

God's Love in Listening

Intro Video – It's not about the nail¹

1. Intro & Context

- This term we're thinking about God's love in action
 - Started with God's love in the gospel and the foundation that we only love because God first loved us
 - It's the gospel that shows us what true love is like – it's sacrificial and unconditional
 - Only when we know God's love to us in the gospel are we able to love others this way
 - Over the coming weeks, we're going to be thinking about what God's love in action looks like in ...
 - Caring
 - Hospitality
 - Conflict Resolution
 - Encouragement
 - But apart from sharing the gospel with one another, probably the important thing we can do in caring for others is to simply be good listeners!
- Most people say
 - "Oh yeah ... listening! I can do that! That's easy!"
 - But do you listen well?
- How often do you find yourself ...
 - Like the guy in the video providing solutions or giving advice
 - Saying "You'll be fine, it'll all work out, you're worrying about nothing"
 - Saying to a person in pain or despair "I know how you feel"
 - Fidgeting or watching the time when someone is talking to you
 - Interrupting a person mid sentence or finishing their sentences
 - Hearing their story and then immediately telling them about you
- If you've ever done any of these ... then maybe you're not as good listener as you think
- Well this morning we're looking at God's love in listening
 - How you and I can love one another by listening well to one another

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4EDhdAHRQg>

- So this morning I want to look at three things
 - Bad listening
 - Better listening
 - Best listening
- And as usual ... we'll be turning to the wisdom of God's word guide us in this

PRAY

2. Bad Listening

- I want to start this morning looking at the book of Job
- Job is one of the OT wisdom books that we often turn to help us work through and resolve the issue of suffering in the world

- In Job 1-2 ... Job had lost everything > wealth, family, health, the lot
 - It's a despairing scene
 - To have **everything** in life ... and then lose it all in the blink of an eye is a great tragedy
- Towards the end of Ch 2, three of Job's friends come to visit
- And as the readers we're thinking –
 - This is good ... now his friends will gather around him and support him through this tragedy

- However, in Ch 4 all the way through to Ch 25 we have this dialogue between Job and his friends
 - And it stems from Job's lament in Ch 3
 - If we had time to read Job 3 we see how he was so distraught in his pain and darkness that he even cursed the day of his birth
 - He wished the day he was born had never happened or died at birth
 - Because, then he wouldn't have to go through all this suffering

- After listening to Job lament his situation and express the raw emotion and pain of what he is going through ...
 - Rather than empathise and listen to and love Job ... his so called friends spend the next 20-odd chapters taking turns to lecture him
- And what happens is ... rather than be a comfort to him in his suffering, they actually add to his suffering

- **Judgmental**
- One of the things Job's friends fall into judgmentalism

- They basically say ... "Job, this suffering is your own fault"
 - Eliphaz says in 4:7-9
 - *Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? As I have observed, those who plough evil and those who sow trouble reap it. ⁹ At the breath of God they are destroyed; at the blast of his anger they perish.*

- See what he's saying?
 - If you're reaping trouble it's because you sowed it

- Bildad joins in the party too making a similar comment in 8:3-4 he says
 - ³ *Does God pervert justice? Does the Almighty pervert what is right? ⁴ When your children sinned against him, he gave them over to the penalty of their sin.*

- He's saying ... the reason your children are dead Job is because they sinned
 - They got what they deserved

- Eliphaz pipes up again in Ch 22:5
 - *Is not your wickedness great? Are not your sins endless?*

- But the problem is ... Job's friends are wrong!
 - Job is not being punished for his sin
 - His hasn't brought on his suffering himself
 - But they assume the worst and judge him accordingly

- **Problem Solving**
- Not only do Job's friends judge him ... they tell him what he needs to do to fix it
 - Like our man in the nail video ... they go into problem solving mode
 - Does this happen your household?
 - Have you got fixers / problem solvers in your house?

- Well, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar are typical men and they are getting straight to solution mode
 - They start to tell him what to do to climb out of his misery
- Bildad says in Job 8:5-6
 - *But if you will look to God and plead with the Almighty, ⁶ if you are pure and upright, even now he will rouse himself on your behalf and restore you to your rightful place.*

- Zophar says in Job 11:13-19
 - *"Yet if you devote your heart to him and stretch out your hands to him, ...¹⁶ You will surely forget your trouble, ...¹⁷ Life will be brighter than noonday, and darkness will become like morning ... ¹⁹ You will lie down, with no one to make you afraid, and many will court your favour.*
- So you see the essence of what they're saying to Job?
 - "The reason you are suffering like this Job is because you're guilty of sin ... you're reaping what you've sowed"
- And their solution is ...
 - repent and turn to God and you will be blessed
 - repent > make amends with God and everything will work out fine
- **Self-Righteous**
- Not only are they judgmental and solution mode ... they're also self righteous
 - *Job 15:9 – What do you know that we do not know? What insights do you have that we do not have?*
 - There's this air of superiority ... that they know better and they are better ... which in their minds is obvious because they're not suffering like Job
- **Impatient**
- They're also incredibly impatient with Job in his suffering
 - *Job 18:2 "When will you end these speeches? Be sensible, and then we can talk.*
 - "Come on Job! Move on!"
 - "Stop your blabbering and moaning!"
- They're impatient
- It's a terrible way to try and comfort someone in such pain and darkness
 - They lack love, they lack empathy and they lack wisdom
 - So it's no surprise about half way through their lecturing in 16:2 Job calls them "*miserable comforters*"
 - They offer no comfort ... they don't listen ... they fail to love their friend
- **Application**
- Psychologist and grief advocate Megan Devine – recently wrote a book called *It's OK That You're Not OK*
- She says ...

- Our best efforts to help somebody feel better often backfire
- When we are with people who are grieving or suffering ...
 - Cheering people up
 - Telling them to be strong & persevere
 - Helping them move on
 - Doesn't actually work
 - We just add to their suffering and anguish
- Bad listening comes in many shapes and sizes
- It often happens when someone is experiencing grief and suffering or going through a hard times and we
 - Get judgmental
 - How many times has someone in your household done something against your advice and you say
 - "I told you not to do that"
 - "Why'd you do a stupid thing like that"
 - "You should have said this ... you should have done that"
 - We say it to the kids as well!
 - Go into solution mode
 - "You know what I did when that happened to me? ..."
 - "I felt sad once ... have you tried green tea?"
 - Try to reassure and console
 - "You just need a cuppa and lie down it will all be okay"
 - "I know how you feel" – no you don't
 - "The pain will go away with time"
 - It's pretty rare you can talk someone out of their pain
 - Saying "Look on the bright side" never actually heals someone
 - It just makes them stop telling you about their pain
- But it's not just in the more intense moments of life that we listen badly
- Often it's in our day to day conversations with each other that we do it too
- When we
 - Interrupt people as they are speaking
 - Finish their sentences
 - We are implicitly saying ...
 - I don't **really** care what you're saying ... I'm going to cut in and say what I want
 - I don't **really** have the patience to hear everything you've got to say ... so I'm going to speed it up and say it for you
 - Are you a finisher or an interrupter?

- A really bad form of listening ... is when as soon as the person finishes what they're saying ...
 - We turn the conversation around to ourselves
 - I start telling them about the time that happened to me
 - Because what that shows ... we weren't really listening
 - Because as they were speaking ... we were formulating in our mind what we were going to say as soon as they stopped
- Proverbs 18:13 says - *he who answers before listening-- that is his folly and his shame*
 - In other words ... when you fail to listen ... that's foolish
 - And in the context of our series, God's love in action, its unloving

3. Better Listening

- What Megan Devine goes on to say is ... a better way to care for those in pain is ... to **just listen**
- She says ... just listen and let them be in pain
- She quotes author and educator Parker Palmer who says
 - *The human soul doesn't want to be advised, fixed or saved. It simply just wants to be witnessed, exactly as it is.*
- They're talking about empathy
- Devine goes on to say ...
 - Empathy makes things better even when it can't be made right
 - Empathy is much way more helpful ... because in doing so you **join people in their pain** ... rather than to trying to cheer them up
 - When pain and suffering come into a person's life ... it's much better to simply listen ... and acknowledge that that pain exists
 - And so in order to love someone in that situation ... we need to acknowledge things are as bad as they feel
- When you share something painful ... rather than me
 - Try and cheer you up
 - Give you advice
- It's much better to say
 - "I'm sorry that's happening, do you want to tell me about it" and listen
- For someone to be able to say ...

- "This hurts" ... without being talked out of it, helps
- Being heard helps

- For a brief moment in Job 2 ... this is what Job's friends do
 - When they see the distress and anguish Job is in ... they weep aloud, tear their clothes, sprinkle dust on their heads and **mourn with him**
 - For seven days they just sit there in silence with their grieving friend

- If only they'd left it at that and not opened their mouths
 - Because when they begin to speak, that's when they become miserable comforters
 - Their comfort would have been a blessing ... if they'd just listened and refrained from speaking

- **Application**
- Paul says in Romans 12:15 - *Mourn with those who mourn*
 - And the better way to mourn with those who are suffering, grieving or going through hard times ... is to simply
 - Listen
 - Empathise; and
 - Acknowledge the pain, hurt or frustration they're experiencing

- Last week we looked at God's love in the Word ... and the importance of speaking the truth in love
 - That is, speaking the good news of Jesus into one another's lives
- You and I can't love one another
- Nor will we know how to speak the gospel into each other's lives ...
 - Unless we first listen
 - Unless we first empathise and acknowledge
 - Because if we start speaking without doing these things first ... we will hurt, frustrate and silence one another
 - We end up like Job's friends giving bad advice and hurting them with lack of love, empathy and care

- But being a good listener ... is not just limited to times of grief and hardship
- Being a good listener is one of the ways we love others in our interactions with each other day to day
 - Listening well is one of the ways we put *God's love into action*

- Failing to listen is actually failure to love one another
 - When we interrupt ... we cause frustration
 - When we look away ... we make them feel unimportant
 - When we ignore ... we make them feel rejected
 - When we give unsolicited advice ... we make them feel small
 - When we insist on telling my story ... we make them feel unheard

- How do you listen better?
 - While it is a skill you can practice ... as with most areas of behaviour ... it begins with the heart

- Tim Keller says ...
 - *if you meet a truly humble person, you wouldn't think him / her humble, but happy and **incredibly interested in you***

- What does a person do when they show they are incredibly interested in you?
 - They listen to you!
 - What Keller is saying ... to be that person means being someone who is humble

- Apostle Paul picks up on this in his letter to the church in Philippi
 - *Philippians 2:4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others*

- We will listen well ... when in humility ... we look out for the interest of others
 - A humble person doesn't need the conversation to be about them
 - A humble person thinks the things you have to say are valuable
 - A humble person won't assume they know better and therefore
 - need to interrupt; or
 - fidget
 - get distracted

- Your humility or lack of it ... will greatly impact on whether or not you listen well

- This is crucial for those times we disagree with one another
 - What happens when we disagree, or we're criticised?
 - We react

- We defend ourselves
- We fail to listen and actually hear what's being said
- James says in 1:19
 - *My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to get angry*
- They're wise words
 - How many times do you wish you had kept your mouth shut after
 - you lashed out in anger with harsh words
 - made a sarcastic remark
 - attacked the person who criticised you
- Learning to listen
 - To hold your tongue and to truly hear what's being said
 - Will guard us against unnecessary hurt, argument and relational tension
- **Illustration – Husband & Wife Fight**
 - Liana criticises me (fairly) for something I did or said
 - If I don't listen, and am quick to speak ... what do i do?
 - I defend myself ... I attack her ... imply it's her fault or someone else's fault
 - How does Liana feel? Unheard ... frustrated
 - What's she going to do? Say it louder ... with more force or tone ... because she wants me to hear her because she doesn't think I've listened
 - And it just escalates
- But what happens when I listen well
 - I listen to what she is saying
 - I am slow to speak
 - I show I have heard her by empathising ...
 - That is ... by verbally and non-verbally letting her know I've heard what she's said
- What happens then?
 - She softens towards me
 - I'm in a place to admit my wrong doing
 - The tension is resolved
- If we are going to put God's love into action ... then *Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to get angry*
 - Not just in our marriage
 - But in our parenting

- Relationships here at church too
- But that won't happen when I'm filled with pride
 - Only if I am humble ... will I be willing to listen
 - Only if I am humble ... will I be willing to hear I am wrong
 - Only if I am humble ... will I be in a position to consider someone else's thoughts, ideas, story or observation
- Interesting up at Basecamp Men's convention last week ...
 - Online poll asking men there to share the thing that gets in the way of them giving glory to God in their life
 - The #1 reason ... pride
- Us men are so full of pride
 - Husbands ... is your pride stopping you from listening to your wife?
 - Fathers ... is your pride preventing you from listening when your children are explaining themselves?
 - Young men ... is your pride causing you to dismiss other people and their opinions?
- Humility will help you to be a better listener

4. Best Listening

- How then ... can you and I grow in humility so that we might love one another and be better listeners?
 - We need to practice best listening
- How do we do that?
- We need to listen to Jesus
- Jesus says in Matthew 7:24-26
 - *"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand."*
- Jesus says ...
 - the wise person not only listens to his words ... but also puts it into practise
- And when we listen to the words of Jesus what does he tell us
- He tells us

- We're all broken sinners
- Yet he came to give his life as a ransom for sinners like you and I
- He calls on you and I to repent and turn back to God and believe in him for the forgiveness of your sins
- That's what Christians call the gospel ... that's the good news

- And what's the gospel teach us?
 - It teaches us we are more sinful than we dare to admit
 - That we are unable to save ourselves
 - And yet God is
 - quick to listen to us,
 - slow to speak against us and
 - slow to get angry with us
- And therefore, when you and I call out to God in repentance and ask for his forgiveness ...
 - God not only listens to us ...
 - He shows us amazing grace and mercy and wipes away our sin

- For God is not like the friends of Job who when he cried out in despair were
 - Judgmental
 - Impatient
 - Telling him how to fix the problem

- No ... for when we cry out to God in despair
 - He's not judgmental
 - He's incredibly patient
 - He doesn't tell us what we need to do in order to fix our problem ...
 - he says I've already fixed the problem for in you Christ
 - he's already paid the price for you and your sin
- That's incredible grace!

- And it's God's grace to us in Christ is the thing that humbles us
 - To know that without Christ we stand on the wrong side of the ledger and there is nothing we can do to fix it
 - And yet the creator of the universe ... the very one we have rebelled against acts to reconcile and restore us at the cost of his own son ... that is humbling

- And friends ... to the extent that
 - the truth of the gospel pierces your heart and

- you allow the grace of God wash over you ...
 - that will make you smash your pride and make you a more humble person
- And as God's grace transforms you to grow in humility ... then you and I will be able to love one another better ... and therefore listen well
- It's only when you realise that you have a God who is so incredibly interested in you that he was willing to send his son to the cross to die for you ... will become a person who is interested in others and willing to listen to them

5. Conclusion

- How do we show God's love in listening?
- It starts by listening to God
 - And as you listen to him and hear his word to you in the gospel
 - And you experience his grace to you in Christ
 - That will smash your pride and humble your heart ...
- And as God does that deep work in your soul ...
 - That will help you to listen in love to one another

PRAY