



LISTENING in your MARRIAGE

An 8-day Plan



Listening in Your Marriage

an eight-day reading plan

What if listening is the kindest, most honoring way to love your spouse? One of the most remarkable skills anyone can ever practice, listening is creating an environment in which another person feels heard, understood, known, cared for...loved. Through these eight days, we invite you to consider the value and the impact of listening well, and how cultivating and practicing listening brings healing and integration to your marriage.



This reading plan is related to our 12-week video-based marriage resource: ***The Rendezvous Project***.

Day 1: Why Does Listening Well Matter?

Scripture:

A wise person will listen and continue to learn, and an understanding person will gain direction. Proverbs 1:5 GW

Understand this, my beloved brothers and sisters. Let everyone be quick to hear [be a careful, thoughtful listener], slow to speak [a speaker of carefully chosen words and], slow to anger [patient, reflective, forgiving]. James 1:19 AMP

Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Matthew 22:37-39 NIV

Devotional:

If loving each other is as important and significant to God as Jesus says in Matthew 22:37-39, the question that comes to mind is *what are ways to love each other well?* Especially your spouse? One of the ways Jesus loves us and invites us to love is through listening. ***The practice of listening well is loving, honoring, and healing in marriage.***

What if listening is not merely the act of hearing the words spoken by your spouse? What if listening is the practice of understanding the meaning behind the words? Listening is being attuned (aware of and attentive or responsive) to a person's heart and experience – joining them in their story, weeping as they weep, sharing their joy, and everything in between. Listening is one of the most remarkable skills one can ever practice; it helps to create an environment in which another person feels heard, understood, known, cared for...**loved**. And when practiced in marriage, listening cultivates a safe and sacred space for deepening intimacy.

We each have a story to be told that is worthy of good, wise, and kind engagement. Your story matters, and is worthy of being heard, held, and engaged well, with kindness and attunement.

Attunement is about understanding another's inner emotional world. The window into another's emotional world is their non-verbal communication—that is, their facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language.

Sharing our stories with someone who listens with compassion and empathy contributes to redeeming painful, fragmented experiences and developing new, healthy, and whole stories – regardless of what a person has experienced. When

we tell our stories, including the fullness of brokenness and blessing, pain and joy – to a caring person, it leads to a kind and empathic understanding of others AND ourselves, interrupting entrenched, unhealthy, harmful patterns. How kind of God to bring healing and integration to his beloved this way!

Perhaps there's more to your spouse's story than you know. As you move with God in your own story, there are opportunities to understand your story more deeply, more rightly. There's always more in your spouse's story, as well as in your story together, to explore. How beautiful (and sometimes challenging) to hold space for your spouse's story in the context of your marriage.

As you listen, you have the opportunity to offer a safe and welcoming space for your spouse when they are struggling, stuck, hurting, and are courageous enough to share their heart and story. You get to come alongside, listen well, and invite Jesus to meet you and your spouse in this time and in this space. This is a sacred space with your spouse. Holy ground.

This is the invitation of listening: you have the opportunity to partner with our Trinity God: Abba Father, Jesus, and Holy Spirit for the heart of your spouse – to offer care and compassion in ways that may bring integration and healing!

God's loving presence within us — in and through our presence — is one of the ways the Kingdom comes here on earth, in your marriage, and in all relationships. This is the place where Love rises in you, through you, and through your marriage. May it be so!

As you ponder all this with God today, consider asking Him:

Father, how have I experienced this to be true for me? How have I experienced being listened to and attuned to? How am I meant to love and be loved through listening well and showing honor and care for my spouse?

Jesus, how might it feel if my story is held and engaged well by my spouse? Please give me a glimpse of this; please guide us in this practice.

Holy Spirit, how are you with and in my every breath, every thought and hope and care? How are you aware and attuned to my heart and my story?

Day 2: Helpful Listening and Responding

Scripture:

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. John 13:35 NIV

Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude. 1 Peter 3:8 NLT

Devotional:

The first duty of love is to listen.
- Paul Tillich

Can you think of a time when someone sat with you face to face, leaned in, and listened intently as you shared a story with them of when you were hurt, betrayed or abandoned in some way? Or perhaps you felt stuck or overwhelmed. What was that like for you? What did it feel like when they listened and engaged you well? What did it invite in you?

We embody the love and the heart of God, the hands and feet of Jesus when we are present to each other and offer attuned care. In 1 Peter 3:8, we are invited to compassion, kindness, and humility as we offer our presence in Love.

What does this look like on a practical level when you are sitting face to face with your spouse as they share their story and heart?

Intentional, helpful listening is:

- Keeping your mind and heart open and curious.
- Holding the space for them for that time period and giving them your undivided attention.
- Being fully present to their heart and story. When you are fully present and engaged, you communicate, "You are important, and so are the things you are saying. I hear you. I see you. I care about you, your story, and our marriage. It all matters."
- Engaging them - their whole person - with your whole person. Allowing them to affect you, i.e., to grieve with those who grieve.
- Offering them the dignity of being heard - having their story witnessed by the one who committed to a lifetime together.
- Part of walking with God together.

We each have different styles of relating as our spouse knows well, and yet there

are ways we can be with each other that show care, honor, kindness, and compassion in ways that have the potential to facilitate healing!

As you ponder this with God today, consider asking Him:

Father, how am I meant to be cared for, attuned to, and listened to in ways that bring honor, dignity, integration, and healing to the deep places of my heart and in my story? How am I meant to care for, attune to, and listen to my spouse in ways that bring honor and healing to his/her heart and story?

Jesus, would you help me remember how it felt when my spouse listened well to my heart and my story? How did I feel in my body as they listened to me? What did their listening invite in me?

Holy Spirit, would you open my heart and mind to the possible ways that your Presence brings integration and healing in our marriage?

Day 3: Your Presence Matters

Scripture:

Be devoted to one another with mutual love, showing eagerness in honoring one another. Romans 12:10 NET

For He has not turned away from the suffering of the one in pain or trouble. He has not hidden His face from him. But He has heard his cry for help. Psalm 22:2 NLV

But you, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head. Psalm 3:3 ESV

Devotional:

In Psalm 3:3 David cries out to God asking him to be a shield and a “lifter of my head.” This lifting is a gift you can offer to your spouse. Essentially your way of being present says to them that you will not join the ranks of anyone who shames them for being “too much” or “not enough” or for “being too out of step morally”, and so on. You are there to lift their downcast eyes to a loving gaze that forgives and welcomes the weak and the wounded back home.

We ALL experience seasons of pain and suffering, and we experience seasons of being able to offer comfort and care. Both thread through our individual stories and our marriages. This is not their first or their last difficult season, but it is part of their growth and maturity, and the deepening of intimacy in your marriage relationship. In a sense, it helps to convey, “You are right on time, and this is familiar to Jesus—He is well acquainted with grief. We are in this together.”

What an opportunity to see, hear, honor, and engage each other, as people on the same path, on the journey and adventure of marriage, meeting in a sacred moment arranged for by God for his purposes in your two lives and your marriage!

In marriage, we are able to hurt each other more deeply or care for each other more beautifully than anyone else on the planet. Within marriage, we get to be the one who chooses to share in our spouse's pain and gently hold their wounds instead of offering solutions or fixes. You have the unique honor to sit quietly with your spouse in moments of uncertainty or despair, to remain by their side in times of loss or sorrow, to embrace the unknown and face the challenges of life without the need to solve or heal, to be the one who truly cares.

What if you could practice caring for your spouse this way?

As you ponder this with God today, consider asking Him:

Father, show me when you have been the God of all comfort in my story; when you or someone else has lifted my head while I was lonely, feeling overwhelmed, heartbroken, or grieving.

Jesus, when I've shared my story, how has my heart been handled? How has my spouse cared for my heart?

Holy Spirit, help me to name the hurting places in my heart and story. Comforter, tend to these hurting places, and bring your healing balm.

Day 4: Unhelpful Listening and Responding

Scripture:

Answering before listening is both stupid and rude. Proverbs 18:13 MSG

Understand this, my beloved brothers and sisters. Let everyone be quick to hear [be a careful, thoughtful listener], slow to speak [a speaker of carefully chosen words and], slow to anger [patient, reflective, forgiving]. James 1:19 AMP

Devotional:

Early in our marriage, I remember a quiet evening when my husband Scott and I were sitting under the stars, and he risked sharing a hope and dream he had, how he longed to run a country store. You know—the kind of place that supplies what people need and where men might gather for coffee before heading into work. He could just see it—rockers on creaking floorboards, overlooking a beautiful vista.

My response? *"That's the dumbest idea I've ever heard!"* And then I detailed how impractical the idea was.

He was stunned. Of course he was! My response was very insensitive, unkind, dismissive of his desire, his longing for gathering men, for a simpler life than we were living, for providing for our family. I didn't realize it then, but he made a vow to never open his heart to me again.

This conversation happened 30 years ago, yet I can still feel the sting when I think about it; we're reminded just how far we've come in the way we listen and care for each other's hearts.

Sometimes, despite our desire and promise to love, honor, and cherish, we venture into some ways of engaging and listening to our spouses that are not helpful, and could be harmful. Over time, we develop well worn ways of interacting- harmful ruts and cycles that foster isolation. Do you see yourself (or your spouse) in any of these examples?

Like a bull in a china shop, you barge into painful parts of their spouse's story without care, overwhelming rather than comforting, your spouse may feel run over, exposed, and afraid.

Focused on fixing, you avoid emotional engagement by offering tips or solutions instead of empathy. While well-meaning, your spouse may feel dismissed or unseen. Shifting focus to your own experience, you unintentionally sideline your spouse's

story as you talk about yourself. Your spouse may feel ignored, abandoned, and like their heart, feelings, and story don't matter.

Like an investigator solving a mystery, you ask rapid-fire questions, assuming your spouse has quick and easy answers. Instead of entering the story, you add pressure instead of understanding to an already heavy moment, leaving your spouse feeling like they've been through the wringer.

Not knowing what to say or do with what you've heard, you respond with silence or detachment, leaving your spouse feeling alone, misunderstood, and ashamed.

If you catch yourself responding to your spouse in one of the ways listed above, it's okay! Don't panic! You might default into one of these unhelpful ways (or others) as you learn and practice listening and engaging well. There is grace for each of us as we grow in offering good care.

If you do find that you've defaulted into one of these unhelpful ways of listening, stop, name it, apologize, and then re-engage with your spouse with kindness and attunement. Each conversation is an opportunity to move differently with your spouse.

As you ponder this with God today, consider asking Him:

Father, please remind me of a time when I shared and my spouse did not listen well. Would you help me remember what that felt like? What did it raise up in me?

Jesus, would you help me to see where I react in some of these (or other) unhelpful ways of listening? What might be the cause for why I relate as I currently do?

Holy Spirit, where do I need to extend grace to myself for the ways I have not listened to my spouse as well as I might have?

Day 5: Bear With Me

Scripture:

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Ephesians 4:2 NIV

Be kind and compassionate to one another. Ephesians 4:32 NIV

Rejoice with those who rejoice [sharing others' joy], and weep with those who weep [sharing others' grief]. Romans 12:15 AMP

Devotional:

One recent afternoon, as Sherry and I were painting our vintage camper, I could feel the frustration rise within me with each pass of the paint roller, unwieldy drips, and paint going where I didn't want it. Sherry was skillfully applying the paint with patience and oddly, delight. I felt increasingly incompetent, eventually putting down the roller with great energy, expressing *"I hate doing things I'm not good at, and I'm not good at this. I'm done."*

At that moment, Sherry poked her head up from the other side of the camper and responded with kindness, thanking me for joining her in painting, and understanding my frustration. Not trying to make me feel better, she simply released me from my self-imposed pressure to paint perfectly, and suggested that I take a break, that she would finish the painting. It was then that I realized I was in a shame spiral that had little to do with painting, and all the more to do with how I've been shamed in my past for not knowing how to do something. Because of her kindness, I was able to name what I was feeling and allow her to be in it with me, dissolving the shame.

Often in these moments when we don't know how to respond, it's easy to slide into old unhelpful ways, reacting to the situation, missing our spouse's heart and what is really going on.

In the past, we've responded to each other in ways that shut the conversation down, closing the door on an opportunity to join our spouse where they are and engage them in a way that can actually offer some healing balm. When we offer verses or cliches initially, we may be attempting to help or to make things "better", when in actuality, we are often trying to make ourselves feel better, as we are often uncomfortable with our spouse's emotions, struggle, and pain. We want to rescue, when what they are really crying out for is for their struggle and pain to be witnessed and joined with...to be seen and known.

Sometimes we don't know how to respond to our spouse, and yet, what might feel most helpful in the moment is for them to hear,

"I don't even know what to say. I'm just so glad you told me. I am with you."

It is an honor to bear witness to another's story, to our spouse's story—especially those of pain, sorrow, and heartache. To hold space for their story, their pain, and to bear their burden with them—if for only a few moments—can be an incredible gift.

As you ponder all this with God today, consider asking Him:

Father, what are your intentions for how we handle each other's hearts and stories with care, kindness, and compassion?

Jesus, how have you been present with me in my story, in my struggle? In my marriage? How might I be with my spouse similarly in their story?

Holy Spirit, how do you bear witness to my situation, my story, my pain, to my grief? How might I bear witness to my spouse in theirs?

Day 6: Asking Meaningful Questions

Scripture:

Jesus asked, 'What do you think about this?' Matthew 18:12 NLT

Jesus asked, 'Why are you afraid?' Matthew 8:26 NLT

Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, 'Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?' Luke 5:22 NIV

O Lord, you have heard the desire of the humble [and oppressed]; you will strengthen their heart, you will incline your ear to hear. [you listen to their cry] Psalm 10:17 AMP/NIV

Devotional:

Learning how to ask good questions is paramount in listening well. Good questions--those that are thoughtful, short, respectful, pertinent, and open-ended (open-ended questions cannot be answered with a simple 'Yes' or 'No') invite thoughtful responses, stories, and opportunities for your spouse to express how they are feeling. Leading questions, judgmental questions, questions that suggest a solution, and the "Why?" questions can shut down conversation, causing your spouse to retreat.

It is also important that questions not be shot off rapid fire. Give your spouse time to ponder, to consider, and explore one question before asking another, as you listen well to their responses. Who knows what you might learn about your spouse--their heart is a deep well.

Examples of Good Questions:

- Can you put words to the tears that are starting to come?
- What about his/her words feel true or have some power for you? What sticks?
- Do you want to say more about that? (about the anxiety, the rejection, the betrayal)
- I wonder if you are able to allow yourself to be angry at what was done, what happened to you? I feel angry with you, on your behalf.
- How are you feeling in your body right now? Where are you bracing? (your gut? teeth clenched? shoulders tight?)

If there is any confusion or doubt about what you are hearing (especially if you sense that it's important), take the opportunity to clarify. Ask them if you may repeat what you think you heard, so that your spouse can confirm that you heard correctly. Try to "mirror" what your spouse said. This kind of active listening is very

valuable. It may be hard for you to hear their answers- you may want to explain or defend. Allow your spouse to share what they experienced and receive the gift of exploring with them.

Jesus is our ultimate example. He asked over 300 simple and brilliant questions in the gospels, engaging with individuals of all walks of life. He often stopped what he was doing to offer care to hurting people, and embraced their interruptions. I wish I could have witnessed his body language and the love he showed as he conversed with people he encountered. I wonder how he bore witness to their stories of pain as well as their joys. Here are a few of the questions Jesus is recorded asking:

- What do you want me to do for you? Matthew 20:32, Mark 10:51 Luke 18:41, John 1:38 NIV
- Why are you afraid? Matthew 8:26 NLT
- Do you believe that I am able to do this? Matthew 9:28 NIV

Our prayer is that all of this will help you to move in union with God as Jesus did, so that when listening to your spouse, you may see an entry point into their story when appropriate, asking questions, allowing for a deeper level of engagement with and knowing your spouse.

As you ponder all this with God today, consider asking Him:

Father, when have I experienced the value of asking good, wise, kind, thoughtful questions?

Jesus, when have I experienced being asked good questions, in ways that invite deeper consideration, exploration, and connection?

Holy Spirit, when have I been engaged with curiosity and without judgment in my story? Please help me and guide me in how to be curious and open without judgment as I listen to others. May my being present to your Presence bring wisdom in the moment to know when to ask and engage, when a pause is needed, and when to sit quietly.

Day 7: The Importance of Naming

Scripture:

But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand. The victims commit themselves to you; you are the helper of the fatherless.
Psalm 10:14 NIV

Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, that is, Christ. Ephesians 4:15 NASB

Love one another deeply, from the heart. 1 Peter 1:22 NIV

Devotional:

Quite possibly the kindest and most helpful thing you can do for your spouse is to **name** for them what you have just heard and witnessed as they've shared with you. I remember when I shared a painful story with my wife and she simply said, "*That is so hard.*" I felt heard and joined in with my sadness, and that she was feeling along with me (expressing empathy).

Here are a few examples of naming what you've heard:

- I hear how heartbreaking and painful that must be. It sounds really lonely.
- Your body has been feeling and carrying a lot.
- That sounds really frustrating.
- You have endured much _____ (heartache, stress, uncertainty, loneliness, being left out, pain, sorrow, loss, waiting...).

Responses like these help you stay with your spouse in their story and to invite more! When something is accurately named, the body *already knows it*. This is how attunement works. So, it can feel like a relief and a kindness to have someone else bear witness to what you know is true but might not be able to put words to.

Sometimes it's a willingness to name hard things with your spouse.

- It sounds as if you've had to make yourself small.
- I hear such loneliness. (and I feel sad for your little girl/boy self.)
- There was so little care for you.

Naming it sometimes invites your spouse to feel what they weren't allowed to feel in the midst of the situation, opening the door for it to be grieved, which can bring significant healing. Naming the themes of what you are hearing in their story can bring clarity and perspective, stripping it of its power.

- I hear a lot of pain (fear, loneliness, etc.) in your story.
- It sounds like you weren't allowed to be angry (sad, disappointed, happy, etc.)
- It seems like you have been trained to hold all of that inside.
- It sounds like it is hard for you to allow yourself to be seen and to receive care. And I hear the loneliness in that.
- Have you been able to name that this was abuse (or betrayal, abandonment, neglect, assault, diminishment, a bind)?

When you courageously and kindly name something you see in your spouse and in their story, you offer them a gift of joining them right where they are and shining a light in the darkness. Naming honors hearts, minds, souls, and bodies as they have endured much. It gives words to what may have gone unnamed, unacknowledged, untended, uncared for, ungrieved, and unhealed.

To offer this way of listening to and naming for your spouse, without judgment or blame, is a practice and skill that can be developed as we seek to care well for each other. I have experienced how healing it feels to have my wife name what she has witnessed in my story. In those moments, I have felt less alone.

We were created to care for our spouse and the people entrusted to us this way. May an awareness of the significance of naming help you to cultivate the practice of naming what you see and hear in your spouse's stories that might help bring deeper clarity, understanding, and healing. And as you grow in discerning when and how to name things you hear and see in each other's stories, may that help both of you explore, discover, uncover, and untangle things that may shed light on what they've experienced, inviting healing, freedom, and life: walking with God together.

As you ponder all this with God today, consider asking Him:

Father, where in my story has someone named something for me that they've seen in my story?

Jesus, when someone has named something for me, with curiosity and without judgment, how did it feel for me?

Holy Spirit, show me where naming something in my story has brought deeper clarity, understanding, and healing. Guide my spouse and me in listening and naming for deeper clarity, understanding, and healing.

Day 8: Silence is Golden

Scripture:

Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was. Job 2:13 NIV

Understand this, my beloved brothers and sisters. Let everyone be quick to hear [be a careful, thoughtful listener], slow to speak [a speaker of carefully chosen words and], slow to anger [patient, reflective, forgiving]. James 1:19 AMP

If we live by the Spirit, let's follow the Spirit as well. Galatians 5:25 NASB

Devotional:

How do you feel when there is silence in a conversation with your spouse? Does it feel awkward or uncomfortable? Do you feel a need to fill it with words and conversation? This might be something to be curious about in *your own story*.

Pay attention to moments when you might be feeling the need to say something because the silence feels awkward, or you want to rescue your spouse (and yourself!). Your spouse may need a few minutes of silence to process their thoughts and feelings. They may not be used to being attuned to and listened to this way, and it might take some time to adjust to it.

Can we learn to be okay with silence?

Learning to be attuned to the Spirit in each moment, knowing what is needed and what is not takes practice. Take this time of quiet in conversation to also check in with yourself and the Spirit: Where are you feeling their story in your body? What emotions come up? Pictures? Words?

May we be asking even as we breathe: What does my spouse need right now, Spirit of God?

Spirit of God, would you bring me to a place where I am settled enough to be comfortable sitting in the silence with my spouse.

When I've practiced the art of silence well, Scott feels that he has the room to consider what he might share with me.

In this final day of our Listening in Your Marriage Reading Plan, let's recap the big ideas:

- When we listen and attune well, we create an environment for healing, extending the loving presence of God to our spouse.
- Our stories and emotions matter, to each of us, and to God.
- When we bear witness to each other's stories, we each feel less alone.
- The very ways we are accustomed to responding and used to think most helpful in listening can actually be harmful and isolating. Often these are attempts to feel less uncomfortable with your spouse's pain and move on from what feels difficult to sit with. This can impair each of your journeys, and your shared journey, toward healing and restoration. Each conversation is an opportunity to move differently together.
- Asking open-ended questions allows your spouse to stay in their story and feel seen, known, and cared for well.
- Listening and naming what you observe in your spouse's story offers a mirror for him/her to see their story with fresh eyes, and permission to feel now what they couldn't then.
- Leaning into the silence in the conversation rather than shying away from it creates space for engagement with your spouse. In those moments, ask the Spirit to guide both of your hearts and words as you continue.

Simply spending time together and living in close proximity doesn't automatically lead to truly knowing one another. A continuous effort to explore each other's desires, dreams, and the stories we carry within is essential for maintaining connection and deepening intimacy and understanding.

As you ponder all this with God today, consider asking Him:

Father, what is my relationship with silence? How do I feel in the silence?

Jesus, will you reveal to me why I may struggle with silence? Where does it come from? What is the source of the discomfort or fear of silence for me? How has this affected our marriage?

Spirit, I invite you to awaken me to moments in my story where silence was not welcomed? Where it was avoided, and Why? Help me be curious about the discomfort silence might bring for me.

If you enjoyed this reading plan, we invite you to explore to ***The Rendezvous Project***, our 12-session video-based marriage resource.



TWO PEOPLE WALKING WITH GOD TOGETHER...

Marriage may be the most sacred of all human relationships. There may not be anything more powerful than two people walking with God together. And because of the power and weight of marriage in the Kingdom, it should not come as any surprise that marriage is violently opposed.

MARRIAGE IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR...

Having the right weapons and tools, training and orientation is crucial. That's why we created *The Rendezvous Project*, a 12-session video series.

YOU'RE INVITED...

Through *The Rendezvous Project*, we hope to empower redemptive marriages to either take a weekend away together and host your own marriage retreat, or journey together in a weekly small group, discovering your true heart, the deep and beautiful heart of your marriage, the context of the Larger Story your marriage is in and how to walk intimately with God together.

therendezvousproject.com