



40.DAY 2023

40.DAYS 40.VOICES 40.PRAYERS

DAY 26 | JULY 26

Listen to Our Youth

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BIBLE READING

Proverbs 18:2 | Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions.

Proverbs 18:13 | To answer before listening—that is folly and shame.

In conversations with youth, it is not uncommon for older people to quickly, sometimes within two minutes of the conversation, offer their opinions, solutions and even correction.

Good intentioned though it may be, it often limits our conversation to trading information, and we miss out on a chance for our lives to really impact one another.

Proverbs 18:13 tells us: “Answer before listening – that is folly and shame.”

I’ve realised over the years just how poor my listening was, and how much harder listening is than we may think.

To win our youth, we must first listen to them. So here are three things that help with our listening, particularly to the youth.

1. Be a “safe” person to talk to. What that means is that the person is safe from our unsolicited lectures, general assumptions of

their generation and pre-judgments of their motives or immaturity. Do we believe they can and will grow? Or are we only looking to confirm our suspicions about them? Being a safe person means we first receive them for who they are and, without judgment, give them the space to share.

2. Don’t make the conversation about ourselves. Do we hijack the conversation by sharing our stories? Or by telling them what we’ve learnt? What is much more effective is to give them the gift of our attention and care, and to encourage them to share even more. This opens the pathway to a deeper conversation and connection.

“Tell me more about that ...” or “What I heard was this ... is that accurate?” Asking such questions communicates that we are really listening to them, and the details of their experience are important to us. It tells them that we appreciate the incredible privilege of knowing them better.

Proverbs tell us that point-blank. In Proverbs 18:2: “Fools have no interest in understanding; they only want to air their own opinions.”

If we can resist the tendency to share what we know, we can then steward the gift they are giving to us, which is the sharing of their hearts.

Jesus said: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” When we know more about where their hearts are at, we can hopefully have access to what they truly value.

3. Know why we need to listen well. Which is that listening to someone may eventually open the door for us to point them to God.

As a youth pastor, I often receive calls from youths needing to “tell me something”. This

has ranged from miraculously surviving car accidents, to the effects of various substances, to dramatic break-ups, to bad decisions and sexual behaviour leading to years of deep regret.

I've learnt that being a safe person to speak to, and learning how to listen on a person's worst day, may eventually help me to turn the person's attention to how God sees their situation.

They know then that it's not about how I see them, but about how God sees them.

For those of us who are not so young, it is true that youth are prone to think they know more than they actually do. They also hate to be told this. There are times we may have to use a heavier approach to warn them of danger and also to mark clear biblical boundaries.

But our goal is clear, we are to "encourage one another and build one another up" (1 THESSALONIANS 5:11) and, in humility, to hear their heart and then point them to what they really need – a God who is Holy, but also compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness.

And to the youths: We can really learn so much if we also humble ourselves to learn, and sometimes to listen to, not just the words, but more importantly the heart of the older ones. We can do our part to help bridge the gap.

Let us pray:

Dear Heavenly Father, may you help us to be quick to listen and slow to speak, that we would, in every generation, learn how to win the hearts of the younger generation before we can win their souls.

May we be given the privilege to point the next generation to their Heavenly Father. Help us as we pray in your mighty name Jesus, Amen.

REFLECT

- 1 Have you been prone to carry judgements and generalisations about youths?
- 2 Which of these three handles do you think you struggle the most with?
- 3 How can you start practising these three handles in your daily life, especially with the youth in your life?

PRAY

- 1 Pray for the conviction to journey with and make disciples of the next generation, who are our hope for the renewal of the Church. Ask the Lord for wisdom to relate to a generation that is curious, globally exposed, "has access to cogent arguments for and against every position and will not blindly follow the assured positions of the church". Pray for God to help us accept that "when the young challenge us, it shouldn't be automatically interpreted as rebellion: They may want to buy in but they want to know why" (REV DR TAN SOO-INN, GRACEWORKS).
- 2 Pray for the grace to be a "safe" person for the youth to talk to, one who listens well and refrains from judgement and unsolicited lectures. Ask for guidance in nurturing a space where the youth can express themselves honestly and where they can process the many questions they face every day.
- 3 Pray to be an example and role model to youths on how they can live out their faith in practical and real ways.