

The Art of Listening and Asking Questions in Counselling

The main requisite to be a good counsellor is to be a good listener. To listen carefully and empathically is deeply healing in itself. A frequent pitfall is to believe that you need to answer and “give solutions” to all the questions of the counselee. Counselling is not primarily a matter of answering questions, but asking the right questions.

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Introduction:

A Christian counsellor is not a “magician” who provides an instant *solution*, but a “sherpa” who is alongside and helps the counselee climb the mountain.

In this journey, listening and asking questions are two of the most therapeutic tools. The baggage is never complete if they are missing.

I. THE ART OF LISTENING

“Listening with your eyes is a delicate expression of love.” (Shakespeare)

1- Listening makes us deeply human

Animals can *hear*, but only human beings can *listen* because listening requires reflection (reflective consciousness)

2- Listening is the core of counselling

Nothing is more therapeutic than unhurried, active listening.

A passionate, warm, empathic listening conveys a powerful message. It is a sort of dialogue where two persons are “speaking”: one speaks with his/her mouth, the other one with his/her eyes.

-When you feel that you are “listened” to, you feel understood. The “mirror effect”

3- Listening is an art that can be learned

Learning to say nothing (remaining silent) is more difficult than learning to say something (giving answers)

-In counselling, words are silver, but silence is golden

II. THE ART OF ASKING QUESTIONS

1- Its purpose: to make the counsellee think.

Every problem/situation has a “hidden” dimension. The questions should help discover “the other side” of the “mountain”.

2- How it works: learning by insight

The “eureka” principle: “And their eyes were opened...”

-Questions are like keys that open doors

3- Its practice: some pitfalls to avoid

We are not called to give the best answers, but to ask the best questions

-“Why,” a question that leads nowhere

-We do not give “solutions,” but try to point “a way out” (1 Cor. 10:13)

4- Jesus Christ, our supreme model

-The dialogue with the Samaritan woman, a masterpiece of communication

-The ultimate goal in pastoral counseling is not feeling better, but being holier