Learning to draw people out

"The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out." (Prov. 20:5)

In church or team life as well as in evangelism and discipleship it is very important to understand a person's thoughts. This isn't easy! We need to be people of understanding and insight. The goal is to get people to express what they really, genuinely think. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Recognise 'bubbles'

Bubbles on the surface of the water are a sign of life beneath the surface. People often give out conscious or unconscious messages (bubbles) when there is an important issue they want to talk about. These are invitations to listen – a cry for help. Recognising bubbles requires good listening skills and good observational skills to understand body language.

Bubbles that are freely given – what to look for:

- Listen to the answer to the question, 'How are you?' Answers can be the usual, 'Fine'. Others could be, 'Tired' or 'Frustrated'. I once asked an acquaintance in Beirut how she was. She answered, "I am just getting my things in order and then I am going to commit suicide!" The 'bubble' isn't usually so dramatic!
- Watch people's eyes – any tears – listen for a sigh. Body language can tell you a lot. How people release a 'bubble' is very often culturally determined. At a time when people are not stressed you can ask them how they would release bubbles – what body language they would use.

These 'bubbles' are vital keys to the heart and to the emotions. Emotions can be very strong – anger, frustration, grief etc. These often release 'bubbles' in the water as an invitation to listen. The person might not know that you care enough about them and so the invitation to listen is often tentative. But all 'bubbles' are cries for help – 'Someone needs to care for me!'

2. We need to recognise our own weaknesses and inadequacies

They may be:

- Poor listening and observational skills so we miss the 'bubbles'.
- A poor reputation concerning confidentiality. People won't share with you if they know you are a gossip.
- Your own prejudices and biases. Possibilities are almost endless but all of them will restrict your capacity to empathise.
- An unhealthy attitude to trying to 'pigeon-hole' people and so only to understand them in a trivial sense. A danger for those who speak formally is to listen to people's stories simply with a view to using them as a future illustration!
- 'Interference' as you listen from your own unmet needs and longings.
- A simplistic attitude to probably the most complex being God ever created – us – humanity.

3. We need to recognise each person's need/needs

There is a difference between our needs and our need. Our needs may be food, money etc. These are superficial needs and are relatively easily expressed or discerned. But behind needs lies a much deeper need. It one of our needs is being thirsty, then giving a drink is relatively easy. But what are our **deeper** needs?

A 'bubble' often reveals these 'needs'. Can you identify the following 'bubbles'?

- a deep sigh
- a continuous request for financial support

- impatience over an issue
- avoiding eye contact
- a question such as: 'Does anyone care about us?'

Many times the needs reveal the deeper need. The need for money may not be the real problem.

4. What is the deepest human need? Self-worth!

God has so created us that we have a deep desire for self-worth. Ultimately this desire for self-worth can only be met by having a clear understanding of God's value of us.

Our need of self-worth results in two further secondary needs:

i) The need to be **secure**. We are made in the image of God so we can receive the unconditional love of God. There is a tremendous sense of worth when we know that God loves us. See Zephaniah 3:18 – God rejoices over us with singing!

ii) The need to be **significant**. A failure to feel significant leaves many with a feeling of unfulfilment.

If we fail to receive God's love into our hearts, we look for replacements. These all come in from our unconscious mind. They may be:

- A hunger for success
- This success is often measured by the amount of money, power over others, prestige etc. We love our titles!
- Pleasure – a hedonistic lifestyle

This is a very broad generalisation, but men seem to try to find their self-worth by having a sense of purpose – i.e. 'We will be valued by what we do'. Women seem to find their self-worth more in being loved by an esteemed other.

5. How do we meet this need for self-worth?

With our conscious minds we make decisions that we like to think are rational, but usually they are determined by our unconscious mind. We make assumptions that often come from distorted programming of our unconscious mind. These may have been formed in early childhood by non-Biblical worldviews. Ultimately Satan feeds us misinformation and lies to distract us from searching for the only person who can meet our deepest need – God Himself.

6. What happens when this need isn't met?

The answer is deep frustration! We are frustrated with the external circumstances that are not meeting this need. We tend to want to fight against these circumstances. This leads to resentment when we fail and this in turn can lead to boiling anger! So external behaviour often reveals the deep underlying frustration.

Primary frustrations include:

- Fear of failure
- Anxiety that may have its source in the fear of failure
- Shame/guilt – a failure to reach goals. Often these goals were unreachable! This includes a failure to achieve what we wanted to achieve.
- A vague sense of emptiness that often leads to a quiet despair

What happens when the need for self-worth is being met outside of God? The answer is that nothing is solved. The problem is just displaced to a host of needs. I think Satanic involvement is overt in this in that the programming and worldview of people is, *'Find the answer to my need in anything but God!'* The result is a quiet despair settling in people's lives.

So go beyond just meeting people's needs to a quest to find out if the deepest need is being met. Try and begin to unravel the deep needs genuine believers have such as: *"Why am I discouraged, my soul? Why am I so restless?"* Help them think of their need of self-worth (love and fulfilment). Help them realise that they need to be God-driven and not purpose-driven. All our desire for purpose and fulfilment is met only in God.

"The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out." Learn to draw people out so that they willingly expose their deepest needs and particularly their need for self-worth. Then point them to the Scriptures.

Who Am I?

How am I at listening?

Consider how you are at listening to your family, to team members, to friends and neighbours etc. Use the scale to indicate your responses

[1=hardly ever 2=occasionally 3=sometimes 4=often 5=nearly always]

The higher the score, the better your listening skills.

Family	Church/Team	Friends		
			1.	I am patient with those who have difficulty putting their feelings into words.
			2.	When someone wants to talk with me I make sure he/she is physically comfortable.
			3.	I am concerned and empathetic when someone expresses very deep feelings.
			4.	If I need uninterrupted time, I do whatever I can to get alone so I don't have to tell people I am busy, including turning off the mobile phone.
			5.	When others share with me, I encourage them to continue as, long as they need to without changing the subject.
			6.	I give appropriate eye contact looking at the person without staring.
			7.	My body posture and n on-verbal behaviour communicate that I ma really interested in that person and what they are saying.
			8.	I hold what is shared with me in strict confidence unless I have permission to share with specific people.
			9.	I respect the privacy of others by encouraging them to share from their hearts, but without any force or manipulation.
			10.	I withhold making a judgement until I have heard the whole story.
			11.	I show by my body language (facial expressions etc.) that I am empathising with the person.
			12.	I try hard to learn and apply culturally relevant ways to listen to listen to those from different cultures.
			13.	If someone comes to talk over a serious matter, I let them know up-front if my time is limited by another commitment so they will know the deadline.
			14.	When I am listening I keep interruptions to a minimum – i.e. no phone calls. mobiles etc.
			15.	I gladly stop what I am doing when someone comes to talk to me.

Some Useful Listening Skills

Here are just a few specific skills and behaviours to keep in mind when listening to others. You might want to use this as a checklist before and after major times of listening. It will help you determine what you need to do and also how you did and what skills and behaviours you need to work on some more. Add to the list other skills/behaviours as reminders.

Many of these are culture bound. It would be interesting to print up some of the non-verbal skills and behaviours that are important in the various countries in which we work.

Understanding these 'signals' will avoid many misunderstandings and greatly help in relating to others.

Non Verbal	Verbal
• Set aside distractions quickly (TV, computer, newspapers etc.) • Ignore distractions around you (noises etc.). • If needed, go with the person to a more private place. • Give focussed attention. • Maintain appropriate eye contact. • Guard your tone of voice. • Use appropriate posture and facial expressions that affirm – nodding etc. • Turn your body towards the person. • Touch if it is appropriate. • Use culturally appropriate noises that indicate involvement (such as, 'hmm', 'ahhh', 'Oh dear' etc. • Take the time that is necessary. • Maintain a friendly distance. • Sit or stand at the same level as the person. • Invite the person to sit down. • Stay alert, awake and be visibly engaged.	• Give an invitation to share what they wish to share. • Draw the person out with: ✓ Silence – don't talk too much! ✓ Open-ended questions ✓ Some self-disclosure ✓ Observations about the situation • Focus on his/her issues. • Stay on the subject in hand. • Don't talk when you should listen! • Respond empathetically. • Give appropriate affirmation. • Ask a few questions. • Let the person finish all he/she wants to say. • Respond at appropriate head or heart level. • Acknowledge and validate their feelings. • Be an encourager. • Restate what you have heard to clarify your understanding. • Pray with the person if appropriate.