

# Mastering Listening

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Today, we're going to talk about going further with mastering pastoral care listening skills. What's really interesting about mastering this is that there are so many opportunities to get really good at this. For instance, in your very family, every day when you go home and at night when you're with your family, you can practice listening skills with each other. Or you can go out with a friend and just consciously think about it. As iron sharpens iron, one man sharpens another. Practice this wherever you go.

Mastering pastoral care listening skills is not as easy as it may seem because our tendency is to just start talking and not really listen. The closest person, if you're married, in your life is your spouse to sit with your spouse and to really say, "I am really trying to be a great listener." Here's what's interesting. If you're a guy, what's cool about this is a lot of times we guys can be seen a gal but we guys is like how does a woman really think and what does she mean and what is she saying?

As you actually talk with your wife and learn how to listen to her, what happens is that you have it happen to our women as they're talking. You can get accused of what all the women are trying to say, not that every woman is alike and some women are different—I realized that—and vice versa. If you're a woman and you're listening to this presentation and you're married, you have the other way to benefit you as well.

Now if you're not married, you have a different playing field so you'll get with a sister or brother or mom or dad in the context of the church members, different genders. I guess what I'm talking about is listening is also something that happens to learn how to listen to the other gender. If you're trying to fix your spouse instead of listening to your spouse, trying to fix your friend instead of listening to your conversations, what will happen just on those one-on-one relationships, you'll be fixing parishioners

without listening to them. But if your spouse or close friend thinks that you are a good listener, then others will think that as well.

In mastering pastoral care listening skills, what you want to continue to do is prepare for a listening session as possible as well. So practice at home. Practice with your spouse. Practice with each other. But also, if you know you're going to be meeting with someone, prepare for that meeting. Now, how do you do that? Well, it might be that you'll call ahead of time. "Come out over here and let's talk a little bit. Is there anything you want me to pray for right now?" You can sort of think about—even before the meeting happens—you can think about what might be talked about. So do your thinking ahead of time, not necessarily while you're listening.

Do a little research before the meeting to update your thinking about a subject matter if you know what that subject is. Here's why. Praying about it, knowing ahead of time, doing a little research, let's say somebody says, "Pastor, I want to talk about a struggle I have at work. My particular struggle is in a conflict." It really won't be that difficult to go into [peacefire.net](http://peacefire.net) and research those conflict fighters that people often have and try to get that in your mind. Here's why. You can ask better questions often when you prepare for a listening session.

Now, here's something else you can do when you're mastering pastoral care listening. Find listening mentors in your life. There are some people, pastors, who really know how to listen. They have ideas. They have skills. In fact, if you ask them, they will share with you. They'll say, "Sure, here are some of my secrets." Ask them and then listen to them. Here's the deal with finding mentors. A lot of times, when somebody finds a mentor, they're a little bit afraid to ask because they're thinking, "Oh, this is going to be such a big deal." If you just pick a listening mentor, this person may not be the mentor of every area in your life. It's just one area that you noticed they do very well.

What happens? You contact them. Maybe take them out to lunch. Invite them over and say, "I've noticed that you are a really great listener. Can I ask you some of the secrets that you've learned over

the years in being a really great listener?” What will happen is most will really help you out there. But most importantly, they’ll feel complimented. They’ll feel encouraged that you saw something in them.

When you’re talking and listening in a counseling session and then listening more and talking less in this counseling session, what you’ll find is that there will be a random urge, and I believe put by the Holy Spirit, in your questions. The Holy Spirit can place a question or thought in your heart. Sometimes, a breakthrough will even come. You just sit back and you listen. And then the Holy Spirit will say, “Ask this question. Ask that question with respect and with sincerity.” Sometimes the Holy Spirit will give you a vision, a word of knowledge, a question to ask and you listen.

It’s in those listening sessions where as you’re just listening to the person you’re talking to. But you’re also, in your prayers, you’re listening to the Lord. Is there something that’s being said? It’ll come as a random urge. Over twenty-eight years of pastoral care and counseling, I will be talking to someone and it’s as if that thought comes in my mind and you’re listening to someone. You’re listening to someone.

I recall some of them can be quite comical and hilarious where you’re listening to someone and then you all of a sudden have this thought in your mind. “Maybe there’s an affair. On the surface, it doesn’t look like anything that might be that way.” And then because of that thought, you ask a question. “Have you been faithful to one another?” All of a sudden, it comes out that no, they haven’t been faithful with one another and both have not been faithful to one another. Sometimes I’ve had that too.

I’m not saying accusatory. When these random thoughts come, be very careful that you don’t think that all of a sudden you have the knowledge of God and He has in all cases showed you something and now you’re going to accuse anybody of anything. These are random urges and you’re testing the spirit. What I’m saying is that sincerity. “So, the two of you are together. You’ve been faithful all these years.” It’s that respect. In most cases, yes that maybe a lot of times, that random urge will lead in a different

direction and it's not the question you ask or maybe the couple is like one of them is contemplating an affair. The thing I'm talking about is be sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Be sensitive to the person you're talking to.

Their random urge couldn't be coming from God. Maybe it's just something that popped into your mind. But as you take that urge to the listening room with respect and not judgmental and not like you figured anything out, let your questions be respectful but understand that God is in the room with you as you're mastering listening skills.

One of the things I like to do too is get out a piece of paper and write down some notes. Sometimes even in the discussion, especially if things become a little complicated, get out a piece of paper and write down discussion. What happens is the people feel that you are there listening to them a lot of times when you're writing things down. But most importantly when you write them down, you can look at them at a later time and think and pray about some of the things that you wrote down. Sometimes, later on through prayer and through reflection, an insight will come forward that you didn't expect at the time.

Listening to others really comes down to your ability to listen to God. Whenever you're reading the Bible, have sort of this listening attitude to listening to God's Word. When you are practicing your own walk with God, really seeking to listen to the words that I said to you from the scripture, this practice carries over in ways that you cannot imagine.