



The Art of Listening: Dialogue, Shame, and Pastoral Care

Neil Pembroke

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The art of listening lies at the heart of pastoral ministry. Listening establishes a genuine relationship between persons and creates an environment for authentic dialogue. In this book Neil Pembroke provides a comprehensive study of the art of listening within the congregational context and constructs a practical theology of what it means to be a supportive, healing, growth-promoting caregiver.

Drawing on the insights of the dialogical philosophers Gabriel Marcel and Martin Buber, Pembroke provides a new way of thinking about pastoral care and counseling. He takes two key concepts of theirs, availability and confirmation, and applies them to the kind of ministry that pastors actually do. Availability has to do with personal receptivity to the other, while confirmation involves struggling with the other in reaching for his or her God-given psychological, moral, and spiritual potential. While these two concepts have clear links with traditional pastoral categories such as empathy, acceptance, and genuineness, they also bring important new dimensions to light, and Pembroke sets these new avenues for pastoral praxis in a biblical-theological framework.

But pastors also sometimes fall short of the ideals of being available to and confirming of people seeking their help. The second half of the book explores the shame associated with pastoral nonavailability and lack of confirmation. While the debilitating effect of shame is usually highlighted, here its positive contribution is developed. Building on James Fowler's work on the link between shame and conscience, Pembroke suggests that shame can provide the stimulus for a conversion to a more faithful pastoral presence.

The first book to isolate and present in practical terms the essential components of effective pastoral care, *The Art of Listening* is must reading for everyone currently practicing or studying for a vocation in pastoral care and counseling.

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