



You Talk, I'll Listen

Creating a Multi-Ethnic Gospel Community Through Active Listening

Adapted from The Summit Church's forum with Dr. George Yancey, "Beyond Racial Gridlock."

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Conversations centered around race can be extremely paralyzing and polarizing. Most people are particularly uncomfortable bringing these discussions to light. However, it is critical to truly understand how *others* feel and think before explaining how we feel and think when trying to create a healthy, multi-ethnic, gospel community.

Two Contrasting Views About Racism

Being on the same page about the definition of racism is absolutely critical to engaging in effective conversation. Majority culture often views racism as individualistic, while most minorities view it as structural. The individualist viewpoint suggests racism is only something done overtly from one individual to another individual. On the other hand, the structuralist view adds that racism can also be perpetuated by social institutions, even when individuals do not intend to be racist.

Professor and sociologist [Dr. George Yancey](#) unpacks more of these insights and implications in his book *Beyond Racial Gridlock*. Dr. Yancey's research reveals that when it comes to racism, the average Christian merely parrots solutions offered by the rest of the world instead of initiating biblical solutions to the problem. He analyzes the strengths and limitations of the four common secular approaches to racial issues and offers a biblical approach that acknowledges the unique challenges we all must embrace to move toward racial harmony. One of the practical steps in moving forward is active listening.

Active Listening

Active listening provides the opportunity to demonstrate Christ-like behavior during dialogues on race. The goal of active listening is to understand the speaker, even when disagreement arises. Active listening is *not* listening to merely respond with opposing viewpoints. For example, the practice of active listening for believers (the listeners) begins with the readiness to accept God's Word (the speaker) as salvific truth. James explains this here:

“My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you” (James 1:19-21 NIV).

This practice of being “quick to listen and slow to speak” also proves helpful as we engage one another in conversations about race. Through active listening, humility plus the absence of anger produces

the righteousness of God. Therefore, the fruit of active listening in areas of race provides us with the ability to:

- Learn the perspective of others.
- Communicate better with others before the next racial crisis occurs.
- Create larger environments of healthy interracial communication.

Four Steps to Practice Active Listening on Racial Issues

1. Find someone who disagrees with you and is open to discussing racial perspectives.

- Start with people in your immediate spheres of influence (job, work, church, gym, kids' sports teams, etc.).
- Social media can also be a platform to find friends that share differing opinions.

2. Invite that person to meet you in a neutral/safe environment.

- The conversation may go something like this: "Hey, John. I was reading your post the other day, and I wanted to understand your perspective better. Could we schedule a time to meet and have coffee or lunch and talk about it?"
- If they are willing to meet, schedule a time and place that is convenient for them.

3. Actively listen to their perspective.

- Active listening results in you being able to repeat back to the person what they have just said, even if it's just a paraphrase.
- Talk with them until they are satisfied that you understand their perspective.

4. Thank them for sharing their perspective, and, if possible, share your perspective.

- You might say, "Thanks, John, for sharing your viewpoint. I definitely feel like I understand you better now. Would you care to hear my perspective?"
- If not, let it go. Remember, the goal is to build relationships with people that can respectfully disagree with you and create healthier dialogues moving forward.

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