

The inventor of the medical stethoscope is said to tell his students, “Listen to your patient’s body; it tells you what it lacks and how to treat it.” (René Théophile Hyacinthe Laënnec, a disciple of Napoleon’s personal physician Jean-Nicolas Corvisart, probably sometime after 1816)

I think it truly applies also to our contact with unbelieving friends. Yes, I have perfectly thought through and rehearsed how to guide my George to Jesus. But before I get to that, I need to listen to him first, really listen!

- a) I listen to understand where he is, how he thinks, what language he speaks, and so on.
- b) I ask questions and listen to allow George himself to think important things through; to even experience those important things through my questions, and make valuable decisions.

Biblical explanation of the essence of the Gospel is very important in its time, however, especially for the beginning of spiritual conversations, our listening is a powerful tool for creating an atmosphere of mutual openness. When I don’t know what my George is really dealing with, it’s usually just an ineffective confrontation of different opinions, nothing more.

Have you ever thought that a good question can be stronger than a sermon?

Even a question that remains a question – that is, without an answer.

Let me tell you a few very practical suggestions for listening and questions.

1. My questions and listening enrich my George. Especially when I sensitively ask him about deeper matters that no one else usually asks him. I ask not only about his opinions, but also about his feelings, attitudes, experiences, or alternatives. „What do you do when...” or „How would you see it if...”

Deliberately go through the Gospels and watch how many questions the Lord Jesus asked his listeners. Sometimes he answered their questions with his own questions.

2. Quite an interesting way to reach friends who do not yet know Jesus are questions and listening about their spiritual experiences. „George, have you ever experienced an unexpected protection? Something you would call supernatural? Or have you heard of such a thing from people you trust?” Or the question, “What would you ask Jesus if you had the

chance? ”

3. When you really listen with your heart – that is, without argumentation – people will usually tell you what their need is! They will show you the pain of their heart and give you suggestions on how to effectively bless them. When I hear a problem, I say, for example, „You know, sometimes I don’t feel smart enough for this life. So I keep solving similar things with Jesus! He always invents something, gives me an advice or does something.” In case of need, I have a few stories, when Jesus gave me advice or somehow helped me practically. I often look at the ceiling without warning and in one sentence pass on the entrusted affliction to the living Jesus, who is there with us.

4. If you have been together at Discovery a few times, you can use questions and listening to inspire your George to discover some key things himself in God’s Word. In a personal conversation, open a short passage about his theme in the Bible, ask him to read it out loud, and ask targeted questions: „What would Jesus advise you to do?” His own discovery has tremendous power! George will also be more likely to apply the self-discovered thing.

5. I listen to my George and wonder why he probably tells me that. Sometimes I ask directly: „George, I wonder what’s going on inside of you, tell me...”

6. When George talks, I follow up on what he says, I return to his topics. „You asked me a moment ago how I came to this.” „Last time you talked about your memories of your grandfather.” For most people, this is a sign of genuine interest! Next time, I wonder how it turned out. „How’s the test? What about your Petra?”

7. Another suggestion in this lesson about questions and especially about listening: During the conversation with my George, I listen on two levels. I listen carefully to (a) George, with whom I speak. And at the same time I listen to (b) living Jesus, who is always there with us. I expect His guidance, His advice and also His direct action in George and in myself.

*Lord Jesus, thank you that you not only see into every heart, but you can also speak with love to every heart.*