

Active Listening: Learning from Jesus' Interactions as a Leader



Capacity: Leadership

Baton Exchange

Leadership is not solely about giving direction, making decisions, or managing resources—it is about understanding and guiding people. Central to this is **active listening**, the intentional practice of fully engaging with others to understand their perspectives, needs, and emotions. From a biblical perspective, active listening is both a practical and spiritual discipline, reflecting God's love, wisdom, and empathy in relationships.

Jesus provides the ultimate model of active listening. Throughout the Gospels, He attentively listened to individuals—whether grieving, questioning, seeking guidance, or needing correction. His interactions with Nicodemus (John 3:1–21), the woman at the well (John 4:1–26), and the grieving sisters Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38–42) demonstrate His attentiveness, patience, and discernment. Leaders who emulate Jesus' listening cultivate trust, foster understanding, and create environments where individuals thrive spiritually, emotionally, and professionally.

James 1:19 emphasizes this principle: *“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.”* Active listening is not passive hearing—it is an intentional engagement, a willingness to understand, and a commitment to respond with wisdom, care, and love.

BIBLICAL PRECEPTS FOR ACTIVE LISTENING

1. Listen Before You Speak

Proverbs 18:13 warns, *“To answer before listening—that is folly and shame.”* Effective leaders prioritize understanding others before offering guidance, feedback, or decisions.

2. Demonstrate Presence

Jesus often engaged people by giving them His full attention. He sat with the woman at the well, allowing her to speak openly (John 4:7–26). Active listening requires presence—physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

3. Show Empathy and Compassion

Romans 12:15 instructs believers to *“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”* Listening with empathy builds trust, encourages openness, and demonstrates Christlike care.

4. Ask Insightful Questions

Jesus frequently asked questions to understand perspectives and guide reflection, such as, *“Who do you say I am?”* (Matthew 16:15). Asking thoughtful questions shows attentiveness and helps others articulate their thoughts and feelings.

5. Respond with Wisdom

Active listening culminates in wise, biblically grounded responses. Jesus often used Scripture, parables, or personal guidance to address individual needs (Matthew 22:15–22; Luke 7:36–50).

6. Practice Patience

Listening takes time. Jesus gave people space to process and express themselves, modeling patience even in challenging or prolonged conversations (Luke 19:1–10, Zacchaeus).

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF ACTIVE LISTENING

1. Full Attention

Focus on the speaker without distractions. Eye contact body language, and verbal affirmations signal engagement and respect.

2. Reflective Listening

Restate or summarize what you heard to confirm understanding: *“What I’m hearing is…”* This ensures clarity and demonstrates attentiveness.

3. Avoid Interrupting

Resist the urge to respond immediately. Allow the speaker to finish fully, respecting their perspective and thought process.

4. Observe Nonverbal Cues

Notice tone, body language, and emotions. Often, unspoken messages reveal underlying concerns or feelings.

5. Suspend Judgment

Listen without prematurely evaluating or critiquing. Active listening requires openness to understand before offering guidance.

6. Clarify and Ask Questions

Seek clarification when needed to ensure accurate understanding. Thoughtful questions demonstrate engagement and encourage deeper reflection.

7. Respond with Wisdom and Compassion

After listening fully, respond thoughtfully, integrating biblical principles, empathy, and practical guidance.

8. Cultural Nuances

Be aware of cultural preferences, habits and nuances when communicating cross-culturally and adjust accordingly. For example, in an Asian culture, direct eye contact may be considered rude. Even being aware of cross-generational communication habits and meeting the other where they feel comfortable can go a long way toward building rapport and creating trust.

BEST PRACTICES FOR LEADERS PRACTICING ACTIVE LISTENING

1. Create a Safe Environment

Ensure that team members feel safe sharing openly. Confidentiality, respect, and nonjudgmental attitudes foster trust.

2. Schedule Regular Check-Ins

Frequent, intentional conversations allow leaders to understand evolving concerns, challenges, and aspirations.

3. Listen More Than You Speak

Prioritize understanding over providing immediate solutions. Often, people need to be heard before they can receive guidance.

4. Engage Emotionally and Spiritually

Empathize with feelings, struggles, and hopes. Pray for insight and guidance during conversations to respond with Godly wisdom.

5. Recognize Individual Needs

Tailor responses and support according to each person's unique circumstances, spiritual maturity, and personality.

6. Be Patient with Silence

Silence can encourage reflection. Jesus allowed moments of quiet for contemplation and decision-making, demonstrating trust in the individual's process (Mark 10:17–22, Rich Young Ruler).

7. Follow Up

Listening is not a one-time activity. Follow up to demonstrate care, accountability, and continued investment in growth and well-being.

BENEFITS OF ACTIVE LISTENING AS A LEADER

1. Builds Trust

When team members feel genuinely heard, they develop confidence in their leaders, fostering open communication and loyalty.

2. Strengthens Relationships

Active listening deepens understanding, empathy, and connection, creating cohesive and supportive teams.

3. Reduces Misunderstanding

Careful listening ensures accurate understanding, reducing conflict, errors, and miscommunication.

4. Encourages Engagement

Team members who feel heard are more likely to contribute ideas, feedback, and solutions proactively.

5. Enhances Problem-Solving

Listening reveals underlying issues and perspectives that might otherwise be overlooked, enabling more effective and biblically grounded solutions.

6. Promotes Personal Growth

Both the leader and the listener grow spiritually, emotionally, and relationally through the discipline of attentive listening.

7. Reflects Christlike Leadership

Active listening embodies Christ's humility, empathy, and attentiveness, modeling servant leadership and spiritual maturity.

ASK YOUR MENTOR

1. How do you balance listening with providing guidance or decisions?
2. What biblical examples inspire your approach to active listening?
3. How can I discern between listening to understand and listening to respond?
4. How do you create safe spaces for open dialogue with team members?
5. How do you listen effectively in emotionally charged situations?
6. What strategies help maintain patience and empathy when listening to difficult perspectives?
7. How can active listening be integrated into routine leadership practices without becoming burdensome?

Creative Connection and/or Role Play

Think of a song, character or person from a book, movie or history, or an everyday item that personifies the main idea of this lesson and share it. Or, if applicable to this lesson, ***role play a practice from this article with your mentor.***

Self-Evaluation

Rate yourself 1–5 (1 = rarely true, 5 = consistently true):

Do I give full attention to those I lead, without distractions?	
How effectively do I listen to understand before offering solutions or guidance?	
Am I patient, empathetic, and nonjudgmental when hearing concerns or feedback?	
Do I ask thoughtful questions to encourage clarity and reflection?	
How well do I observe nonverbal cues and underlying emotions?	
Do I follow up on conversations to demonstrate care and accountability?	
Does my listening reflect Christlike humility, attentiveness, and love?	

Reflect and Journal

Reflect on your recent interactions with team members. Ask, "Lord, how well did I listen actively, attentively, and empathetically? Did I allow space for them to fully express themselves? How can I improve my listening to better understand, support, and lead according to Your principles?"

Journal insights, patterns, and practical steps for cultivating deeper listening skills.

Action Step

1. Identify one team member with whom you need to deepen understanding.
2. Pray for humility, patience, and discernment before engaging.
3. Schedule a dedicated time to listen actively, giving full attention without interruptions.

4. Ask clarifying and reflective questions to ensure understanding.
 5. Respond thoughtfully, integrating biblical wisdom and practical guidance.
 6. Follow up to demonstrate ongoing care, support, and accountability.
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Sources & Resources

- Holy Bible (NIV, ESV)
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- Maxwell, John C. *The 5 Levels of Leadership*
- Covey, Stephen R. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*
- *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High* – Patterson, Grenny, McMillan & Switzler
- *Learning the Spiritual Discipline of Listening*, Navigators