

Fishers of Men // Listen Well

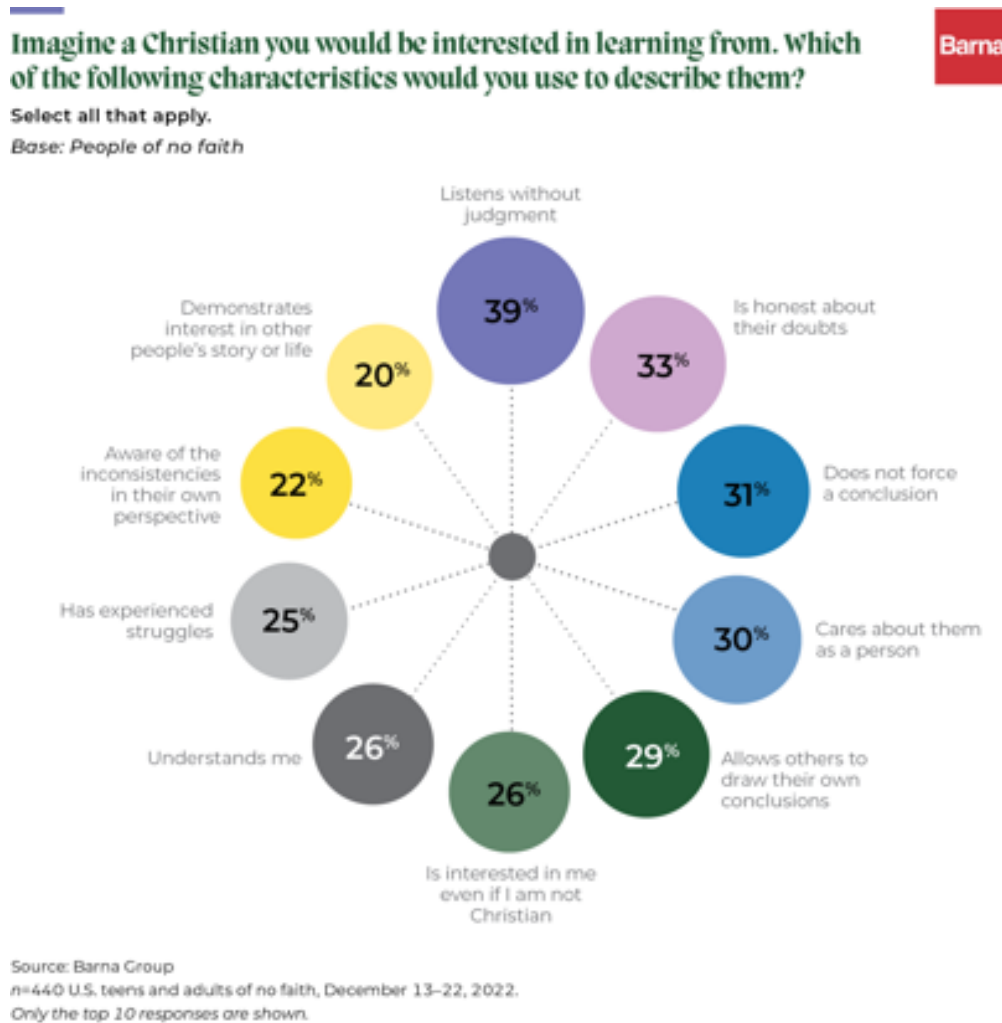
The first step, if we're going to reach out to lost and dying world, is not talking—its listening.

In a recent study by BARNA research group entitled:

What People of No Faith Hope to Find in Conversations with Christians,

the study group asked non-Christian respondents this question:

Imagine a Christian you would be interested in learning from. Which of the following characteristics would you use to describe them?



What are people looking for?

Today, we are going to have a master class, from Jesus Himself, on how to fish for men. He alone can give us a perfect picture of how to navigate difficult conversations with people in a way that shows the love of God to a hurting and broken world.

John 4:5-15, "So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.' (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?' (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) 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.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.' Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.'"

Notice how Jesus hears her heart. Sometimes, I am so embarrassed by Christians that are so eager to say something that they run over the hearts of people. They are like what Paul described as "clanging gongs." Their words are not enticing. They are not full of patience, kindness, or gentleness. But on the other hand, I don't believe that people are looking for Christians to agree with them or coddle them. Jesus doesn't. His words have a powerful combination of love and of truth.

How exactly did Jesus handle this tension between TRUTH and LOVE?

John 4:16-18, "Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come here.' The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.'"

This could easily sound like fighting words, but somehow, Jesus is able to say what is true without alienating her. He doesn't say this as an accusation. He frames it as a question even though He already knew the answer. Jesus sees her flaws and still

conveys his love. He loves her. He doesn't condemn her but, he doesn't agree with her problems either. He simply sees her, and he loves her.

After 25 years in ministry and thousands of hours of working with people on all sorts of problems, I can tell you, nobody needs a bobblehead to only hear and agree with them. People are looking for something real, and something they can build their lives around that is solid. They don't want platitudes or arguments. What people really need is Jesus.

The world does not need an ocean of empathetic, therapeutic bobbleheads. What has that created? A world of narcissism and self-absorption. The world needs love but love always includes the truth. The world needs Christians that have yielded hearts to allow God to guide our conversation in Spirit and in truth.

So, what does all this look like practically?

Imagine that you begin to pray for someone that is far from God, and God opens a door! They ask you out to lunch. You meet up, you start talking about life and family, and about 15 minutes into the conversation, they say something that you TOTALLY disagree with.

Can you navigate that precious moment? There are so many temptations in that moment. On one side of the cliff is blind agreement and bobblehead affirmation. On the other side is a cliff where we become argumentative, judgmental, or contemptuous. We may feel the urge to blindly agree or to forcefully condemn.

Can you be honest, caring, and understanding in that moment without falling off the cliffs on each side? **We must be led by the Spirit.** We need to learn to trust God to guide us in these moments. We need to learn how to hold back when we need to be quiet and listen well and when it makes sense to offer a kind word to what is true. How do you know when to speak up? When to be quiet? **We must be yielded to God.**

If you are a person that is led by the Spirit and filled with His love, you will have opportunities to share your story when the time is right, and the Lord leads it. Oftentimes, I believe we rush to make a point, correct a wrong belief, or to lead someone to Christ before we have earned the right by listening first. We get ahead of God and try to force things before someone is ready.

If you don't learn how to listen well, nobody wants to hear your story. You must earn the right to tell your story.

John 4:19-24, "The woman said to him, 'Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.'"

Notice how she is trying to change the subject to something that divides them. This is the moment that most people stop being the fishermen and become the fish. This is a well-designed trap question to test Jesus and see what he will do. Jesus could have been sucked into a political debate here, or a religious argument, but instead he sticks to the heart of the matter. He is both honest and inviting at the same time!

John 4:25-26, "The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.' Jesus said to her, 'I who speak to you am he.'"

He is not just there to fix her, hear her problems, or tell her what to do. He offers something real and deep. **He offers Himself.** This is what we get wrong when we try to listen to people; We listen with an agenda instead of with truth and love.

Have you ever found yourself in the situation where you're talking to your wife and then she gives you the LOOK? **"The LOOK"** is intended to be a cue to you that you are not listening. You may have heard the words, but you have missed their heart. This isn't a simple problem with a simple solution. If someone says you're not listening, it's a clue that there is a SIN problem that clouds your ability to hear and see what is really going on. There is no amount of talking that can solve a heart that is blind or ears that are closed.

There is a host of sin problems that makes us miss what people are saying. They are the filters that we carry with us, our own business and self pre-occupation, our agendas, or selfish motives that we don't even know are there that get in the way of really listening to people the way that Jesus did.

When we listen, there are so many things that get in the way of hearing. As I was thinking about this in preparation for this sermon, I wrote up a list of sinful attitudes that I discovered in myself. I'm sure there are more but here are some of mine.

In an effort to "hear" someone, sometimes I find myself....

- Judging before I understand
- Minimizing a problem to make myself feel better
- Empathizing without comprehending
- Parroting back what they said without really connecting with their heart
- Analyzing what they said instead of hearing their heart or seeking the Lord
- Arguing with some aspect of what someone said instead of hearing the larger story they are trying to tell

These are all just examples of ways that I screw things up. You see, all these problems are sin problems—not listening problems. They are rooted much deeper than just repeating back what someone says. They aren't solved by all of us paraphrasing well or leaning on the edge of our seat when someone talks.

Listen to the attitudes of the disciples as they return from getting lunch.

John chapter 4:27, " Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, 'What do you seek?' or, 'Why are you talking with her?'"

The disciples have blinders on. They are clueless to what is happening. They have filters and judgments filling their minds and making it impossible to see. Why do we sometimes miss the boat when it comes to listening? It's because we can get so focused on other things, or we try to force an outcome, and it just ends up alienating people from the truth instead of drawing people to the truth! Maybe that is why Jesus had to get rid of the disciples to talk to her!

Jesus has a great training on how to listen well in Matthew 10. He summarizes it in two ways.

Matthew 10:16, "'Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.'"

Do you want to learn how to be a good listener? A fisher of men? Learn how to be wise as a serpent and gentle as a dove.

- What is the wisdom of a serpent?
 - Some people misinterpret this as serpent meaning Satan, but this is wrong. It's literally the word for snake, not the devil.
 - What is the wisdom of a snake? A snake eats by being in the right place, by being still, by waiting, being observant, blending into their environment, then...the food just comes to them.
 - When Jesus sent out the disciples to share the good news, He told them to be watching for "the person of peace." What did he mean by that? A person that is open to hearing and to also beware of those who were not open and not to try to force their way on them.

- What is the gentleness of a dove?
 - When was the last time you heard about a dove attack? Doves are so gentle! I have two doves that live outside my front door.
 - Why gentle? Because if someone opens up their heart to hear about the good news of Jesus, and you load up like a cobra, they are gonna slam the door shut!

John 4:28-38, "So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, 'Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?' They went out of the town and were coming to him. Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, 'Rabbi, eat.' But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' So the disciples said to one another, 'Has anyone brought him something to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. Do you not say, "There are yet four months, then comes the harvest"? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps." I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.'"

It can be easy to walk through life unaware and miss what's really going on. The disciples are clueless. They are focused more on sandwiches than salvation. But Jesus sees the woman. He sees the town. He sees the harvest coming out to meet them in the distance. His eyes are on the harvest. LOOK! The problem isn't the harvest- it's the workers.

John 4:39-42, "Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me all that I ever did.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.'"

Maybe the Lord is putting on your heart someone to pray for, or you are convicted by the Word, and you want to pray about that. Or there is something else you need prayer for. There is no prayer too big or too small for God-