

FOUR VERSES ON LISTENING

A GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE



Scripture has shaped my approach to spiritual community assessment. Below are four of my favorites passages along with a brief thought and two questions for reflection. I quote a short line from each so be sure to look up the whole passage.

You can use this in a group discussion or for personal journaling.

1. “TO ANSWER BEFORE LISTENING— THAT IS FOLLY AND SHAME.” – PROVERBS 18:13 (NIV)

Dave Male points out an interesting phenomenon that is all too common in the church. We attend a conference or read an article exposing us to an interesting ministry idea. Then we decide to give it a try in our context, skipping the step of asking our church and neighbors what they might want to be a part of. Listening first can help you avoid starting frivolous ministries and lead you to start something your neighbors are actually longing for.

Discussion Questions:

1. *What questions can we ask our neighbors that might reveal their hopes and desires?*
 2. *How might we go about asking these questions to those outside of our church?*
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2. “HOW MANY LOAVES DO YOU HAVE?” HE ASKED. “GO AND SEE.” – MARK 6:30-44 (NIV)

When Jesus feeds the five thousand, he begins with what they have. So often our church ministries begin with what our neighbors are lacking. Our neighbors are brilliant, gifted, and each one is made in the image of God! As you listen to them, begin with their strengths and assets. Later in the conversation invite them to share their dreams and hopes. Too many unhealthy ministries have been built on “meeting needs.” Your neighbors are not problems to be fixed, they’re friends to be enjoyed.

Discussion Questions:

1. *Why is our tendency in the church to start outreach ministry by “meeting needs?”*
2. *How might this paradigm shift from needs to strengths change the way we approach community outreach at our church?*

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3. “[JESUS] LOOKED UP TO HEAVEN AND WITH A DEEP SIGH SAID TO HIM, “EPHPHATHA!” (WHICH MEANS ‘BE OPENED!’)” –MARK 7:32–35 (NIV)

In this wild little story Jesus gives an important motto for any good listener: “Be open!” Before the man could speak clearly, his ears needed to be opened. As you venture out into your neighborhood open your eyes and ears to what you will encounter. Be open to what the Holy Spirit wants to show you.

Discussion Questions:

1. *What might prevent you from truly hearing what your neighbors are telling you?*
2. *What is something you can do to be more receptive to the Holy Spirit in this community assessment process?*

4. “SHE HAD A SISTER CALLED MARY, WHO SAT AT THE LORD’S FEET LISTENING TO WHAT HE SAID.” – LUKE 10:38-42 (NIV)

The church in the West has placed an inordinate emphasis on programming. I’ve seen ministry colleagues run ragged by organizing a non-stop lineup of events, trainings, classes, and programs. When we measure success, it’s too often based on how many programs we offered and how many people attended them. As we listen to God, our congregation, and our neighbors we might also need to think about what programs are no longer needed and what will bring us to the feet of Jesus again.

Discussion Questions:

1. *How busy is our church? If we are doing too much, what can we do without?*
2. *What brings you to the feet of Jesus? How might our neighbors encounter Jesus?*

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