

Love to listen – listening in community

A process developed by Cathy James

With grateful thanks to Cathy James for allowing us to use her ideas and activities. Cathy is the originator, any mistakes in conveying the learning rest with us.

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Aims of the process

- Equip churches with the mindset, principles and activities they need to listen well to their community, especially those who are on the margins
- Break down barriers between church and community and between groups/ generations
- Enable churches to move from doing things for the community towards working effectively with the community to address their priorities, thus extending God's kingdom holistically.

Principles and attitudes

Evidence from other listening processes shows that the most important thing is to underpin listening with good principles and attitudes. Principles for good listening could include:

Creating safe space	where people feel accepted and loved, with clarity about purpose, time needed from them, confidentiality and how the learning will be shared/used
Practising appreciative inquiry	focusing on people and change, recognising the gifts and resources we all have in and around us and not raising false expectations
Guided by God's wisdom through the Holy Spirit	so we listen beneath the words to people's emotions and motivations too and to what the Spirit is doing/highlighting
Seeking diversity	so we hear from a range of people, including different generations (especially young people) and those who are on the margins of society or are often left out
Feeding back honestly	and accurately what people say without bias and without reframing their words to fit our own ideas.

When we listen, we need to demonstrate:

- **humility** - putting others above ourselves in our physical and emotional positioning;
- **curiosity** - to listen deeply and try to understand what others are saying and feeling; and
- **authenticity** - in who we are and taking forward what we hear from others.

Activities

1. Mindset change reflection

An activity that can help create the right attitudes and space to listen to God, each other and our communities.

Beginning with Scripture (see Woman at the Well passage below) can place our minds and hearts in the right focus for the work of listening in community:

- Reading: Set the scene and pray for the Holy Spirit to engage our hearts, minds, emotions as we listen.
 - Ask someone to read the passage (below) as we ask God to reveal what this shows us about how to listen/ engage with those on the margins.
 - Listen again as someone reads the monologue (below) – put ourselves in her shoes.
- Meditation: spend 5 mins meditating on the passage. What phrase or idea strikes us when we think about listening and engaging with those who are left out of society/ on the edges?
- Sharing and Prayer: get into twos and listen to each other's thoughts without interrupting. Just a couple of sentences each. And then pray through those thoughts together
- Contemplation: together, just wait in silence, letting the Holy Spirit hover over our thoughts
- Living: share what has come out of that about lessons about listening.

John 4: 1-19 – the woman at the well

Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John—² although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. ³ So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

⁴ Now he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." ¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" ¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." ¹⁶ He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

¹⁷ "I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

¹⁹ "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

Woman at the Well monologue

"I wait behind closed shutters until the sun is at its highest point. Then I cautiously slip out into the sweltering noon heat. I am dripping with sweat in seconds. But as I glance round, I see that my timing has served its purpose. No one is around. No one to sneer, to cast knowing glances at me and whisper something to a friend. No one to make lewd comments as if I am now anyone's property. Yesterday I had to face the ordeal of the market, to do the weekly shopping, and I heard mutters on every side: "5 husbands!" "5, plus the man she is with now...unmarried they say!" "I met him the other day, nice man...shame he's stuck with someone like her..." and so on. Every sentence like a lash on my back... The woman who handed me the fruit I was buying drew her hand out quickly, as if I might contaminate her. Another woman pulled her daughter away. But the pain of their judgement sinks to insignificance when I think of that day that started it all...that horrific day...To lose my dear husband would have been terrible, but to be robbed as well of my beautiful baby in one accident, my two reasons for living... it's unbearable. I try to numb it with any entertainment that I can find, any man that offers me protection, some sort of security... but my grief corrodes my insides, toxic to any relationship that comes close. I hurry on to the well, my steps haunted by the whispers of the town. People that do not even try to understand me. I do not notice the man until it is too late...I stop short. Why is he here? There's never anyone at this time of day! What can he be doing? I look at him more closely and notice and he is not from our town. In fact, he's a Jew! Relief washes over me. He does not know who I am and so cannot judge me. And as a Jewish man, he would NEVER talk to a Samaritan woman. Feeling safe, I lower my bucket gently... "Will you give me a drink?" I start up, shocked. Who is he speaking to? But there is no one else around... Somehow, he is talking to me! Our conversation slips by, surreal. He knows EVERYTHING about me, my entire situation. But he doesn't lecture me. I don't see the flash of judgement that I have grown so used to. He seems to look beyond that, to see me, to want to listen to me and speak to me. He promises me living water so that I will never be thirsty again. I don't get what he means at first, but later, I think I begin to understand. This terrible yearning for something to give my life meaning again has vanished. My grief and pain are still very real, but somehow every memory is infused with hope. Strangely, this man's acceptance has changed everything. He knew all my worst secrets. Yet he still broke social and cultural laws to speak to me, he put his own reputation on the line. He made more sacrifices for me in that one conversation than anyone has ever made for me before. He tells me he is the Messiah... the one who has been promised. Suddenly, nothing else matters to me except that others in my town share my joy. Nothing they can say can hurt me. I have found something infinitely more precious! So I call them all to come and meet this Messiah, the one with living water that satisfies forever

2. Imagining our community

Secret in a box instructions:

- Ask for three volunteers
- Hand the sealed box to person A and ask him/her to say what is inside without opening it. Announce how many he/she got correct, but not which ones. 3.
- Ask person B to close his/her eyes, open the box and allow him/her to feel the objects. Ask him/her to say what is inside without opening it. Announce how many he/she got correct
- Then hand the open box to person C ask them to list the objects as specifically as possible (i.e. with their colours and other details)
- Discuss:
 - Who could each of these three represent in our church context? The first maybe an national government/ agencies; the second maybe us as a church/ local government ; the third a community member who is going through stuff – someone with first-hand knowledge)
 - Who scored the highest? Who scored the lowest? Why? (e.g. donors are highly dependent upon head knowledge; officials see half-truths - they hear about things but do not stay in the area)
 - What does this activity tell us about who tends to plan the community action that happens in this area and who should really plan, based on information and understanding?

3. PhotoVoice taster

- Framing for the activity: PhotoVoice used around the world by many groups – striking, easy for everyone to participate, tell a story, can influence others etc. Share tips for taking photos and for ethics
- Have 20 mins in peer small groups (2-3 people) to go for a walk and take max of 2 photos of what you love about this community and 2 of things that most need to change. If not your area, or can't reach, then just imagine and look at it fresh
- Peer photo-taking: go for brief walk around, prayerfully reflecting
- Reflection and analysis: share what you have taken and will capture each one on a post-it. Cluster the post-its and discuss emerging themes.
 - What comes out as priorities?
 - What one area could be a focus for action?
 - What could we do ourselves using our own resources? Who else might need to be involved?

4. Community Mapping

Steps:

1. **Framing the session:** Explain that this activity is an interesting way to reflect on what problems exist in our group/ community that we need to address to achieve it – and what resources we already have too.
2. **Sketching the area:** Divide people into sub-groups if needed to make sure everyone takes part. Put a large paper/ flip chart in the middle of each group. Ask people to think about the local area in which our group moves around. Get someone to begin sketching out a few of the key roads and defining features. Then get everyone to add any other main places, such as our homes, schools, hospital, churches, shops, parks etc. Encourage people to do it quickly and messily – not worry about how exact it is but just to have a picture of our area.
3. **Reflecting on the issues we face:** ask everyone next to think about what issues in our community could prevent us seeing our vision and who is experiencing them. For example, mark on the map where people feel safe and where they might be at risk (whether physically, emotionally or psychologically), using colours/ symbols to differentiate them.
4. **Reflecting on the resources we have:** ask everyone now to think about and mark onto the map any resources that already exist to help address these issues, whether individuals, groups, organisations or physical assets.
5. **Share and discuss the emerging ideas:** thinking about where the biggest problems lie and where we already have resources to address them. Do we already use these or is there more we can do? Are there hidden resources in ourselves and others that we have not shown – what could those be? Take a photo of your map so you can refer back to it.

Further links

You can find [in this folder](#) the materials we adapted for our Bath church, which they called: Discover God's Heart. It includes two sets of Bible studies/ reflections adapted from the usual CCM ones for our English context a bit more. We also trained the church in one simple set of community activities like the mapping which are also in the folder. It has a bit of introductory information which might help too.

The full set of CCM materials can be found in [this toolkit](#) on the Eagles Malawi website. You will see that the

Bible studies are organised under themes with related activities and then it also includes all the activities to do with community groups to share issues and decide on priorities. It's all digitally linked so people can click on what they want in the Contents and go directly to the tool and then click on the bottom of the page to return to the Contents.

You can find information about Mothers' Union's [Metamorphosis approach here](#) – it's designed specifically for the UK and uses all the same kind of tools and resources as the other CCM ones. They have also produced a Bite-Size version that is shorter. People would be able to access support from there to accompany them, I think.

As I said we also run [a 6-month online CCM course](#) with people all over the world, including UK that trains people as facilitators. It's brilliant but I don't know when we will begin a new one as we have a cohort running currently. People can express their interest by signing up on the webpage and be contacted when there is going to be one. It has a small nominal charge of £50 just to make sure people are genuinely interested in putting time into it, though we reduce that if they are from lower income countries or struggling.