**Relationship Goals – Week 3 – Communication Goals**

**Message Big Idea**: Because we are heard by God, we can grow as a listener.

**Scripture:** James 1:19, Proverbs 18:13, Luke 18:35-43

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**Introduction: Mother’s Day**

*(Cold open with the video)*

**Video: Mom Celebrity Translator – SNL**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JcviVDizlJ0&feature=youtu.be

*(Happy Mother’s Day graphic)* So funny! How many of you have ever had a miscommunication with your mom? *(hands)* Well, the Big Idea for today’s message is very simple, and here it is… no matter how they say it…MOMS ARE ALWAYS RIGHT!!! Everybody got it? OK, let’s close in prayer.

Seriously, though… Let me add my words of appreciation to all the moms out there. You deserve many days for all the love and support and tireless energy you pour into your families. I hope you feel well celebrated today!

And let me also acknowledge that I know this day can be hard for a lot of women, too. For those who have lost your mom or long for a different relationship with your mom or perhaps long to be a mom yourself… I want you to know we celebrate you today, too. Mothering is about more than biology. Today we celebrate every nurturing, encouraging, strong woman in the room. In fact, men, let me ask you to show your appreciation for the women sitting around you *(clap)*.

**Series Recap**

*(Series Graphic)* Today we are continuing in our series **“Relationship Goals”** with a topic that is relevant to every one of us in all of our most important relationships. Today I want to ask you, “What are your **Communication Goals**?”

Few things can wreak havoc in our relationships more than a breakdown in communication.

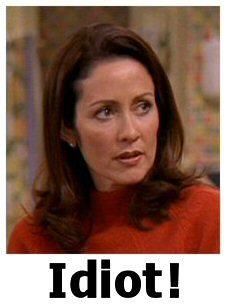
* In a recent poll of mental health professionals, poor communication was cited as the number one reason couples split up.[[1]](#endnote-1)
* If you’ve ever raised a teenager or been a teenager, miscommunication can feel like a daily habit.
* And chances are every one of us has experienced the loss of a friendship or an important working relationship over a break down in communication.

During this series we’re acknowledging that the most important things in life are relationships…a relationship with God and our relationships with each other…and good communication is essential to nurturing those relationships. Yet, not many of us think about setting communication goals. So today, we’re going to challenge one another to get better at communicating.

**Slow to Listen**

Now, of course, communication is a pretty broad topic.

* We communicate with our words.
* We communicate with our hands.
* We communicate through our silence.
* And, most moms out there are experts at communicating with *(picture)* side eye. That’s like a basic mom skill, right? Make this interactive. 4 pictures of mom.



Communication covers a lot of skills, but today I want to zero in on what is perhaps the most important communication skill of all: **Listening**.

James, the brother of Jesus, writes:

**“My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry…” -James 1:19**

He’s saying listening should be our default response, what happens quickly and naturally, but so often that’s just not the case. I am so much faster at speaking. Anyone else willing to admit you are quick to *speak* and slow to *listen*?

Becoming a good listener can be difficult for a number of reasons. *(Heading “Barriers to Listening” and build with following words)*

First, because it’s much easier to be *(add)* Me-Focused **Self-Centered**, right? I like thinking about me and talking about me and having people listen to me…thanks for being here today, by the way. ☺ We have to be willing to let go of our own self-preoccupation to become good at listening. Author Adam McHugh says:

**“Good listening starts with the scandalous premise that this conversation is not about you.” Adam S. McHugh, *The Listening Life***

That’s a new revelation for some of us, right? *“What? You mean your life doesn’t revolve around me?”* Our self-centeredness can keep us from listening.

Another barrier to listening is *(add)* **Assumptions**. We’re all prone to this. Rather than trying to understand what a person is saying, we assume we already know. It’s like trying to put together a piece of IKEA furniture without looking at the directions. You think you know, but you’re going to end up wrong.

A third barrier is *(add)* **Validation**. Let’s face it, in our culture, it’s the people who talk who are recognized, always validated, and given authority. You never see someone on a cable news show trying to be a good listener.

And finally, it’s plain old *(add)* **Busyness** that keeps us from listening to one another. The calendar is full, our minds are full, we find it hard to slow down and pay attention.

**Why Listening is So Important**

~~But let’s just stop for a moment and talk about why listening is so important.~~ **What happens when we don’t listen?** I think a couple of things…

Build equation instead of phrases on screen.

*(add)* **People feel Unheard**. Acknowledge this is obvious, but put emphasis on the feeling. Sure, we may actually be hearing the words they are saying, but that doesn’t mean we’re listening.

To show you what I mean, I want to try something. I want us to be silent for 20 seconds, and I want you to pay attention to what you hear. OK? 20 seconds of silence in this room where we all listen. *(Wait 20 seconds).* Alright, what did you hear? *(Take audience responses)* Here’s the thing… You were hearing all of those things before. The whole time we’ve been in this room you’ve been hearing *(name the things the audience heard)*, but a lot of what you were hearing went unheard because you were paying attention to me (which in this case is OK…hopefully what I’m saying is more valuable than the sound of the HVAC system!). However, when it comes to the most important people in our lives, a lot of what we are hearing goes unheard when we aren’t really listening.

Another thing that can make people feel unheard is something called “spotlight grabbing.” You know what that is, right? Some of us, myself included, are really good at this! It’s when someone else is sharing and rather than listening to their story, you’re thinking about your story and respond with, “Something like that just happened to me…” and off you go focusing on your own story instead of listening to the other person. Anyone else besides me guilty of this? It’s so easy to do! And yet, it can leave the people in our lives feeling unheard.

When we don’t listen, people feel unheard and also *(add)* **People feel Unknown**.

Let me ask you… have you ever called customer support for some kind of issue with a product or service and gotten one of those automated help lines where they say, “If you need help with blank, press 1, if your issue is with blank, press 2, and so on. Have any of you ever got stuck in one of those automated cycles where none of the offered options meets your needs? It’s like whomever put this thing together thinks that they know you and the solution to your problem but they don’t and none of their options are helpful. And then you get stuck on hold and some kind of computer voice says, Play audio “Your call is important to us…” and I want to scream, “No it’s not!!!”

And yet, we often do this to each other in real life. When someone comes to us with an issue they want to talk about, rather than listening and trying to understand where they are coming from, we often go right into “fix-it” mode. We think we know how to solve their problem. This is important for us to recognize… Most people aren’t asking for your strategy for their problem; they are looking for support as they navigate their problem. The writer of Proverbs warns us…

**To answer before listening—**

**that is folly and shame. –Proverbs 18:13**

…and yet it’s so easy to do. We fail people when we try to heal them before we listen to them. When we don’t listen to people, they are left feeling unknown.

And here is the real issue, friends. When the people in our life feel unheard and unknown, (Unheard + Unknown = Unloved) ultimately it leaves them feeling unloved. Maybe that seems too extreme to you, but it’s true. Author David Ausburger writes:

**“Being listened to is so close to being loved that the average person can not tell the difference.” –David Ausburger.**

None of us want the most important people in our lives to feel unloved, so how do we make sure that doesn’t happen?

**Word: Luke 18:35-43**

Well, no person has ever (or will ever) live this out better than Jesus. He is always perfectly loving towards the people around Him. He never misses an opportunity to love.

Sometimes we see that on full display in big powerful moments like feeding a crowd of over 5,000 hungry people…And these stories are amazing and important for us to know and be reminded of…We have a loving God who has the power to display love in big miraculous ways!

But there are other stories as well…stories that are less like a “mic-drop-moment” and more like a whisper…A whisper of love to someone who no one else seemed to notice or value.

Unfortunately, I think it is easy for us to overlook these quieter and more personal stories. BUT, when we overlook these moments we miss out on the personal attentiveness and tenderness of Jesus…

* Jesus, who sees and values everyone…
* Jesus, who loves those who are typically forgotten
* Jesus, who loves those who are just plain old normal

And it is in these moments we see God Himself pull up a chair up to listen to and love those who seem barely register the attention of anyone else.

And one of these stories can be found in Luke 18 where we find Jesus approaching a bustling town filled with people who have heard rumors about Jesus and everyone is desperate to see Him. In fact, we are told that the crowds were so big that people couldn’t even get close enough to see Him…So, important and powerful people, who could probably have pulled strings to connect with any other important visitor, were actually climbing trees just to get a glimpse of Him as he walked by!

I want you to imagine (just for a second ☺) being surrounded by a huge crowd of people, covered in the dust from the road, some of them riding donkeys or horses, and none of them have any respect or value for personal space…I know…it’s terrible.

If you have ever been in a situation like that you know you can just feel overwhelmed and pushed by the crowd…all you can hear is noise…And all you can think about is how great it would be to not breath in someone else’s hot breath…nasty.

If you can bear it, this is the scene I want you to picture as we look at this powerful story in Luke 18 starting in verse 35.

**“As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind beggar was sitting beside the road. When he heard the noise of a crowd going past, he asked what was happening. They told him that Jesus the Nazarene was going by. So he began shouting, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’**

**‘Be quiet!’ the people in front yelled at him.**

**But he only shouted louder, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’**

**When Jesus heard him, he stopped** (pause) **and ordered that the man be brought to him. As the man came near, Jesus asked him, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’**

**‘Lord,’ he said, ‘I want to see!’**

**And Jesus said, ‘All right, receive your sight! Your faith has healed you.’ Instantly the man could see, and he followed Jesus, praising God. And all who saw it praised God, too.” –Luke 18:35-43**

This is so amazing to me…Not just the outrageous miracle of the man receiving sight…which is incredible. But I can’t help but also be struck by how Jesus shows so much love in his response.

Jesus not only hears the man yelling but he stops…resisting the current of the crowd. Then he asks for the man to be brought over to him and he starts a conversation! He honors and respects this man enough to not make assumptions but to actually listen to him.

I mean think about it…everyone is vying for a piece of Jesus but Jesus chooses to get face to face with this blind beggar that the crowd was not only ignoring but they were actively telling him to “Be Quiet!”. Imagine how the blind man must have felt…I wonder how many years he had been sitting by the side of that road…I wonder how many of the thousands and thousands of people who had passed him over the years had actually stopped and gotten to know him…not just tossed him a few coins out of pity.

But here, Jesus, the most important person to ever walk the Earth…**Stops *(pause)* so He can actually listen** *(point to ear)* **to him and then Asks a question so He can actually know** *(point to chest)* **him.**

This amazing scene concludes with Jesus, continuing to act out of love and compassion, healing the man right on the spot.

And I can’t help but think about the beautiful irony of this moment…The first thing that this formally blind man would see is the only man who actually took the time to “see” him.

Then this formally blind man immediately begins to follow Jesus, praising God for what had happened!

And this is just one of many stories we see in scripture of Jesus displaying love in these simple but profound ways.

Jesus was a really good listener. Hurting people were drawn to him like a magnet, pouring out their troubles as they looked into his empathetic eyes.

Jesus was an expert at identifying the cues of the individuals, and even crowds, around Him.

Jesus was an expert at inviting conversation. Jesus drew people out. For example, he was not in a rush when he initiated dialogue with the woman at the well in John 4, knowing it would take time for her to shed surface layers of theological questions and personal struggles.

And Jesus didn’t ignored people and He never interrupted them with a spotlight-grabbing story about how “something just like that happened to me the other day….” Really imagine Jesus doing this…

The secret-truth behind why Jesus was the worlds best listener and communicator is the fact that he fully knew the infinite value of every person…

But for us mere mortals, being a good listener can be really hard.

The not-so-attractive-truth about us is that our value judgment of a person often determines whether or not we will stop and listen to them or actually seek to know them in any way.

So, how can we love others the way Jesus loves us…

**Challenge: Imitate Jesus**

Change the challenge to “listen” (and we do that by stopping) and “know” (and we do that by asking).

Well, first things first, before we can share the love of Jesus with others we have to first receive it ourselves. 1 John 4:19 says; “We love because He first loved us.” Instead use 1 Peter 3:12

Just like the blind man in this story first was loved by Jesus before he started to follow Him and praise God. We need to first understand that each of us are just like this man.

When we see ourselves as the undeserving recipients of God’s attention and love through Jesus, something changes in our hearts…Everything changes when we understand that Jesus *really sees* us and He *really knows* all our brokenness BUT chooses to love and forgive us anyway at the expense of His own life!!!

When we receive that love and healing forgiveness we can begin to follow in the way of Jesus with overwhelming joy in our heart…Just like the blind man.

And just like Jesus we can begin to create space in our mind and life to actually stop.

Maybe we will even set aside some of the countless distractions like our phones or even Netflix!

I think so often we are so distracted by our phones or our own busyness that we don’t even look like we are listening when we actually are listening!

I mean, think about your non-verbals when you are listening…Is this person valuable enough for you to pay attention to without peaking at your phone or worrying about what you have to do later that day? Of course!

I know sometimes my kids won’t let me get away with this…maybe you parents have experienced this…If I am not really listening to them, they will literally grab my face to get attention! ☺

So, the first thing we need to do to imitate Jesus in this way is to STOP.

Second, we need to Ask.

Don’t assume you know what someone is communicating. We need to learn to ask good questions and sometimes we need to respond with affirmation, not answers, like:

* I’m so sorry.
* That must have been so hard.
* How did that make you feel? ]
* Or, Tell me more about that

When we STOP and ASK the people around us will feel heard and known…they will feel loved!! And that is the goal of our communication as Jesus followers!

And after we STOP and ASK we will have the opportunity to follow through like Jesus and ACT.

**Conclusion**

Ultimately, this is what love looks like. Taking the time to listen and know the people in our life, especially those who are most important to us.

And how are we able to do this??? Because God has initiated this kind of love with us…

God loves us so much that he hears every thought that goes through our head and every word that comes out of our mouth.

There is a direct correlation between our communication with God and healthy communication with others. If I am not heard and known by God, then I will have to look to people for what I need…I will be looking to get value from them rather than adding value to them…I will only seek to be heard rather than seeking to listening hear.

God hears you, He knows you, and he loves you.

Being heard and valued by God equips us to do that for others. So let’s set a goal to receive what we need from God so that we in turn can love the people in our life by listening. Remember…

**“Being listened to is so close to being loved that the average person can not tell the difference.” –David Ausburger.**

So let’s love each other well by listening.

**Communion Idea**

So, today as we close with communion today I want you to receive these symbols, the bread and the cup, as a reminder of God’s forever love that has been given to all who will accept it.

He came to all of us and each of us in Jesus so that we could receive the miraculous love of God so we could share that miraculous love with others.

Receive this cup and this bread as a reminder of the truth that “We love because He first loved us.” -1 John 4:1

1. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/divorce-causes\_n\_4304466 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)