

Volunteer Training Session 2

Session 2/Conversations

We are all concerned that we will not be able to do what we feel God has asked us to do. Scripture is full of stories of people reluctant, scared, even defiant of following God. Yet, through faith and obedience, they did what they thought they could never do.

We are going to look at a man written about in scripture and how he cared well for someone in crisis, review our listening skills and help our Client think about the future. Thank you for taking the time to join in, reviewing this ahead of time and your willing heart to expand your capacity to care well for the people God has given to you – your household, your neighbors, your friends, your co-workers – don't be surprised where He places you as you grow in His heart to care.

Jeremiah's Rescue by Ebed-melek

Please take a minute and read through this biblical passage about the story of Jeremiah in the Cistern. As you read, take a minute to follow the description, thoughts and activity of Jeremiah. Then, read it again with a focus on Obed-melek. Write your thoughts out in the margin.

Jeremiah 38:1-13 NIV

38 Shephatiah son of Mattan, Gedaliah son of Pashhur, Jehukal[a] son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur son of Malkijah heard what Jeremiah was telling all the people when he said, "This is what the Lord says: 'Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague, but whoever goes over to the Babylonians will live. They will escape with their lives; they will live.' And this is what the Lord says: 'This city will certainly be given into the hands of the army of the king of Babylon, who will capture it.'"

4 Then the officials said to the king, "This man should be put to death. He is discouraging the soldiers who are left in this city, as well as all the people, by the things he is saying to them. This man is not seeking the good of these people but their ruin."

"He is in your hands," King Zedekiah answered. "The king can do nothing to oppose you."

6 So they took Jeremiah and put him into the cistern of Malkijah, the king's son, which was in the courtyard of the guard. They lowered Jeremiah by ropes into the cistern; it had no water in it, only mud, and Jeremiah sank down into the mud.

7 But Ebed-Melek, a Cushite, an official in the royal palace, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern. While the king was sitting in the Benjamin Gate, Ebed-Melek went out of the palace and said to him, "My lord the king, these men have acted wickedly in all they have done to Jeremiah the prophet. They have thrown him into a cistern, where he will starve to death when there is no longer any bread in the city."

10 Then the king commanded Ebed-Melek the Cushite, "Take thirty men from here with you and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the cistern before he dies."

11 So Ebed-Melek took the men with him and went to a room under the treasury in the palace. He took some old rags and worn-out clothes from there and let them down with ropes to Jeremiah in the cistern. Ebed-Melek the Cushite said to Jeremiah, "Put these old rags and worn-out clothes under your arms to pad the ropes." Jeremiah did so, and they pulled him up with the ropes and lifted him out of the cistern. And Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard.

What were some of your observations of this story? Here are a few thoughts:

Jeremiah was a prophet of Jehovah in Jerusalem when the city was under siege by the Babylonians and in great decline. He had seen the disintegration and destruction of Jerusalem over the past 40 years. Now, he was tasked by God to give the people a message of salvation that they did not believe or care to hear. This message from God required them to go with their enemy into captivity. Needless to say, he was not liked, and no one really listened to him. Ever. Perhaps that is why he is called the "Weeping Prophet"?

So, because of this counter-intuitive message, Jeremiah finds himself thrown into a cistern full of mud. The historian Josephus says that more than likely Jeremiah would have sunk in almost to his neck. Lamentations 3:52-66 seems to be the written memories of this incident where Jeremiah describes his predicament and God's rescue. A great passage to take a minute and read! And so God sent a "Rescuer" on His behalf named...

Ebed-melek. A foreigner from Cush, a Cushite, a non-Jew. Someone with a different skin color from Jeremiah. A slave whose name is simply a title, his true name lost to history. Someone who saw injustice and was willing to do something. Ebed-melek takes it upon himself to do anything he could to change the outcome for Jeremiah. And, he does a few things that give us inspiration:

1. Asks for permission from the King. It is always good for us to ask permission from King Jesus before we step into any situation in His Name. His blessing always assures a good covering.
2. He got help. We should never attempt to help anyone without some good hands and hearts alongside us to keep us accountable and share the load of the work.
3. He was thoughtful of the person's condition. Ebed-melek went and got some rags to wrap the ropes so that they would not burn Jeremiah's tender, mud-soaked skin as they lifted him out. Our rope to help is Truth but we must always have it wrapped in Love. Our good words, given from a place of love and kindness can be used to bring hearts and minds to a higher place, a higher vantage point.
4. Together Ebed-melek and those who helped him accomplished the mission to get Jeremiah out of a place of certain death. As part of the Volunteer Staff at RWC, we too are on a Team and it takes all of us to bring women and men out of the pit and into fresher, cleaner spaces where life can continue.
5. He was rewarded by God through Jeremiah. Take a minute and read Jeremiah 39:15-18. And, a quick glance at Hebrews 6:10-12. Remember, God sees what we do and we can trust His protection and reward.

Loving Listening Skills

God listens to us. His Word instructs us to be good listeners too. Our focused time with Clients is the most important thing that we do. Good listeners are rare – it is a skill we must develop and do well at if we really want to care well. For anyone. When was the last time someone really listened well to you? What showed you they were engaged? How did that make you feel? The gift of listening well can bring:

- A sense of being understood and cared for.
- A sense of trust that allows a heart to open and share concerns.
- A sense of relief now that concerns are shared.
- A chance to talk through problems or concerns to plan solutions that spark hope.
- An example of how God listens to us, hears us and responds to us.

It is impossible for us to really hear our Client unless we listen to her with an open, non-judgmental heart and mind. Active Listening helps us understand where she is in her process of problem solving/concern processing and just where we can actually help her to her best solution. Without listening and empathizing, we may seem clinical – or focused mostly on what we think is a good solution. When we poorly assume, do not take time to get the ‘back story’ or seem anxious to give solutions, we squander a God-appointed opportunity. Active Listening is the way we express genuine Christ love to others. Why?

- Each person is unique and worthy of our respect as an individual made in the image of God. Active Listening conveys respect.
- Everyone is shaped by positive and negative value systems, Active Listening helps us understand a person’s viewpoint and values.
- Active Listening tells people we are concerned about them and care about their need.
- Active Listening is a gift we give, to encourage and bless them.

We must get to know someone by listening to them, allowing them to open up to us before we can really care for them. **We must understand that if we try to love first without seeking to know a person’s needs, we are likely to be ministering out of our needs rather than meeting theirs. This is a form of selfishness and counterproductive to the caring process.** Giving “an ear” is not a matter of what we feel like giving but what the other person needs in that moment for their present joy or comfort *and* their future development. We are not likely to do this well unless we deny ourselves and intentionally draw upon the power of the Holy Spirit within us (Luke 9:23).

Active Listening Skills

1. **Open Ended Questions.** Use open ended questions that require an answer other than ‘yes’ or ‘no’ and opens a door to conversation. We then share share questions and concerns at a comfortable rate. Remember – a “Why” questions can put people on the defense. It is better to use “How is it that...” or “What is it that...”. Also, “Tell me more...” or “Help me understand...”. These are all better phrases to use when a “Why” question seems necessary.

2. **Reflecting & Restating.** Restating a Mentee's words back to her shows sincerity in trying to understand her viewpoint. It helps with clarification to get good meaning of what was said, allowing for correction.
3. **Paraphrasing.** It is always good to use your words for what you have heard at some point to ensure you are connecting with them and are trying to understand their perspective. It gives another chance for clarification in the communication. "So you are saying that...", "It sounds like you..." or "You feel...because of..." are all phrases that help with paraphrasing.
4. **Brief Verbal Cues.** There are short things we can say to keep the conversation going – verbal cues. "I see...", "I understand...", "You are saying..."
5. **Specific Questions.** Asking specific questions helps us to not guess at details but actually know.
6. **Non Verbal Cues.** Leaning forward, gentle eye-contact, mirroring the speakers body position, avoiding crossed arms – these physical postures convey interest. Always be aware of cultural differences and responses to your movements so that you can modify if needed to maintain a comfortable conversation.
7. **Simple Examples.** Sharing a simple, relatable experience you have had is always helpful. But, you must remember that the conversation is not about you.
8. **Waiting.** Waiting to disclose your feedback helps to insure that you truly understand. Asking if you can share feedback shows respect. It is always good to ask if she wants to hear your thoughts *before* you share them; "May I share some thoughts with you?" "I had an idea, what do you think?"

Active Listening Rewards

- We learn the value of not talking so others can share.
- We understand that silence can be a form of Active Listening, especially in groups.
- We develop patience with others as we care.
- While some may be better at this than others, we can all learn how to do it – as well as teach it to others.
- We learn how to share in appropriate ways as we listen empathetically.
- We come to recognize that we will hear more of a person's heart as we listen to the superficial aspects of their life.
- We validate each other as loved and valued as we open up to each other's hearts and lives.
- Withholding our judgement gives people space to talk through their problems and come to their own conclusions.
- Time invested in good conversation can only benefit a relationship.

Scenarios & Situations/Role Play

- A Client calls looking for an abortion appointment.
- A Client's boyfriend wants to know where he can get financial help for an abortion.
- A Client shares that she has been raped.
- A Client is thinking about adoption.
- A Client is very happy to be pregnant but has no visible means of support.

Goals vs. Desires

Dr. Larry Crabb in his book *Marriage Builder: A Blueprint for Couples and Counselors* defines the difference between a goal and a desire:

- A goal is an objective under my control.
- A desire is an objective that I may legitimately and fervently want but cannot be reached through my effort alone.

It is very important that we understand what our goal as a helper is to allow our Clients to make their own decision about this pregnancy. While we may desire that they carry and parent their baby – we must adjust ourselves to the goals of loving them, sharing options and sharing the truth that there is a God who loves them and will help them. By making these our goals, we will respect the Client's free will and leave the results between them and God. While we care about the innocent life, we do understand that God uses every situation to draw people to Him. Our goal is to establish a relationship with our Clients that goes beyond whether they fulfill our desires for them or not.