



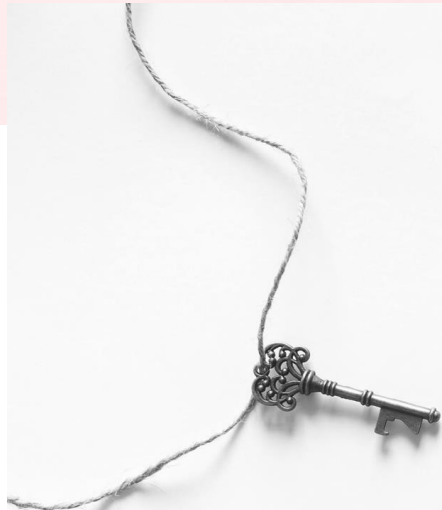
Disciple-Making Requires Listening

By Jeremy Bohall and Tom Foley



Have you ever left a conversation feeling drained because the other person talked the whole time? Did you feel ignored or uncared for? If you've experienced this, allow it to become a valuable lesson in how not to have disciple-making conversations.

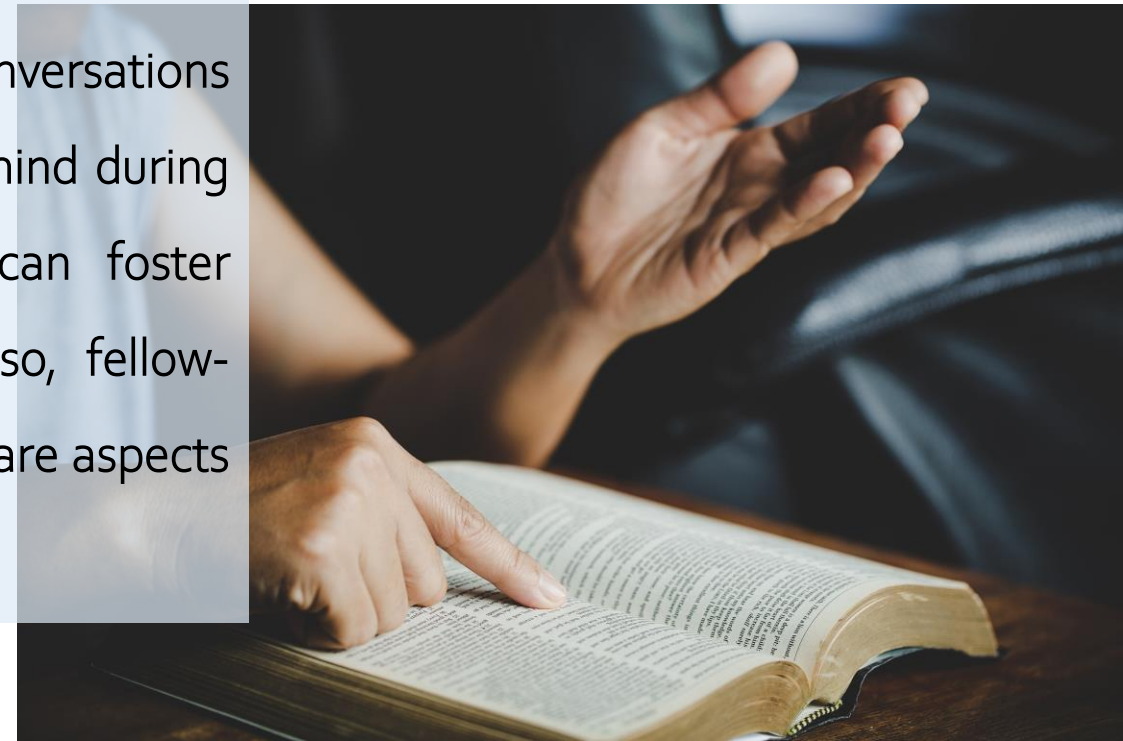
Listening and being listened to carefully are helpful as we invest in one another. If we wish to care for and respect those with whom we converse, being present (though separate) as we listen is key. Fruitful disciple-making necessitates active listening. So what does active listening look like?

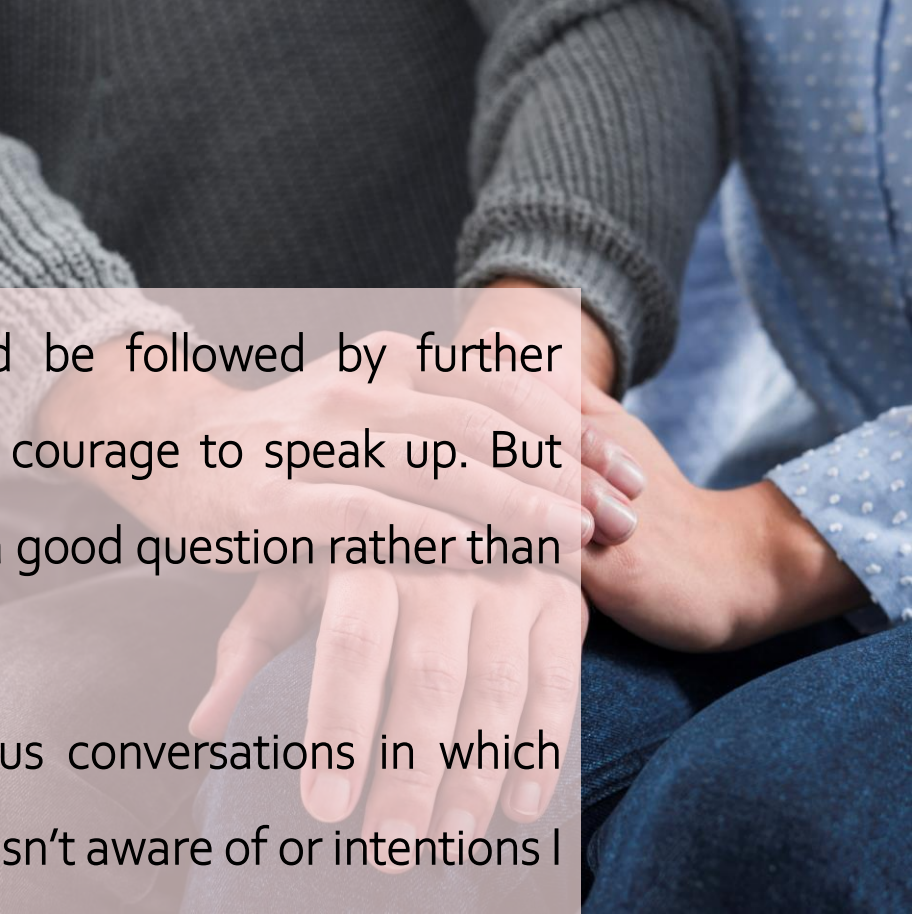


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One key aspect of any disciple-making conversation is time invested in catching up on the happenings in one another's lives. If these conversations are regular, it makes catching up more productive because we already have a sense of what's happening. As we hear from one another it's important to dig a little deeper. This is where active listening goes to work.

A sure foundation to active listening is to approach conversations prayerfully, asking the Spirit to guide our ears, heart, and mind during the conversation. Helpful questions will emerge that can foster vulnerability and honesty in the conversation. In doing so, fellow-disciples are able to point one another to the gospel. These are aspects of active listening.

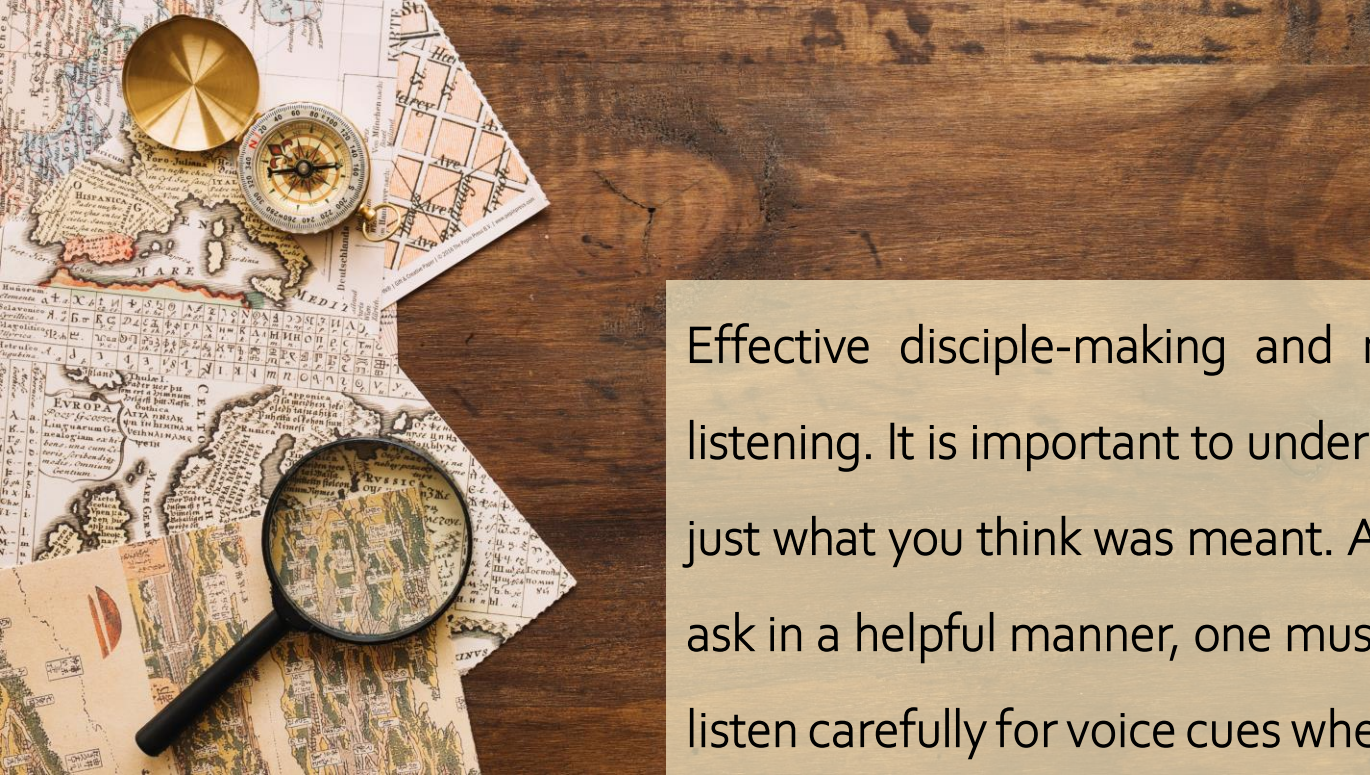




But listening and really hearing should be followed by further probing. We would be wise to have the courage to speak up. But speaking up is more often in the form of a good question rather than a statement.



Jeremy tells us that he “recalls numerous conversations in which questions helped me uncover feelings I wasn’t aware of or intentions I didn’t realize were behind my actions. This new understanding helped me reflect and pray intentionally for the Lord’s wisdom, discernment and direction.”



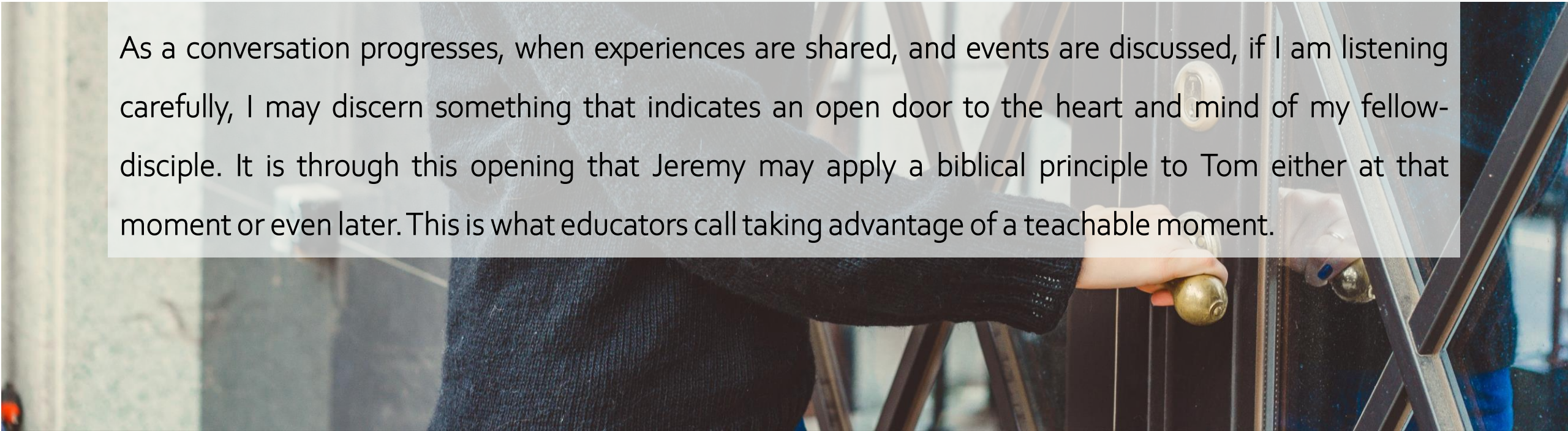
Effective disciple-making and mentoring is less about talking and more about listening. It is important to understand what the other person really meant to say, not just what you think was meant. Ask the speaker to clarify; it will help you both. But to ask in a helpful manner, one must listen well. During social distancing, while on a call, listen carefully for voice cues where you might usually be looking for body language.

When we practice these key aspects of active listening, they will allow us to enter the other's context and understand their situation. Let the other person know you're paying attention by making appropriate verbal cues: 'uh-huh...', 'okay...', 'yeah...', etc. These acknowledgements help the person know that they are being heard.

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It is also vital to make sure that what you heard was what they wanted to communicate. Ask, 'Are you saying that...?' Or, 'Should I infer...?' This will refine your understanding. Repeat the ideas that you have heard back to them and continue to ask questions that clarify meaning. This will help them think more deeply about what they've just said—or left unsaid. Listen for the teachable moment, then follow with a thoughtful question and quietness.

As a conversation progresses, when experiences are shared, and events are discussed, if I am listening carefully, I may discern something that indicates an open door to the heart and mind of my fellow-disciple. It is through this opening that Jeremy may apply a biblical principle to Tom either at that moment or even later. This is what educators call taking advantage of a teachable moment.



Let's apply these to disciple-making conversations. The main point of the teachable moment is that, when something is said or, especially, when a question is asked, openness is demonstrated. This shows that our now open friend may be ready to hear something helpful, perhaps for the first time. This brings us to the next tool, being quiet.

Many people are uncomfortable with silence. But a brief pause after a probing question gives your fellow-disciple time to think about the implications of the question. So, don't rush to fill silences. Take a sip from your cup, look up to the sky, and after a pause, make a "I wonder what if..." statement. Take another sip. Give the other person time to consider the question. Jeremy has noticed that it is often during periods of quietness that the Lord is able to be heard loudest. So, listen carefully for the teachable moment, ask a thoughtful question, then be quiet and allow for reflection.



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Jeremy tells us that “Imagining a future conversation helps me incorporate these principles.” Tom agrees, reminding us: “This is why regularly praying for fellow-disciples is critical.” Conversations, like many other disciplines, take preparation. Jeremy suggests that we “Imagine what it’s like to ask a probing question. Think about what it might feel like to let the silence last five seconds longer than you’re comfortable with. Imagine how you might formulate a question allowing your friend to confirm that what you heard was what they meant.” This sort of preparation should be filled with prayer so as to allow the Spirit to guide the upcoming conversation. Active, prayerful listening is fostered by prayerful preparation.

Since we’re all dutifully practicing social distancing, let’s remain committed to making disciples even when we can’t be in person. It has been suggested that we make calls to see how we’re growing in the Lord. This is pretty important during this unusual season as so many are struggling. If these calls are regular, and are filled with active listening, vulnerability and honesty will emerge and good fruit will grow in the lives of our fellow-disciples.



Application Questions

Like Jeremy, what have you learned about yourself from someone who asked you a helpful question?

On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate yourself in active listening? What could you do to improve?

Do you find yourself waiting to talk more than active listening?

Write down one helpful tip from this article that you will put into practice in your next conversations, ask your Father to use his Spirit to help you practice better listening to point people to Jesus.



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