesn't know the first thing about God, because God is love—so you can't know him if you don't love. This is how God showed his love for us: God sent his only Son into the world so we might live through him. This is the kind of love we are talking about—not that we once upon a time loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to clear away our sins and the damage they've done to our relationship with God'. (1 John 4 : 7-10 The Message)

'Immature love says: I love you because I need you. Mature love says I need you because I love you' (Erich Fromm)

God is the source and ultimate expression of love; even to the extent of providing His son as a sacrifice, in order to restore an ongoing relationship with man and reveal His character and nature. Man, so needs that connection with God to find purpose and value in life, without it despair and hopelessness can so easily result. The body of Christ, the Church, can represent God's love, purpose and character to a hurting world if it reflects God's heart. To do this we need to be open to 'being healed' and made whole ourselves in an ongoing process, in order to better understand, hear and respond to the broken. That requires us to know ourselves and God intimately, only then can we begin to know our 'neighbour as ourselves'.

Our need for community

The human condition since the fall of man has been one of struggle; struggle to be at peace with self, God and others. This struggle sometimes leads to fear, anxiety, panic attacks, suicidal thinking and planning, self-harm behaviours, depression, anger, guilt and shame, negative thought patterns, hopelessness, addictive behaviours and grief over childhood trauma, loss, abuse and relationship difficulties. Researchers around suicidal ideation identify most of these as influencing people to consider suicide as an option. A common theme in all the above is an inability by those struggling to connect with themselves, God or others; which leads to withdrawal, social exclusion and loneliness.

This to some extent has been created through the fragmentation happening within society, a breakdown in community structures. People appear to have lost faith in traditionally trusted institutions (government, EU, banks, large corporates, church, community and family) or are living and working far from their loved ones, or dependent upon relative strangers to raise their children in crèches and schools for many hours of the day. Opportunities for connection become limited and as a result people are more isolated, or dependent upon a small circle of acquaintances. The increase in the electronic age has made it possible to communicate more but has often led to spending less and less time having 'face to face' communication. People are apparently losing touch with each other; families are too busy engaged in programmes or work and children are addicted to TV or computers and engaged in relationships with total strangers via the Internet.

God himself is a community – completely fulfilled in the love and relationship existent within the Trinity. However, he still created man for fellowship with himself. In Genesis he not only created Adam, but Eve as well, recognising man's need to connect and commune with other living human beings. The ideal of course existed in the amazingly intimate relationship shared between himself, Adam and Eve. Jesus' life demonstrates a deliberate choice made to live and identify with man and share the love and compassion of heaven, as well as provide a means of reconnecting with God. God is the answer to isolation and loneliness and the church

is potentially the ideal place for people to learn about His love. How do we demonstrate that?

There are many ways we can accomplish this, but bottom line, we need to know what is driving the choices we make to show love to others.

What motivates you to want to help others?

Possible positive and negative motivations

Positive	Negative
Concern for others	<i>We have a need to be needed</i>
Because Jesus showed compassion	<i>Feeling guilty - 'I have to do this or ..'</i>
That is the role of the church to care for orphans and widows and those in need	<i>Because homosexuals, prostitutes, drug addicts, alcoholics need changing (strong agenda; self-righteous attitude).</i>
To share some of the comfort we have received ourselves	<i>Nosy, gossiper – want to know what’s going on</i>
Because God encouraged you personally to be involved	<i>Someone who is wounded and looking for help themselves, helping others might fix them</i>
To ‘be’ the gospel (nothing hidden)	<i>To use as a platform to show others how good I am</i> <i>To have an ulterior agenda (manipulative)</i>

The challenge then for the church is to walk in the connection with God that Jesus purchased at the cross, enjoy the intimacy of this relationship and find ways of sharing this with others.

- With compassion, respect, kindness and love
- Using empathy and understanding
- In a confidential and trustworthy manner, without judgement
- With genuine interest in what others are saying, not just what we want them to hear

Jesus knew his Father well – he also knew himself, his limits and his capabilities. If this was important for him, it stands to reason that it should be important for us as well. If our motivation for helping others is suspect or misdirected, based more on our own needs than theirs, it will be obvious to those who we hope to reach with help.

In the account of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:27-37) the priest and Levite would both have been scholars and would have known what the scriptures required. However, knowing what was right didn't compute to doing it. They were both self-focussed. On the other hand the Samaritan, who would have been considered a second class citizen, with no real understanding of God, was the one who responded with compassion towards the man who had been attacked by robbers.

What did it cost the Samaritan?

- He had to overcome prejudice – he was considered untouchable and yet he reached out across the class barrier
- Possible danger to himself – robbers may have still been about
- Probably time– he had to interrupt his agenda to not only minister to the man, but also to take him somewhere to recuperate

- Money – he paid the inn keeper in full and promised to reimburse him if he hadn't left enough
- No expectation of thanks required – totally unconditionally given

What can we learn from the Samaritan?

- He demonstrated surprising levels of kindness and compassion
- He extended respect – to both the inn keeper and to the injured man
- He had very pure motivation, nothing of 'self' detracting from this, and he was willing to face possible rejection or danger

How would you practically apply these principles to your life?

What challenges would that raise for you personally?



Prejudice

How do we experience others and how do you think they experience you?

The Oxford dictionary describes prejudice as having a ‘preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience’. This suggests that people ‘pre-judge’ or have a perception about certain people, situations or circumstances without clarifying the accuracy of those judgements. This can lead to discrimination – either positive or negative. Positive in that we are pre-disposed to like or accept something or someone, or negative in that we may be pre-disposed to reject or oppose something or someone. According to Brown in ‘Prejudice’, prejudice is defined as showing ‘Any attitude, emotion or behaviour towards members of a group, which directly or indirectly implies some negativity or antipathy towards that group.’

Jesus was very aware of man’s natural instinct to categorise or classify people or situations into boxes, that is why in Ephesians 3:28 it is stated ‘There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus’. (See also Romans 10:12, Colossians 3:11).

Change and understanding can only come when one is able to own one’s own prejudices – are you aware of having any?

What instinctively comes to mind when you consider one of the following categories:

- different racial/ethnic grouping to your own
- people of a different social standing –privileged/poor/cultured/uncultured
- Educated vs uneducated
- Someone of a different age group
- Someone who has a different, or no, faith background

- Political affiliation
- Cultural understanding
- Sexual identity

Are there situations that you know you would be unable to handle?

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If so, are they based on any form of prejudice?

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Does this stop you from being able to listen to what this type of person is trying to communicate to you or influence the context of what they say?

According to Nelson Mandela in 'Long Walk to Freedom' - *'No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.'*

'The test of courage comes when we are in the minority. The test of tolerance comes when we are in the majority.' Ralph W. Sockman

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." Matthew 5:43



Empathy and compassion

Empathy and compassion go beyond prejudice and offer a higher law.

What does it take to become compassionate and exercise empathy?

We can express compassion through offering empathy, sympathy and pity.

However, there are different qualities in each:

Pity – a feeling felt for the person suffering (one feels sorry for them) but one can view them as helpless victims in need of rescuing. Pity can lead one to action, such as ‘alms to the poor’, but may not necessarily include personal contact with the one suffering. This then can be impersonal and may lead to the sufferer feeling rather like a ‘charity case’.

Sympathy – a feeling felt when one is moved by the pain of another; rather than ignoring or disregarding this, one is moved with an emotional response. However, if one is reminded of one’s own pain when seeing someone else’s, one can misinterpret what is actually being experienced by the one in pain. The sympathizer may feel overwhelmed or uncomfortable and either end up giving some inappropriate platitude or over identifying and swamping the recipient. Whilst wanting to communicate that one does care, it can be disempowering for the person in pain and may not feel comforting at all.

Empathy - one steps into the world/or shoes of another in order to understand what is being felt or experienced and then steps out again to be supportive and alongside them. One strives to hear what the person is saying, or not saying, and this may lead to compassionate action or just coming alongside the sufferer.

Henri Nouwen in 'Here and Now' says it well:

“Compassion means to become close to the one who suffers. But we can come close to another person only when we are willing to become vulnerable ourselves. A compassionate person says: ‘I am human, fragile, and mortal, just like you. I am not scandalized by your tears, nor afraid of your pain. I too have wept. I too have felt pain. We can be with the other only when the other ceases to be ‘other’ and becomes like us”.

This requires that we are not in denial over painful issues in our own lives and open to God dealing with our own issues. It also requires that we be vulnerable and honest about our own suffering and inadequacies. Someone in emotional pain or need does not need someone to fix them, but rather to validate their own experience with understanding and love.

The Good Samaritan showed compassion through his attitude, understanding and actions. He did more than bind up the wounds of the man who was attacked, or provide a safe harbour for his recovery, or provision to cover his physical needs, he also offered him dignity. Jesus showed compassion for Mary and Martha as they wept for their brother Lazarus, despite knowing that he was about to be raised from the dead, his heart was moved by their grief and he grieved with them.

If we are really going to 'be there' for others, we need to understand what they are experiencing, without our own judgements over whether this is right or wrong, listen to them and let them know we are not shamed or afraid of their pain.

“When I reflect on my own life, I realise that the moments of greatest comfort and consolation were moments when someone said: ‘I cannot take your pain away, I cannot offer you a solution for your problem, but I can promise you that I won't leave you alone and will hold on to you as long and as well as I can’. There is much grief and pain in our lives, but what a blessing it is when we do not have to live our grief and pain alone. That is the gift of compassion.” Henri Nouwen in 'Here and Now'

“When we are looking for compassion we need someone who is deeply rooted, able to bend, and, most of all, we need someone who embraces us for our strengths and struggles. We need to honour our struggle by sharing it with someone who has earned the right to hear it. When we’re looking for compassion, it’s about connecting with the right person at the right time, about the right issue.” Bréne Brown in ‘The gifts of Imperfection’



Empathic People

- Are sensitive listeners – they understand what others’ needs are
- Are interested and caring – they look beyond labels and are curious about another’s experience
- Are able to share something of their own lives where appropriate, they are willing to be vulnerable for the benefit of another, without deflecting attention towards themselves
- Are able to ‘be’ with those who experience suffering

One biblical example where empathy would have been of benefit is that of Job.

How would you have felt if you were Job?

- He was very prosperous, loved God, was married, had a large family, many servants and herds, was a man of repute and obviously a scholar
- He was stripped of his wealth, his children, his flocks, most of his servants, then his health but was left with a critical nagging wife!
- His friends were initially helpful -just 'being there' quietly with him for 7 days. Then they start questioning him about where he had failed God – accusing him and making assumptions about his behaviour and character
- He grapples with the confusion, struggling with despair

Whilst the story of Job is thought by some to be an allegory, it is in the bible for a reason. Possibly to challenge our concept on suffering; it is hard for most to marry suffering and a God who cares. We feel better when we understand the reasons why things happen. But God lives outside of our world's limitations.

What would you want from your friends if you were in Job's situation??

- A lecture
- An accusation
- Some cliché response
- A 5 point plan on how to live a happy life?

Do you feel the need to provide any of the above when you're with people who are struggling?

- Compare Job's companions (comforters) with how Jesus responded to Martha and Mary at the death of Lazarus (John 11: 32-44)

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- Jesus was deeply moved by their pain – ‘chafed in spirit’, deeply disquieted, he sighed and wept

In modern everyday life there are those who shame us for being needy, according to Bréne Browne in ‘The gifts of Imperfection’. She describes some of these below:

The friend who hears the story and actually feels shame for you. She gasps and confirms how horrified you should be. Then there is an awkward silence. Then you have to make her feel better!

The friend who responds with sympathy (I feel so sorry for you) rather than empathy (I get it, I feel with you and I’ve been there) if you want to see a shame cyclone turn deadly throw one of these at it ‘oh you poor thing’, or the passive aggressive response ‘bless your heart!’

The friend who needs you to be the pillar of worthiness and authenticity. She can’t help because she’s too disappointed in your imperfections. You’ve let her down.

The friend who is so uncomfortable with vulnerability that she scolds you “how did you let this happen? What were you thinking? Or she looks for someone to blame – ‘who was that guy? We’ll kick his ..

The friend who is all about making it better and, out of her own discomfort, refuses to acknowledge that you can actually be crazy and make terrible choices. “you’re exaggerating. It wasn’t that bad. You rock. You’re perfect. Everyone loves you’

The friend who confuses ‘connection’ with the opportunity to one-up you. ‘that’s nothing. Listen to what happened to me one time!’

Jesus demonstrates compassion and empathy:

'In your relationships with one another, have the same mind set as Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.' (Philippians 2:5-11NIV)

Based on this passage, what did it cost Jesus to leave heaven and enter our world?

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What does it cost us to leave our comfort zone(s) to seek to 'walk in another person's shoes'?

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Jesus never ceased to be fully God when he became human. In the same way, God does not call us to lose ourselves in an unhealthy way as we enter another's world – how can we protect ourselves from 'losing ourselves'?

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How can we listen and 'be present' with someone, loving unconditionally, when we do not necessarily agree with them or like what they are saying?

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What does the image of Jesus hanging on the cross, between heaven and earth, teach us about loving other people?

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What is the great promise for us, based on the life of Jesus, if we choose this downward path of incarnational love? (vs.9-11)

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To review :

We have discussed the importance of our need to connect with others in order to enjoy a fulfilling life and to be responsive in a community. This is best achieved through selfless acts of kindness and generosity and knowing our own limitations. Understanding what our own prejudices are, how well we are able to really listen and respond appropriately helps in relating to others. However, being human it is difficult to maintain without the empowering of God. In order for our motivations to be Christ-like we need to be led by God, through His Spirit and through His Word.



Listening and understanding is key to relating and responding :

- To others
- To oneself
- To God

Understanding people requires that we always seek to hear what they are trying to tell us about their life experience(s).

Considering this it would be helpful to complete a questionnaire to evaluate for yourself how well you are able to listen.

Good listener questionnaire – (Peter Scazzero in ‘The Emotionally Healthy Church’) Give yourself this short listening test. Check all the statements you can affirm.

- 1. I make a great effort to enter other people’s experience of life
- 2. I do not presume to know what another person is trying to communicate
- 3. My close friends would say I listen more than I speak
- 4. When people are angry with me, I am able to listen to their side without getting upset
- 5. People share freely with me because they know I listen well

- 6. I listen not only to what people say but also for their nonverbal cues; body language; tone of voice, and the like
- 7. I give people my individual attention when they are talking with me
- 8. I am able to reflect back and validate another person's feelings with empathy
- 9. I am aware of my primary defensive mechanisms when I am under stress, such as placating, blaming, problem-solving prematurely, or becoming distracted
- 10. I am aware of how the family in which I was raised has influenced my present listening style
- 11. I ask for clarification when I am not clear on something another person is saying, rather than attempting to fill in the blanks
- 12. I never assume anything, especially anything negative, unless it is clearly stated by the person speaking
- 13. I ask questions when listening rather than mind reading or making assumptions
- 14. I don't interrupt or listen for openings to get my point across when someone else is speaking
- 15. I am aware, when listening, of my own personal 'hot buttons' that cause me to get angry, upset, fearful or nervous

If you checked 12 or more, you are an outstanding listener / 8-11 very good / 5-7 good; 4 or fewer, poor. If you want to be really brave after you score yourself, ask your spouse or closest friend to rate you as a listener.

What did you learn about yourself from the experience?

What was your experience of being listened to growing up?

How has that influenced you today

If someone close to you experiences you differently to how you have assessed yourself, can you hear this and talk it through?

Are there many disparities?

Three way listening:

Listening takes concentration and an ability to really hear another; but three way listening requires one to have self-awareness (my responses and reactions to what is being said), God awareness (what am I sensing from God) as well as the ability to really hear another – all of that takes focus. It is a good practise to spend time tuning and focussing on God to become familiar with the way one's awareness of God is heightened.

- For some that would be through reading the scriptures, allowing God to touch one's heart with the truth of the word and understanding His will through this.
- Whilst for others this would encompass meditating on a specific passage of scripture to glean a personal 'rhema' word.
- Others are more comfortable in God's creation, close to nature, allowing the environment to connect with their spirits and illuminate something from God to them.
- Great artworks or music which move us emotionally are often means of sensitizing our spirits to God's creativity.
- Whilst others, in their devotions and prayer, spend time waiting to hear in their hearts what God's leading is, what they are 'hearing' Him communicate to them

Whatever the means, the importance is focussing on the call of God to us – our response to be open, receptive and not demanding. We are able then to understand more clearly what God's heart for a situation is.

- We should practice the presence of God in our daily lives and be aware of the things that block connection with Him, such as:
 - unrepented sin, or our own hardness of hear
 - presenting Him with our own agendas

- not taking captive one's own thoughts and desires and not preparing adequately to listen to Him.

A worshipful and prayerful attitude creates an atmosphere in which God has freedom to move or speak.

The following is a helpful exercise that helps in making connection with God.

'Keys to hearing God' (CWR Ministries)

1. The voice of your heart often sounds like a flow of spontaneous thoughts.

Habakkuk knew the sound of God speaking to him (Hab. 2:2). Elijah described it as a still, small voice (1 Kings 19:12). I had always listened for an inner audible voice, and God does speak that way at times. However, I have found that usually, God's voice comes as spontaneous thoughts, visions, feelings, or impressions.

For example, haven't you been driving down the road and had a thought come to you to pray for a certain person? Didn't you believe it was God telling you to pray? What did God's voice sound like? Was it an audible voice, or was it a spontaneous thought that lit upon your mind?

Experience indicates that we perceive spirit-level communication as spontaneous thoughts, impressions and visions, and Scripture confirms this in many ways. For example, one definition of *paga*, a Hebrew word for intercession, is "a chance encounter or an accidental intersecting." When God lays people on our hearts, He does it through *paga*, a chance-encounter thought "accidentally" intersecting our minds.

Therefore, when you want to hear from God, tune to chance-encounter or spontaneous thoughts.

2. Become still so you can sense God's flow of thoughts and emotions within

Habakkuk said, "I will stand on my guard post..." (Hab. 2:1). Habakkuk knew that to hear God's quiet, inner, spontaneous thoughts, he had to first go to a quiet place and still his own thoughts and emotions. Psalm 46:10 encourages us to be still, and know

that He is God. There is a deep inner knowing (spontaneous flow) in our spirits that each of us can experience when we quiet our flesh and our minds. If we are not still, we will sense only our own thoughts.

Loving God through a quiet worship song is one very effective way to become still. (Note II Kings 3:15.) After I worship and become silent within, I open myself for that spontaneous flow. If thoughts come of things I have forgotten to do, I write them down and dismiss them. If thoughts of guilt or unworthiness come, I repent thoroughly, receive the washing of the blood of the Lamb, putting on His robe of righteousness, seeing myself spotless before God (Is. 61:10; Col. 1:22).

To receive the pure word of God, it is very important that my heart be properly focused as I become still because my focus is the source of the intuitive flow. If I fix my eyes upon Jesus, the intuitive flow comes from Jesus. But if I fix my gaze upon some desire of my heart, the intuitive flow comes out of that desire. To have a pure flow I must become still and carefully fix my eyes upon Jesus. Again, quietly worshiping the King, and receiving out of the stillness that follows quite easily accomplishes this.

Fix your gaze upon Jesus (Heb. 12:2), becoming quiet in His presence and sharing with Him what is on your heart. Spontaneous thoughts will begin to flow from the throne of God to you, and you will actually be conversing with the King of Kings!

3. As you pray, fix the eyes of your heart upon Jesus, seeing in the Spirit the dreams and visions of Almighty God

Habakkuk said, "I will keep watch to see," and God said, "Record the vision" (Hab. 2:1,2). Habakkuk was actually looking for vision as he prayed. He opened the eyes of his heart, and looked into the spirit world to see what God wanted to show him. This is an intriguing idea.

God has always spoken through dreams and visions, and He specifically said that they would come to those upon whom the Holy Spirit is poured out (Acts 2:1-4, 17).

I had never thought of opening the eyes of my heart and looking for vision. However, I have come to believe that this is exactly what God wants me to do. He gave me eyes in my heart to see in the spirit the vision and movement of Almighty God. There is an active spirit world all around us, full of angels, demons, the Holy Spirit, the

omnipresent Father, and His omnipresent Son, Jesus. The only reasons for me not to see this reality are unbelief or lack of knowledge.

In order to see, we must look. Daniel saw a vision in his mind and said, "I was looking...I kept looking...I kept looking" (Dan. 7:2,9,13). As I pray, I look for Jesus, and I watch as He speaks to me, doing and saying the things that are on His heart. Many Christians will find that if they will only look, they will see, in the same way they receive spontaneous thoughts. Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us (Matt. 1:23). It is as simple as that. You can see Christ present with you because Christ is present with you. In fact, the vision may come so easily that you will be tempted to reject it, thinking that it is just you. But if you persist in recording these visions, your doubt will soon be overcome by faith as you recognize that the content of them could only be birthed in Almighty God.

Jesus demonstrated the ability of living out of constant contact with God, declaring that He did nothing on His own initiative, but only what He saw the Father doing, and heard the Father saying (Jn. 5:19,20,30). What an incredible way to live!

Is it possible for you to live out of divine initiative as Jesus did? Yes! Fix your eyes upon Jesus. The veil has been torn, giving access into the immediate presence of God, and He calls you to draw near (Lk. 23:45; Heb. 10: 19-22). I pray that the eyes of your heart will be enlightened.

4. Journaling, the writing out of your prayers and God's answers, brings great freedom in hearing God's voice

God told Habakkuk to record the vision (Hab. 2:2). This was not an isolated command. The Scriptures record many examples of individuals' prayers and God's replies (e.g. the Psalms, many of the prophets, Revelation).

I call the process "two-way journaling," and I have found it to be a fabulous catalyst for clearly discerning God's inner, spontaneous flow, because as I journal I am able to write in faith for long periods of time, simply believing it is God. I know that what I believe I have received from God must be tested. However, testing involves doubt and doubt blocks divine communication, so I do not want to test while I am trying to receive. With journaling, I can receive in faith, knowing that when the flow has ended I can test and examine it carefully, making sure that it lines up with Scripture.

You will be amazed when you journal. Doubt may hinder you at first, but throw it off, reminding yourself that when we cease our labours and enter His rest, God is free to flow (Heb. 4:10). Sit back comfortably, take out your pen and paper, smile, and turn your attention toward the Lord in praise and worship, seeking His face. After you write your question to Him, become still, fixing your gaze on Jesus You will suddenly have a very good thought. Don't doubt it; simply write it down. Later, as you read your journaling, you, too, will be blessed to discover that you are indeed dialoguing with God.

Some final notes:

Knowing God through the Bible is a vital foundation to hearing His voice in your heart, so you must have a solid commitment to knowing and obeying the Scriptures. It is also very important for your growth and safety that you be related to solid, spiritual mentors. All major directional moves that come through journaling should be confirmed by your leader or mentor before you act upon them”



Practical keys to listening to others

‘Understand this, my beloved brothers and sisters. Let everyone be quick to hear [be a careful, thoughtful listener], slow to speak [a speaker of carefully chosen words and], slow to anger [patient, reflective, forgiving]’ (James 1:19 AMP)

In order to listen in a focussed way it is advisable to prepare oneself, applying active listening skills. Then, to reveal how well one has listened, apply active responding skills as well. These are explained as follows:

Preparing to listen : *helping ourselves to be in a place where we can offer focussed attention*

- Avoid distractions – attention stealers –

- do you have time for this conversation?
 - Are you in a private place if there are disclosures?
 - Perhaps this is not the best time to be offering focussed listening to someone
- If the time and space are conducive, then prepare to focus your attention on the person or subject – make a choice to be present.
 - Acknowledge your own emotional state to yourself, can you control this? (put this on hold) Are you able to detach from your feelings to be present?
 - Review mentally what you already know about the situation being discussed, or the personality of the person before you – what will you do with that information? Use it as ammunition, or to reveal your superior knowledge?
 - Suspend judgment – people can usually sense prejudice or assume it

Active listening : *the different skills that enhance one's listening abilities*

- Concentrate with 'all' your senses – get into their world – who are they?
- How do they view life?
- What are their hopes and dreams or fears?
- What they are feeling, what do they want from you?
- Note the whole body, their body language – what is not being said as well as what is – tension or pain over certain topics, or mention of certain people.
Don't be afraid to comment on what you are observing

- Pick up on points – engage in the topic without agreeing or disagreeing (no evaluation). Your opinion is not as important as hearing what the other thinks about a certain thing, and why. (Even if it's something you don't agree with. People often feel validated that you hear their point of view – it is a mark of respect to the other and shows self-restraint and wisdom)
- Reflect back what you are hearing – either through paraphrase, or summary
- If you do, they possibly will go deeper because they sense you are really listening, not waiting to lecture or teach them
- Clarify to ensure you are hearing accurately – particularly where there are lots of details being given. This ensures you haven't perceived something that is not true;
- Respond with your whole body
- Look for points you can validate or encourage someone in. Sometimes it is more natural or common to disagree with another's opinions, attitudes or feelings but if we disrespect people's points of view, they can feel misunderstood. This takes self-discipline and control to not react negatively and a conscious choice to look for something meaningful or worthwhile in what is being shared. If you are self-focussed, distracted by what you think and feel about the topic, you can end up losing concentration and contact and as a result connection
- There are many perceptions that can influence what we hear.
 - A male perspective may differ from a female perspective i.e. problem solving – looking for solutions versus sharing emotions.
 - Age difference – language / perspective / assumption that the older is the wiser, young person has nothing of value to offer or vice versa.
 - Different cultures – what is or is not acceptable in each other's culture

- Educated vs no formal education – an assumption that the one is ignorant or conversely that the other is unapproachable and arrogant
 - Prosperous vs poor – one perceiving that the other expects a ‘hand-out’ or is lazy, whilst the other may feel ‘looked down on’ or misunderstood
- Listening to conflict – if a person is embarrassed to share their annoyance they may be very indirect ; this is easy to dismiss or not pick up on. Passive aggressive behaviours are also not direct – assumptions can be made by the speaker that you should know what they are thinking or feeling.
 - Aggressive conflict is difficult to not be intimidated by, or to take personally, but remaining calm and objective may defuse a situation when under attack

Active responding: *how to engage in a way that helps to show you are ‘with them’*

- Reflection – paraphrasing what you heard being said, helps to show you have focussed on what was said, regardless of how unnatural it may feel
- Clarification - checking that you have heard accurately – helps to avoid making assumptions over what is not being said as well
- Assess the level of communication required – is the person wanting to communicate using more emotional language than you are using
- Be supportive and positive where possible – empathic
- Ask the impossible – what’s not being said but possibly alluded to
- Ask what they would like to see happening
- Clarification of what you can offer if there are expectations from the other

- You are not responsible to resolve their issues; but you can show support and point them in the direction of help

The content of your conversation would be determined by the situation, circumstances, the type of relationship you have and how much time you have to spend. People sometimes feel 'unheard' when they communicate at one level and are responded to at a different level.

The following diagram describes five different levels of communication. Obviously when two people are communicating at the same level, they understand each other well. However, there are times when a speaker may be communicating on a more emotional level than the listener is prepared to respond at, or listen to, as this takes an emotional investment.

It is good to evaluate at what level you mostly communicate with people and whether there is a reason for this? Would you be prepared to trust someone else with your feelings and if not, is there a reason for that?

Levels of communication



Cliché conversation

- how are you? Fine, thank you. Nothing of real value communicated

Factual reporting

- nothing self-revelatory. Usually about others or just facts – good weather, or the soccer results

Ideas and judgements

- the contents of my mind – my thoughts, ideas and viewpoints. What I think about water charges or my local TD

Feelings

- it is these feelings I am to share with you if I am to tell you who I really am. How I feel about issues that affect us both

Peak

- total openness and honesty, leading to intimacy in the relationship. Personal disclosures that I feel I can trust you with, such as my depression over the loss of my husband

The key is not so much in 'saying all the right things'. It's more to do with self-awareness and being willing to change and risk something different.

For instance: if you are the type of person who is a bit of a closed book and never shares feelings with anyone, perhaps you are keeping others at a distance for a reason, to try to protect yourself? You don't want to be known, but that also has the effect of shutting others down when sharing with you and feeling that you are emotionally not available.

Alternatively: you may be the type of person who wears their heart on their sleeve and shares intimately with anyone and everyone. This may appear enviable, however it may also scare people away who may not be in the same space as you are. They may feel threatened at the thought of having to disclose intimate details about themselves, or hear intimate details about you. We need to assess when it's appropriate to share intimately with others and set boundaries around our emotions at times.

There are four published workshops in this Equipped to Care series

Workshop One

Relating and responding to others in an empathic way

Workshop Two

Developing healthy caring patterns by being aware of our own and understanding others

Workshop Three

Responding to those affected by suicide and self-harm

Workshop Four

Understanding anger, conflict and bullying and developing more proactive responses

For more information about obtaining booklets or organisation of a workshop contact

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