



INSIGHTS FROM A 12-YEAR OLD
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We all see every manner of problem in our churches. Many times, we are the last stop for the most serious attacks of Satan. So, it's incumbent on us to continually learn how to better counsel those we serve.

And all of us counsel! As a matter of fact, you'll find the word counsel or counselor 46 times in the Scriptures. As friends, mentors, advisors, consultants, teachers, and disciplers – we all counsel, so let's look at the master counselor, or as Isaiah describes him, ***the wonderful counselor*** – Jesus with his astonishing heart to heal and the perfect skill he demonstrates to help others!

My orientation in counseling is that we first and foremost look to Jesus and his to passion to heal us, his insights into the human heart, thinking, and behavior, and the power of the cross to change us. We work alongside the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures. *Change is not all about us and what we do, but how God can use us.*

- 1) We help the weak by being weak.** No one wants to be helped by a perfect person. We all have issues – and if you're like me, some serious issues. When we are in touch with our own weaknesses, we are more compassionate, kind, insightful, and effective in helping others.

The great apostle Paul discussed his weaknesses ten times in I Corinthians 11, 12, and 13

Paul said to the Corinthians: *I came to you in weakness—timid and trembling.* Where did Paul learn such humility?

In Chapter 13 Paul tells us that *“Jesus was indeed crucified in weakness”*

The difference here is that Paul understood his weakness as a fact. He simply acknowledged what was already true. As a matter of fact, the older Paul got, the humbler he was to his weaknesses.

On the other hand, Jesus **decided** to be weak...for our sakes.

Romans 5:6 - God’s greatest work came at our greatest moments of weakness

We may need to get more comfortable with our own weaknesses in order to help others. As I work with hundreds of students every year in my school and the multitude of disciples in the Denver church, and through the Disciples In Motion and Grief Journey ministries worldwide, I’m reminded of my own weakness and how God works through my vulnerability.

Vulnerability is vital, as we strive to help others. We are generally good with privately sharing our weaknesses. How about publicly? I know there is wisdom that is important in public sharing—but Paul was vulnerable...Peter was and Jesus was vulnerable, publicly.

Let me share about a powerful example of this: Barri Lusk’s sharing at Disciples Motion. She was the womens ministry leader in the Denver church and she has given me permission and encouragement to share this example:

At our In Motion meetings we start with a large group devotional. No one in the large group knows why you attend – this helps with people’s dignity. We often have discussion questions and when a leader shares – they can sometimes share not very vulnerably - what I call making Bible points – it can have a negative effect on others. **Not Barri Lusk.** Barri shared in the large group some very vulnerable

comments about growing up and you could see the impact right away. It felt safe. Others shared. Barri made a difference by being vulnerable publicly.

This ability to be vulnerable leads to empathy. Empathy is feeling what another feels. It is going to a dark place in **your own life** to connect to another person's dark place and their pain. It's not the same as relating verbally. Often, we simply access the feeling we have that is similar.

With greater empathy, we can become that friend, mentor, or an ally most needed during difficult times.

- Perspective taking without judgment
- Fuels connection
- Recognize & communicate emotion
- Go to a place of pain w/o "relating"
- A choice
- Learn to ***hold the moment – explain later***

Here are a few questions to ask yourself and vulnerably share with a trusted friend:

- 1) Is there a childhood or teenage issue that brings you shame or is an embarrassment that you've never or rarely shared with another person?
- 2) Do you have a current issue that you don't share, share with euphemisms, or have created a "truce" (I'll tell you my sin and you tell me yours and let's just keep it between us) with someone else?
- 3) Does your vulnerability lead or stifle those you shepherd?

So, first of all, **we help the weak by being weak**. Strive to follow our brother Paul's (and Jesus') example on this one.

Now, I want to share two powerful and yet simple features of an effective and loving relationship by looking at Jesus' astonishing impact on those he changed –

his **heart** to listen and his **wisdom** to ask questions. A heart to listen and wisdom to ask the right questions at just the right time in the perfect way.

There are many important features of a relationship: friendship, hanging out, having a purpose together, being there during tough times, but **quality listening** and **asking effective questions** are of first importance, as we help each other effect change.

So, let's look at Jesus' heart to listen. Turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 2

Luke 2:41-47:

⁴¹ Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. ⁴² When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. ⁴³ After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. ⁴⁴ Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, **listening to them** and **asking them questions**. ⁴⁷ Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.

2) Listening Like Jesus

To make sure we understand, God calls us to **listen** or **hear** 771 times in the Bible. To hear with our ears and thus understand with our hearts.

REFER to Matt 17: *Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. **Listen to him!***

We are too much like Peter. He was getting ready to miss something important because he did not go to listen. We are not called to have all the answers or to be the smartest guy in the room...**but to listen**. What have we missed by NOT listening?

We all know there is a difference between hearing, known as passive listening, and active listening with our hearts. The difference between active and passive listening is what is going on inside the **mind and heart** of the listener. When Jesus wanted to communicate, he often stopped for a moment to clarify the need for listening with our hearts.

When we are in the role of the helper we find, there are two hearts on display – the heart of the helper and the heart of the “helpee” – two hearts engaged. My heart is on display by the kind of listening I do. ***What goes on in the heart of the listener is vital!***

Consider these thoughts about listening like Jesus: He had a humility of heart. Let's talk about humility:

a) Humility is the key to effective listening:

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

Now, where do you think James learned that? James grew up in a home with Jesus as his older brother and saw him humbly listening to his family members – his mom, dad, siblings, and other relatives. James watched Jesus with Peter and the rest of the crew...Jesus listened with his heart.

I think this is how Jesus came up with some of the many amazing responses he gave others to change them, by closely listening.

I realize that I am not the most important person in the room. I take a stance of **“not knowing”** from solution focused theory. And by that, I don’t assume that I know what the problem is, or how to fix it. This stance of **“not knowing”** takes a humble character. It’s not merely a technique, it needs to be a part of our character.

I’m reminded of the phrase: *“Technique is what you do until the counselor shows up.”* Make humble listening your character, who you are!

At times, we feel the need to relate to people – I think relating can sometimes be overrated. If we’re too busy thinking how we relate, then we miss important information. Be careful when you feel the need to relate – you might be getting ready to hijack or swing the conversation your way and miss something important. Use relating only when you feel it will help the other person.

It takes humility to listen when it personally hurts. The work we do can be painful at times. We don’t counsel in a bubble or in the traditional client-counselor relationship that engages only 50 minutes a week. We live in our church. It is our social setting.

Many of those we counsel, we have deep friendships with, or are connected in other ways to their situation. This can lead to personal hurt and listening while hurting is a great act of love. It takes humility to listen when hurting – do it anyway.

Listening is an exercise in humility. The opposite of a humble listener is a distracted listener – eyes darting, not tuned in, thinking more about what you want, maybe that next appointment... engagement takes great humility.

We have to empty ourselves to listen. In whatever context, I try to imitate my mentor Greg Jackson – *“Tim, humility is always the answer.”* If you don’t know the answer, be humble.

b) We seek to understand by searching for other's perspective.

Pr. 18:13 ***To answer before listening— that is folly and shame.***

In my counseling of others, I've learned that what is important is ***not my*** experiences but what my ***friend*** is communicating about their experiences.

Instead of assuming we know others' perspectives, ***we listen*** - Listening is seeking to understand another's perspective, whether it is right or wrong – their perspective is their reality – seek to understand people by being a great listener! It will also allow you to validate your friend's story.

When we listen to understand another's perspective, we will find clues to success – that is, things that have worked before and exceptions to the problem – times when the problem is not ruling their lives. How are they accomplishing this exception?

Listen for Lies:

When we listen to understand another's perspective, we will identify cognitive distortions, mal-adaptive thinking (lies from Satan) – things like black/white thinking, filtering, blaming, or predicting the future. Others are listed in your handout. These lies from Satan may impact people for lifetimes.

Satan: Liar, father of lies and native language is lying. We come to believe and live by those lies – repentance is changing those lies into truth. Satan, the deceiver, from Genesis 3 to Revelation 12. He is the deceiver, the accuser – he is cunning, crafty, and callous. It's as if he orchestrates lying around the world – it is his very character, through and through.

These are known in the counseling world as cognitive distortions or maladaptive thinking but I like to think of them as lies, big, fat lies.

Thankfully, God never lies!

We see this at our Disciples In Motion meetings over and over again – people get caught up in their addictions, bitterness, marriage issues, and character deficient because of faulty thinking – by ***buying into and living lies*** from Satan.

How about you? Where has Satan fooled you? Think of a lie in your life. The Scriptures say things like our eyes get darkened so we cannot see, we get corrupted through our deceitful desires, we exchange truth for a lie.

We not only believe those lies but we structure our lives and live by those lies. It is what we can become and operate out of.

Perhaps you're ruminating on what people called you as a child. There may be trauma from an experience that you need to process. Often, sibling order or the timing of your place in the family, with other dynamics going on may play a role – these can all determine a negative view of self.

Lies can be wrapped around anger, unfulfilled hopes, failure and shame, guilt, legalism, and death. Some of our lies are simply from an unknown source - they just are.

Usually the lies we believe and live by have strong emotional attachments, which make them doubly difficult. **We may even be loyal to the lies in our lives.** They become automatic and reflexive. Like the clutch on a six-speed car, we automatically do them. Once I sold my six-speed and bought an automatic, but still pushed my left foot down, looking for the clutch. Lies are like that.

One member said his lie was that there would be a room in Heaven called the "Ought to Room" a place you go to figure out what he ought to have done in this life – *and he structured much of his thinking around this*. Can you imagine how this has shaped his parenting, marriage, career?

I once got in an argument with my son as he was trying to come back to God, after 5 years in atheism. He stated, *“Dad, you have no idea what it’s like to grow up in a conservative Christian family! I said, you’re right, I don’t, and you have no idea what it’s like to grow up in a dysfunctional Methodist one!”*

I only had my perspective of growing up – not his. I had to closely listen to him and consider his point of view. This conversation helped to open him up to be restored and surprisingly move to China to serve alongside his sister and her husband on a mission church.

I often have to “park” my judgments for a later date in order to ***create a safe environment***. If we are too quick with opinions and judgment it is not safe – people react against quick answers because it indicates you are not considering their life experiences, thoughts, or ideas. *There is no dialogue if you already have your next answer ready - Jesus said your “ears are closed.”*

Listening is our education, so we can understand from their perspective. Make listening your education. **(Paul Simon)**

- c) Finally, to be a good listener, **we practice patience**, in order to develop rapport and trust. Often people only have parts of their hearts ready to be revealed, so time is needed to build a safe & confidential environment. Like Jesus, we patiently love. When we want to quit, we patiently continue on – just like Jesus. Often, with time, hearts open.

So, listening like Jesus is a vital component to effecting change in others’ lives.

Listening takes humility, the need to understand another’s perspective, and loving patience.

Jesus’ heart to listen led him to the wisdom to ask amazing questions. Questions that radically changed others.

3) Jesus Questions:

Jesus connects humble listening to asking **wise & effective** questions – He was absolutely stunning with the ability to ask questions that totally changed the direction of not only the conversation but lives as well. Simple questions with perfect delivery and timing.

See if there are any ways you might improve on the kinds of questions you ask others. Here are a few thoughts about Jesus' kinds of questions.

One. Questions create open dialogue: There is no real conversation or dialogue if you've already decided your next statement or answer! Too often we are busy formulating our response and thus do not know what question to ask that may move the conversation along.

How many times I've changed my course because I listened well and then knew what question to ask! The interns I teach at the University of Denver struggle with this: they are so concerned about getting their theory right, or filling in silent gaps, or figuring out the "right" answer or response that they don't create dialogue. Conversation is choppy. There is little flow. They struggle creating questions that move conversation forward because they are not present in the conversation.

Ask open ended questions. *So, how is the marriage going?* Big picture.

Or: *Tell me the story of how you two fell in love or of this sin in your life, or hurts that are related to this one.*

Secondly. Questions examine our heart, attitudes, and motives: Questions reveal the hearts of both persons. Do my questions reveal impatience, a lack of faith, or hurt? Or do my questions reveal loving patience, faith and grace?

Jesus was the master at asking great questions at the perfect time, in the perfect way, that moved people forward to change. Instead of asking *"Do you really love*

God?" (which is accusatory) I might ask: *How can I help you love God better? Or tell me about a time you loved God the way you want to and what was different during that time?*

Thirdly. Questions allow people time to respond less defensiveness: Instead of simply doling out advice, good questions place responsibility and ownership of the problem where it belongs. Be thoughtful while allowing time for reflection. Good questions lessen defensiveness. Questions take thoughtfulness instead of "off the cuff." It is OK to stop and think instead of quickly asking – this also gives the other person time to reflect and bring guard down.

Questions like: *Tell me more. Help me understand that. Clarify. What does that LOOK like?*

Fourthly. Questions allow us to place the focus on God, where it belongs: You should not be the focus of change – God should be. The real discussion is between your friend and God – not you and your friend. Questions give you a chance to focus the conversation on God.

An example is: if someone is saying: "God is really mad at me and does not even like me" Instead of giving your opinion like, "No I think god likes you because you're a good guy most of the time" I might ask, *"What does the cross say about that?"*

And Finally. Questions lead to more positive and sustainable results: Questions stay with people longer because they walk away with something rolling around their head that they need to figure out. Again, questions place responsibility where it belongs.

I might ask a married couple going through a difficult time: *Where would they like to be without this problem? Or, If you were leading a Campus Retreat class in a few years, what would the title be?*

So, let's end up with an example of one of the six kinds of questions Jesus asked. The other five are in your handout: In Mark 6, we see the feeding the 5000 and the disciples struggling with a problem:

³⁵ By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. ³⁶ Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."³⁷ But he answered, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, (With What?!) "That would take more than half a year's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?"

People are often stuck and faithless about the possibility of change, just like these disciples were. They had already calculated how things would NOT work out (half a year's wages). Don't we do the same thing? We figure out how things won't work – tried that, thought that, you don't understand my problem, been like this too long to change...

Jesus was different. He looked at things with an eye toward solutions:

1) Solution Focused Questions - (Mk. 6:38) *"How many loaves do you have? Go and see."*

Five loaves of bread and two fish. OK, now we can get started.

What are the available resources? This question caused disciples to look for creative, faithful solutions to a seemingly impossible situation.

Think Resources: #1 key to success is client resources

In secular counseling, you get one hour and then little is available until the next appointment. Now I understand there are certainly times and situations where professional counseling is not only warranted but also quite effective. You may want to put together a resource list of good Christian counseling in your area.

However, in church counseling, we have the following at our disposal:

- sermons,
- a breadth and depth of relationships – discuss a TEAM APPROACH
- scriptures are read and trusted as absolute truth,
- the Spirit of God lives inside,
- there is (or should be) a safe, confidential and non-judgmental environment,
- we have the oversight/wisdom of mature Christians,
- the client has personal goals and dreams, and finally,
- with God, there is always hope for change.

Another is the Disciples In Motion ministry, where anyone with any issue can bring their problem into a safe and confidential environment every week to work on it. That way you are not solely carrying the burden but can concentrate on your area of expertise with the person or couple you are working with. This is also a more sustainable approach.

The church is perfectly situated for all kinds of recovery!

We think in the direction of the question being asked. If I asked you what time is it, where do you look? People look in the direction of our questions. If our questions are focused on the problem, then they look toward the problem. If our questions are focused on a solution, then that is the direction people look.

Jesus was creative in his solutions. He spit on people's tongues and eyes or made mud out of his spit to heal. He stuck his fingers in their ears. He picked up an ear in the dirt and reattached it without asking any questions. He wrote mysterious stuff in the dirt. He was often creative with those he changed.

Don't look toward the problem so much as the solutions; Jesus spent little time looking backwards in his healings.

Japanese farmer - the solution does not have to be connected to the problem.

So, think about the kinds of questions you ask and what they lead to. Ask questions that are focused on the solutions you seek. Questions that lead to solving some of life's most challenging problems.

Questions like Jesus.

Do you want to get well?

Or perhaps:

Do you believe?

Maybe it is the question:

Has no one condemned you?

Or for some us older guys:

Who do you say Jesus is?

(Demoniac) Jesus asked a simple identity question: *What is your name?* He addressed the identity issue for the demoniac.

Finally, for all of us:

Do you love Jesus more than these?

CONCLUSION:

So, remember the astonishing 12-year old Jesus and how he humbly listened with his heart and asked wise questions that changed many for eternity. He had a profound impact on those he interacted with, in a short amount of time, which led his friends to make dramatic changes in their hearts, thinking, and behavior.

It takes practice, patience, and perception. Pray during conversations, listen intently with all your heart, and ask questions that will move the conversation further down the road toward a solution.

Imitate him, think like he thinks, challenge yourself to be like him as he changed the entire course of human history and the hearts of people like you and me. Jesus lives today and changes people now just like he did 2000 years ago and the remarkable thing is that he uses people like you and I to do so!