



VULNERABLE

LISTENING WELL TO CREATE A
CULTURE OF VULNERABILITY

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The Gift of Being Seen

Behold, there were two blind men sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent, but they cried out all the more, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" And stopping, Jesus called them and said, "What do you want me to do for you?" They said to him, "Lord, let our eyes be opened." And Jesus in pity touched their eyes, and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him.

- Matthew 20v30-34

Why did Jesus ask these two blind men what they wanted? Wasn't it obvious that they were blind? Wasn't it obvious they would want to see? Didn't Jesus, who knows the hearts of all men, know what they were asking for when they asked for mercy? Of course it was obvious. Of course Jesus knew. But before he gave these men the gift of sight, he gave them the gift of being seen. Notice how the crowd is responding to these men calling out. They rebuked them and told them to be silent. These men sat on the margins of society. Jesus, in his beautiful care for others, makes sure they aren't silenced, but heard, not just by him, but by the crowd.

There was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and though she had spent all her living on physicians, she could not be healed by anyone. She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, and immediately her discharge of blood ceased. And Jesus said, "Who was it that touched me?" When all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds surround you and are pressing in on you!" But Jesus said, "Someone touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me." And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."

- Luke 8v43-48

Why did Jesus ask the crowd who touched him? Didn't he know exactly who it was? Yes, he knew. But this woman, for 12 years, would have been ritually unclean. She would have been treated like an exile of the community. She would have experienced significant isolation. No synagogue. No temple. Jesus didn't just want her to experience the gift of being clean, but the gift of being seen. He restored her to the community by asking who touched him and by pronouncing her "well".

It matters to Jesus that people feel seen, heard, known, loved, understood, cared for. By him and by others. If it matters to Jesus, it must matter to his people. Jesus wants us to be a community of people who see, hear, know, love, understand, care.

Introduction

Our church is seeking to become more vulnerable, honest, and confessional with one another. This is hard. It pushes against our fallen instincts. The first response, after the fall in Eden, was to cover and hide. We've been doing it ever since. However, if we want to faithfully follow the commands of Jesus for his church, we must learn to come out of hiding. We need to be vulnerable.

After all, you can't weep with me when I keep my weeping secret. We can't bear each other's burdens if we don't know about them. I can't rejoice with you over your patient endurance in suffering, or your victory over a certain sin, if I'm not aware of your suffering or sinning.

So, vulnerability is a must. But so too is how we respond to the vulnerability of others. Vulnerability involves risk. It's a privilege when someone entrusts their sin and suffering to us. If we don't listen well, or if we respond carelessly, we make vulnerability harder for each other.

We don't want to force people into being vulnerable. Rather, imagine when someone is struggling, instead of covering and hiding, they feel safe enough to share with their church family, they want to ask for help, they want to be vulnerable, and they trust they have a group of brothers and sisters in Christ they can come to.

Imagine someone handing you something made of crystal. It is precious, but fragile, and should be treated with care. If you hold it well and then gently pass it back to them, they will trust you again. If you drop it clumsily, start juggling with it, intentionally smash it, leave it sitting perilously on the edge of a table, they are going to struggle to trust you again.

There are rules to follow for holding a newborn. Don't lift them by the ankles is an obvious one. Make sure to support the head and neck. As parents pass their baby over to people who want to hold them, they usually watch like a hawk to make sure the baby is safe with the other person. If you are clumsy and careless, the parents are understandably going to be reluctant to pass the baby over again another time.

Vulnerability is just as delicate. When people talk to you about what's hard, when they open up about hurts, we should treat it with great care. And the truth is, this doesn't come naturally to many of us. We're not naturally great listeners. We don't naturally treat the vulnerability of others with care.

Our hope is that this short booklet will show you how our poor listening can discourage vulnerability, and how growing in love through listening can create a culture where it is safe to be known.

Lecturing

1

A good rule to go by:

Until someone asks for advice, they probably haven't come primarily for advice.

They likely haven't come for a mini sermon, but for a listening ear. Being vulnerable is hard because people are afraid of being looked down on. And often, when we lecture, even with good intentions, it can feel like we're speaking "from above" or "from afar" as if we've already figured things out, and they haven't. It assumes we know everything there is to know about the person and the situation. That kind of response can come across as careless, and even prideful.

But Jesus doesn't lecture the broken-hearted. He draws near. He comes alongside us. And that's what we're called to do too. Not to look down on others as dispensers of information, but to walk with them as gentle, patient friends in Christ.

Another good rule of thumb:

If you're doing most of the talking, you're not really listening.

We have a desire to feel heard, seen and cared for. When someone is being vulnerable, they're taking the risk of asking to be seen, heard and loved.

So slow down. Resist the urge to correct or teach right away. Hold back on the mini sermon. Listen more than you speak. Ask questions that show real care. Make sure the person has time to talk it all out. This is sometimes called the "ministry of presence" and it is a powerful gift to give someone. Just being a good friend, a listening ear, a caring brother or sister in Christ.

Personally, I know I don't gravitate toward people who tend to lecture. When someone starts giving advice too quickly, I can feel the walls go up around my vulnerability.

And I've been on the other side too; when I've fallen into lecturing rather than listening. I can still remember the way someone's expression changed and the shift in their posture, as I began dispensing advice instead of showing care. I likely made them feel unheard, maybe even unseen. And that grieves me.

We all long to be heard. And we're more likely to open up to people who come alongside us with the compassion of Jesus; who ask thoughtful questions and listen with love.

Rebuking

2

Our natural posture is to cover and hide. Being vulnerable is hard. We fear being judged and condemned. If our immediate response to someone's vulnerability is correction or confrontation, they may never feel safe enough to open up again.

Yes, 'rebuke' is a Bible word. And there are times when rebuking, correcting and admonishing is necessary, but it shouldn't be our default. We need to be slow, prayerful, and discerning in how and when we do this. If we rush into rebuke, the person is unlikely to experience compassion, empathy or love.

There are many stories in the life of Jesus where he speaks with sinners, and rebuke is not his first move. He often leads with compassion. He sees the person before addressing the problem. He welcomes before he corrects. Think Zaccheaus.

Careless rebuke can often come across as if we ourselves are not in need of the gospel. As though we are not struggling sinners who need a Saviour. Once again, it creates a posture of speaking down, rather than walking with.

Rebuke, when separated from the truths and comforts of the gospel, misses the person's heart. It doesn't meet them where they are. It simply demands they get to where they should be. It can also unintentionally suggest, "I am already there, I've arrived". But we are all still on the journey. We are all still in need of grace.

Paul reminds us in Galatians 6v1: *"If anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted."*

If I'm struggling with doubt, fear, or anger, I'm unlikely to turn to someone whose first instinct is to correct me. I don't move toward the person who is quick to rebuke and slow to understand.

And I know there have been moments when I have done this myself. I can remember times when someone opened up in vulnerability, and all I offered in return was a furrowed brow, a stern tone, and a challenge to stop sinning. I missed the opportunity to reflect the gentle grace of Christ. I can only imagine how unhelpful and even cold I must have seemed.

Who am I more likely to talk to? Someone who is humble. Someone who knows they too are a sinner in daily need of grace. Someone who doesn't pretend to have it all together, but who gently and patiently points me to Jesus. Someone who reminds me that in Christ there is both forgiveness for failure and strength for the struggle ahead.

Judging

3

If you want someone to stop being vulnerable; say something like:

*I can't believe you would do something like that.
I wouldn't expect that from you.
I would never do something like that.*

We are all sinners. We are all still struggling against the flesh. We are all failing in different areas. When we respond with words like these, even unintentionally, we add to the weight of guilt and shame the person may already be carrying. The fact that they've had the courage to be vulnerable likely means they've already fought through those feelings just to speak up.

Yes, "judging" is a biblical word and principle. But Scripture also gives us clear, wise, and loving instructions on how to go about it. It is always meant to be restorative. It should flow from humility, not superiority. Think about how the high priest treated fellow sinners according to Hebrews 5:2:

*He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward,
since he himself is beset with weakness.*

This is the posture we're called to. We are needy people, listening to another needy person speak about their need. We don't come with condemnation. We come with compassion. Imagine saying to someone "I was just about to go to Jesus to talk to him about my need for his grace, do you want to come with me and tell him about yours too?"

I know I tend to withdraw from people who speak in judgmental ways when I'm wrestling with sin. Often, I already know what I've done is wrong. I'm already carrying a sense of guilt or regret.

And I know I've judged. I can recall moments where I offered a shocked expression or a "I'm disappointed in you" kind of remark. Jesus already knew these things about them, and he still loved them. He was patiently at work in their lives. Meanwhile, I was acting as if I didn't also need grace. That kind of response was not only unhelpful, it was hypocritical.

Who am I more likely to talk to? Someone who is humble. Someone who is honest about their own need for the gospel. Someone who treats my vulnerability with compassion and gently points me to the love and grace of God. Someone who prays for me and helps me grow in the areas where I struggle. Someone who reflects the heart of Christ, not the voice of condemnation.

Story Matching

4

When we listen to someone being vulnerable and we respond with something like:

"That reminds me of something I experienced..."

And then talk about that for the next ten minutes, we've story matched. We've taken their moment of vulnerability and turned it into an opportunity to talk about ourselves. Even if unintentional, this can come across as dismissive or self-focused. Sadly, it's something we've all likely done, and it's happening in conversations everywhere.

Have you ever shared with someone about a hard week, only to be told, "That's nothing compared to my week"? Have you wept in front of someone during a deep loss, only for the conversation to turn toward their life? Have you shared exciting news, only for it to become a springboard for their own story? In those moments, you may have felt like the conversation was hijacked. And that's because, in a way, it was.

Sometimes we share our own stories to try and build connection. We want the person to know they're not alone, that we've been through something similar. And that can be helpful, but it must be done carefully. There are risks. We might unintentionally dominate the conversation. We might share something heavier that makes their situation feel small in comparison. Or they might not see the connection we're trying to make.

If you do share part of your story, keep it brief, and keep the focus on them. Pay attention to how they respond. Ask questions. Keep checking in to see if it's actually helping or just distracting. Listening well means staying with the other person's story.

We are called to weep with those who weep, and to rejoice with those who rejoice. We are not called to turn their story into a launching pad for our own.

As I reflect on times I've shared parts of my own life, I know it's hard to feel safe opening up to someone who tends to story match.

And I know I've done this. I've heard stories of sorrow, fear, or joy, and responded by telling my own story instead of sitting with theirs. I can only imagine how unheard they must have felt. It was a moment to be present, and I made it about me.

Who am I more likely to talk to? Someone who stays with me in the moment. Someone who follows up on what I've just shared. Someone who will weep with me or rejoice with me because they care more about my heart than their story.

Minimising

5

Onions have layers. As you peel back one, you get to the next. And so on, until you reach the core. It's the same with an iceberg; what's visible above the surface is only a small part of what's really there.

Trust is layered too. Vulnerability often comes in stages. Someone may trust you with one small part of their story, and if that's handled with care, they may eventually trust you with more. But if we're careless with the first layer, they're unlikely to risk showing us the deeper ones.

The initial layers of vulnerability might seem light or trivial, but they're often a gentle test. The person may be quietly asking, "Can I trust you with more?"

When we respond to someone's vulnerability with phrases like, "You just need to..." or "That's nothing," we're minimising. We're sending the message that their experience isn't worth much. Even if we don't mean to, it can make someone feel small, unseen, or dismissed.

Recently, I watched a child drop their sweets on the floor. Devastated, they ran to their father for comfort. The dad knelt down, embraced them, listened to their sorrow, and expressed compassion. I remember thinking, "That dad really cares about the small things." And because he does, when the bigger things come, that child will likely still run to him.

But what if the dad had brushed it off? What if he kept doing that over time? I wonder if the child would still run to him when life really hurt.

When someone matters to you, the things that matter to them will matter to you.

I tend to avoid being vulnerable with people who have responded to my smaller struggles with, "That's nothing," or, "Other people have it worse." It doesn't invite trust. It closes the door.

And I know I've done this. I've heard the first layer of someone's story and thought, "That's not a big deal," and responded in a way that reflected that thought. There was more going on. More pain, more depth. But I never got to hear it. I hadn't earned that trust. And I missed an opportunity to love them well.

Who am I more likely to talk to? Someone who understands that sin and suffering have layers. Someone who knows that trust is built slowly. Someone who will treat what I share with care, not because it's a massive crisis, but because they know I chose to share it. Someone who sees that if it matters to me, it matters to them too.

Gossiping

6

For someone to be vulnerable with you is deeply precious. It's a sacred trust. A moment where someone opens their heart and invites you into a part of their life that's often hidden or painful. We must treat that vulnerability with care and respect.

If we share what's been entrusted to us with others, we are being untrustworthy and unfaithful. Even if we frame it as a concern or a prayer request, if we haven't been given permission, we are crossing a line. If the person finds out, they may never trust us again. And understandably so.

The Bible has a lot to say about gossip, and just as much to say about being faithful, trustworthy, and wise with our words. Proverbs 11:13 says, "A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy person keeps a secret." The call is clear: those who belong to Jesus must be known for faithfulness, not for betrayal.

The gospel reminds us that Jesus is always faithful. He never mishandles our hearts. He is our Great High Priest, the one who carries our weaknesses without shame, who intercedes without gossip, who knows us fully and still loves us completely. He's the safest person we can run to. And he invites us to reflect that safety to one another.

There have been people in my life I've entrusted with sensitive things, only to discover later that others knew about it. It's hard to overstate how damaging that is. Naturally, I really struggle to trust those people now.

And I know I've done the same. I've taken what someone shared in confidence and passed it along. Sometimes casually, sometimes carelessly. I broke their trust. That was not just unwise, it was unfaithful. How unlike Christ I was in that moment.

Who am I more likely to talk to? Someone who proves to be trustworthy. Someone who guards what I share as if it were their own. Someone who doesn't need to say "You can trust me," because their life already says it for them. Someone who treats my vulnerability with the same care that Jesus shows me.

**Confidentiality should not be understood as absolute. Information that raises safeguarding concerns or indicates a risk of harm must be shared with the appropriate safeguarding personnel and relevant church leadership, and, where necessary, with the relevant statutory authorities, in accordance with the church's safeguarding policy.*

**See Appendix 'When It Feels Too Big to Carry Alone' for guidance on situations where additional church leadership involvement may be appropriate.*

When someone is being vulnerable with you, it's taking them real courage. It's never easy to be vulnerable. These moments are precious, and they deserve our full attention.

If I am someone who listens poorly, people will likely struggle to be vulnerable with me. And if I behave in a distracted way during their moment of sharing, I'm essentially communicating that what they're saying isn't worth my focus.

If I'm picking up my phone, checking my watch, clicking on my laptop, if my eyes are wandering, if I have that glazed-over look, if my body language says "I'd rather be somewhere else," then the person will not feel heard or valued.

Jesus is never distracted when we speak to him. He is the Good Shepherd who hears every word, the High Priest who listens with perfect compassion. His eyes are never glazed over. He never rushes us. He is always fully present, always attentive, always caring.

I've been on the receiving end of that. I've tried to pour out my heart to someone, only for them to pick up their phone mid-sentence and start texting. I've opened up about something painful, only for the person to open their laptop and begin clicking away. I've started sharing something serious, only to be interrupted by a joke or a comment about something happening nearby. In those moments, I shut down. I felt small. I stopped talking.

And I've done the same to others. I've let my eyes and thoughts drift, scrolled through my phone, responded with half-hearted "hmm" and "yeah" while someone was sharing something important. It was unloving, and I missed the gift of being present with them.

Who am I more likely to talk to? Someone who listens like Jesus does. Someone who closes the laptop, puts the phone down, and leans in with care. Someone whose posture says, "I see you, and I'm here with you."

Interrupting

8

Being vulnerable is often an emotional experience. We're talking about our struggles, both in sin and in suffering. We're talking about the things that are hard for us. And often, it takes time to unravel what we're feeling and find the words to share it.

If someone constantly interrupts or fills up the quiet moments when we're gathering our thoughts or struggling through emotion, it can disrupt the flow. We lose our train of thought. We start to feel rushed or even silenced. Those pauses that come with vulnerability aren't empty; they're spaces where trust is being built and truth is being formed.

And again, the simple reminder applies: if I'm doing most of the talking, I'm probably not listening well.

I've experienced this personally. I've tried to talk to someone about sin or sorrow, only to be interrupted again and again with comments or quips that made it hard to stay focused. I found myself nervously trying to squeeze everything out quickly before I was cut off. I rushed the process. I didn't feel like I was given space to sit with my feelings or to reflect on what I really needed to say.

And I know I've done this too. I've interrupted mid-sentence. I've felt uncomfortable in a moment of silence and filled it with something trivial. I've stopped someone's thoughts before they were ready to speak them fully. How careless and impatient that was of me.

Who am I more likely to talk to? Someone who listens with patience. Someone who gives me space to process. Someone who knows that silence is not empty, but sacred. Someone who waits with me in those moments, gently encouraging me to keep going. Someone who asks careful, open questions that help me keep reflecting, rather than interrupting the journey.

Changing the Conversation

9

It takes a lot for someone to open up the vulnerable areas of their life and let others peer in. It may have taken days, weeks, or even years of prayer and internal wrestling for them to finally take that step. And they've chosen you as the person to confide in. What a privilege that is.

When that happens, we must be willing to stay in that conversation for a while. If the timing genuinely makes it difficult, then say so gently, and honour their vulnerability by setting aside another time to give them your full attention. But what we mustn't do is suddenly change the subject to something more comfortable or interesting to us. That sends a subtle but painful message: "What you just shared doesn't really matter to me."

Jesus never does that to us. He doesn't brush us off or redirect the conversation when things get uncomfortable. He meets us where we are, listens to our cries, and stays present with us in our mess. His conversations with the broken were never rushed or rerouted. He lingered, listened, and loved.

There have been times I've opened up about painful things. Real struggles of the heart. Only to hear someone respond with, "Well, anyway..." and then start talking about their day, the news, the traffic. It made me feel small. It made me wish I hadn't said anything at all.

And I know I've done the same. Whether it was because I felt awkward, or because I had another agenda for the conversation, I've shifted the focus and left someone 'out to dry'. In hindsight, I imagine what I did felt like taking the precious crystal of their vulnerability and throwing it across the room. That may not have been my intent, but it was careless, and it was unkind.

Who am I more likely to talk to? Someone who will sit with me in my vulnerability and patiently listen. Someone who stays with the conversation, even when it's awkward. Someone who, if they can't engage deeply in the moment, will make space soon—because they care, and they value what I've shared.

When someone chooses to be vulnerable with us, they're not speaking to a brick wall. They're reaching out in the hope of being heard, understood, and cared for. And while moments of quiet reflection can be really important, vulnerability needs response. A human, relational, compassionate response.

We want to use our body language, our facial expressions and our words to convey that we are present with them, listening, understanding and caring about them and their situation.

If we sit motionless, without expression or response, we may accidentally give the impression that we're disengaged, or that we simply don't care. But our presence can be a ministry in itself, if it communicates empathy and attentiveness.

That means nodding, leaning in, softening our facial expressions, making eye contact, offering short words of encouragement or questions that help someone keep going. These are all small ways to show, "I'm here. I'm with you in this."

I've tried to share deeply with someone who sat completely still, without a single flicker of response. No facial movement, no words. And eventually offered a flat, robotic "I understand." Those are painful and awkward moments. Instead of feeling heard, I felt dismissed. I changed the topic just to make the moment feel less uncomfortable.

I know I've done the same. I've listened with my heart elsewhere. I've been physically present but emotionally absent. I've failed to respond with any kind of warmth or engagement. How cold and unkind that must have felt to the person opening up to me.

Jesus never listens to us like that. His compassion is active. He weeps with those who weep. He moves toward the broken-hearted. His posture, tone, and actions all communicate the deep love he has for his people.

Who am I more likely to talk to? Someone who listens like Jesus. Someone who shows they care. Someone who responds with gentleness, warmth, and presence—using not just their ears, but their whole self to say, "You matter to me, and I'm here with you."

Conclusion

You may have read this list and discovered areas of your own personal failure. How wonderful it is to know that Jesus forgives us completely for every time we've listened poorly, responded carelessly, or failed to love well. How wonderful that the Spirit of God lives within us to convict us gently and transform us steadily into the likeness of Christ.

You may have read these things and remembered moments when others let you down. Take comfort in the truth that Jesus sees and understands those wounds, and he calls you to show mercy and grace to others, remembering that they are weak, stumbling, broken people, just like you and me.

Vulnerability is something that grows over time in a community shaped by the gospel. It's cultivated by humble, kind, patient, and compassionate listeners who reflect the love of Christ.

May God help us become those kinds of people.

May he deepen our relationships in the church.

And may we learn to treat one another with the gentleness, patience, and care that we ourselves have received from Jesus.

Reflection and Group Discussion Questions

1. Vulnerability and Trust

- When has someone's vulnerability helped you grow closer to them? What made that experience safe and meaningful?
- Can you think of a time you've struggled to be vulnerable? What made it hard? What helped or would have helped?
- Reflect on a time when someone responded to your vulnerability with grace. How did that affect your relationship?

2. Listening Well

- Which of the "10 ways to listen carelessly" do you find yourself doing the most? Why do you think that is?
- How do you think Jesus listens to us when we are vulnerable? How can we imitate him better in our listening?

3. Practical Steps

- What's one thing you can start doing this week to become a better listener in your church or friendship groups?
- How can you help create an environment where vulnerability is safer and encouraged?

4. Gospel-Centred Reflection

- How does understanding the gospel help you respond differently when someone shares sin or suffering with you?
- What role does the Holy Spirit play in transforming us to be more compassionate listeners and encouragers?

Summary Checklist

- Listen more than you speak, offering a listening ear before advice or correction.
- Respond with gentleness and humility, remembering we all need God's grace.
- Avoid judging, lecturing, or interrupting when someone is vulnerable.
- Honour trust and never gossip about what is shared with you.
- Give your full attention, putting away distractions like phones and laptops.
- Use words, expressions, and body language to show you are engaged and care.
- Allow space for silence and reflection without rushing or filling every moment.
- Don't change the subject but sit with someone in their vulnerability.
- Acknowledge the layers of vulnerability and treat all struggles as important.
- Pray for those who open up to you and seek to point them to Jesus.

Example Prayers

- **Before Conversations of Vulnerability (Prayer for Help)**

Father,

Thank You for the privilege of being a listening ear for someone made in Your image. Help me to be present, patient, and gentle. Guard my heart from pride, distraction, or a desire to fix. Fill me with compassion. Let me listen as You listen, with grace and truth. Guide my responses. Help me to speak only what is helpful, and to reflect the love of Christ in every expression, question, and moment of silence. May this be a moment where Your mercy is felt, where burdens are shared, and where gospel hope begins to take root.

In Jesus name,

Amen.

- **After Conversations Where You Listened Carelessly (Prayer of Confession)**

Father,

I confess that I didn't listen well. I was distracted, impatient, or proud. I didn't reflect Your love or show the compassion of Christ. Forgive me for the ways I mishandled the trust that was given to me. Thank You that Your mercy is greater than my failure, and that Jesus has already paid for this on the cross. Help me to grow. Make me slower to speak, quicker to care, and more aware of how precious it is when someone shares their heart. Teach me to love like Jesus. Restore what I've damaged. And give me grace to try again with humility and hope.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

- **After Someone Carelessly Listened to You (Prayer of Lament)**

Father,

That was hard. I opened up something tender, and I didn't feel seen, heard, or understood. I feel hurt, disappointed, and a little more hesitant to be vulnerable again. Thank You that You are always listening. You never interrupt. You never minimise. You never turn away. You are near to the broken-hearted and gentle with those who are hurting. I bring my sadness to You now. Help me to forgive. Help me not to grow bitter or closed off. Help me to remember that the person who didn't listen well is weak and human, just like me. You are the friend who hears every unspoken ache. Heal what this moment bruised. Restore my trust. And help me to keep walking in grace.

In Jesus name,

Amen.

Appendix: When It Feels Too Big to Carry Alone

One of the privileges of Christian community is that we don't carry one another's burdens alone. Someone might share something with you that feels bigger than your wisdom, experience, or ability to help. Serious sin, deep suffering, complex marriage issues, a crisis of faith, or circumstances that require ongoing care. These are situations where additional support is needed.

God has given pastors and elders to shepherd his people, care for souls, teach God's Word, and help guide people through difficult circumstances. Not every struggle requires pastoral involvement. Many burdens can and should be carried within ordinary Christian friendships. But love sometimes requires recognising our limitations. When a situation is beyond your ability to help, is causing significant concern, or may affect the wider church community, it is wise to speak with those entrusted with spiritual oversight.

Inviting church leadership into a situation is not a failure of trust, but an act of care. The goal is not to pass them on to someone else, but to walk with them toward more pastoral support. As a general principle, whenever possible, involve the person who has shared with you in the process. Rather than speaking about them without their knowledge, consider saying something like:

"I care about you, and I want to help. I also think this may be something where additional support would be helpful. Would you be willing for us to speak with one of the pastors or elders together?"

There is an important difference between gossip and seeking appropriate pastoral help. Gossip shares information for reasons that are careless, unnecessary, or self-serving. Pastoral involvement seeks the person's good, spiritual growth, protection, and restoration.

We want to be people who are faithful with what is shared, while also recognising that God has given the church pastors, elders, and mature believers to help care for his people.

This booklet seeks to help churches cultivate a culture where vulnerability is safe, encouraged, and responded to well. While many churches desire deeper fellowship, burden-bearing, and honest confession of sin and suffering, vulnerability can easily be discouraged by careless responses, even when they are well-intentioned.

Through ten common ways we mishandle another person's vulnerability, the booklet aims to help ordinary church members listen and care more faithfully, so that people feel seen, heard, loved, and supported within the life of the local church.



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