

Listening – ABOUT 24:00 (USUALLY 19:00)
Outline & Mentality - Common Protestant Outline
Adapted for the Restore, Rekindle, Renew Enrichment
(3RE CHANGES IN BOLD ITALIC CAPS)

Objective

To help the couples identify the patterns of listening they use in their relationship and to illustrate that there is a difference between listening with the head and listening with the heart, which requires active participation.

Goals of this presentation

To know

- there are various listening patterns and obstacles to listening
- listening requires active participation by both parties
- there is a difference between listening with the head and listening with the heart
- developing good listening in our spousal relationship can benefit how we listen in other relationships as well

To do

- discover the listening patterns in their relationship
- discover their obstacles to listening
- listen actively, with the heart

To experience

- being an empathetic listener
- being listened to with the heart
- being loved, respected and valued

Flow of the presentation

CL or CS begins by pointing out that most people have some obstacles to listening well. He/she provides a personal example. LH and LW illustrate specific listening patterns that limit listening in their relationship. The couples complete a written exercise in their Workbook to determine their own listening patterns, including the ones they use most often with their spouse. CL or CS introduces the concept of “listening with the heart,” then teaches how and why to listen with the heart. CL or CS reads and teaches the scripture passage about the Parable of the Sower. LH or LW illustrates how he/she listened with the heart during a dialogue on their original Marriage Encounter experience (or soon after) in an area where it was difficult to listen. The other spouse illustrates the effects of being listened to that way during the same dialogue. This is followed by LH or LW sharing his/her attempts to listen in the area where it is most difficult to listen, ending with how making the decision to listen with the heart to their spouse affected their relationship. CL or CS teaches the couples that the way they listen to their spouse deeply influences the ways they listen to God and to others. CL or CS reads and teaches the dialogue question, which is intended to direct the couples to the area in their own relationship where it is most difficult to listen to their spouse and to identify and describe their feelings as they attempt to listen.

Connection with other presentations

Listening is woven through all the talks. Listening is vitally important in the context of intimate and responsible relationships; thus, it lays the foundation for the concept of intimacy in subsequent talks. This talk is presented just prior to Areas for Reaching Out to Each Other and is especially important in preparing couples for their dialogues after that.

I. Introduction and optional opening prayer (LH or LW: 0:30)

State:

The title of this talk is Listening. We are on page ___ of the Workbook.

Opening prayer (optional)

Suggested wording:

Lord, we have each experienced times of loneliness in our relationships. Thank you for letting us know that those periods of disillusionment are normal. Please help us now to take a look at the ways we listen to each other and how important it is to try to really listen with our hearts rather than just our heads.

II. Patterns and obstacles to listening (Total time: 4:00)

II A. Illustrate by personal example that it is difficult to listen well

(CL or CS: 1:00)

The CL or CS begins this section with a transition statement.

Suggested wording:

Most people have some obstacles to listening well to others. Perhaps it is hard to listen if you thrive on excitement and find one-on-one conversations a little boring. Maybe an obstacle to listening is too much information - too fast - and you need time to analyze what you have heard. You may find it difficult to listen if you have tasks to accomplish and dislike interruptions. If you are caring and compassionate, you may find it hard to listen when only a practical approach is expressed or there is nothing you can do to help.

Provide a personal example to illustrate how it is difficult for you to really listen well. Emphasize what it is about yourself that makes it difficult for you to listen; for example: attitudes, behaviors, temperament, personal qualities, past history, etc.

II B. Listening patterns that limit my listening (LH & LW: 3:00)

After a transition statement, LH & LW equally divide the ten examples following the list given on page ___ of the Workbook. In each case, clearly illustrate how your behaviors and/or attitudes can be obstacles to active listening to your spouse.

Below is an example of how a pattern of listening might be illustrated (**NOT to be read “as is”**).

“A huge listening barrier for me is **pacifying**. When Jane expressed her concern about an upcoming medical procedure, I was quick to provide reassurance by telling her “Honey, everything will turn out okay” – but my comment stopped her in mid-sentence and I missed learning more about her thoughts and concerns.”

NOTE:

The time allotted for these examples is only 3 minutes, so they must be clear and concise.

The examples should include the following key elements:

- Name the listening pattern, either at or near the beginning of the example.
- Describe a situation in your relationship when you used this listening pattern.
- Clarify the effect on your spouse when you listen in this way. (Be careful to keep the focus on effects you have observed, such as your spouse's reaction or non-verbals, rather than trying to share what your spouse is feeling. You might include your awareness of what you may be missing when you listen in this way.)

II B 1. Listening for facts only

Listening for who, what, where, and when, ignoring everything else; not concerned with the feelings that accompany the facts; focus is on my need for information.

II B 2. Preparing my answer

Forming my answer in my head while my spouse is speaking; focus is usually on defending, justifying, or explaining my own position.

II B 3. Problem-solving

Listening only to get enough information to fix the problem, with the sole intent of providing a solution; failing to realize that my spouse may need to vent or may only want to have someone listen.

II B 4. Listening with my motor running

Believing that I can listen to my spouse while doing other things at the same time; focus is on my own priorities or busyness; easily distracted.

II B 5. Pacifying

Trying to soothe or comfort my spouse through reassuring words such as “don’t worry” or “everything will be okay” in order to try to replace his or her feelings or perceptions with a more uplifting view; primary focus is maintaining harmony while avoiding potentially tense conversations on difficult issues. Often this pattern comes across as patronizing or belittling.

II B 6. Impatience

Giving the other person the impression that I do not have time to listen and/or what they have to say is unimportant; often accompanied by non-verbal gestures such as fidgeting, foot-tapping, eye-rolling, heavy sighs, etc; focus is on ending the conversation quickly so the listener can concentrate on something else.

II B 7. I've heard this all before

Assuming that I have heard everything my spouse has to say on a particular topic, and that there is nothing new to be communicated; tuning out the other person.

II B 8. Focusing only on the words

Taking certain words or phrases literally without listening to the entire message; failing to take other forms of communication into consideration, such as tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, etc.

II B 9. Minimizing

Minimizing my spouse's feeling by saying what I think he or she wants to hear; primary focus is to gain some peace and quiet and get the other person to stop talking.

II B 10. Other listening patterns

For example: being controlling, being judgmental or a know-it-all, assuming listening is the same as agreeing, being indifferent, multi-tasking, interrupting, finishing the other person's sentence. Although only one example of each pattern will be shared, it is recommended that both husband and wife write on all ten listening patterns in order to determine which ones are most relevant in your relationship. The examples should be shared equally between husband and wife. While you may share on any of the listening patterns, the examples must be presented in the same order that they appear in the Workbook.

In the final example, "Other listening patterns," point out that there are other patterns of listening, such as:

- being controlling, judgmental, or a know-it-all
- assuming that listening is the same as agreeing
- being indifferent
- multi-tasking
- interrupting
- finishing the other person's sentence

If either Lay husband or wife has another listening pattern that is not mentioned in the Workbook, it could be shared here, under example #10, either in place of, or in addition to, the generic "other" patterns.

III. Exercise: Some patterns of listening (LH or LW: Total time: 2:00)

III A. Introduce the exercise on page _____ in the Workbook

(LH or LW: introduction: 0:15; exercise: 1:00)

Ask the couples to check off the listening patterns they use that limit how they listen in their relationship.

III B. Introduce the exercise to identify the listening patterns they use most often with their spouse (LH or LW: introduction: 0:15; exercise: 0:30)

Suggested wording:

Now we will give you an opportunity to examine your listening patterns more closely. Please go over that list again; but this time, circle the one or two listening patterns that you use most often with your spouse.

IV. Listening with the heart (Total time: 3:00)

IV A. Introduce and explain what is meant by “listening with the heart” (CL or CS: 0.30)

Suggested wording:

On this Marriage Encounter experience, we talk about a different kind of listening – listening with the heart - which can bring new life to relationships. Listening with the heart means to make room in my heart beyond my own feelings and beyond what I understand with my head. I put my own thoughts and feelings aside and try to take in the thoughts and feelings of my spouse. I go beyond the words to meet the person who is trying to tell me something about himself or herself. Listening with the heart is empathetic listening that is other-centered. It requires the listener to be an active participant in the exchange, rather than a passive listener.

IV B. Explain how to listen well by illustrating the elements of “listening with the heart” (CL & CS: 2:00)

Explain how to listen well by illustrating the elements of listening with the heart. Personalize the elements when possible and where time permits. Illustrate how your underlying attitudes had to change to allow awareness of the other person to influence your openness to listen.

IV B 1. Develop an attitude of openness in listening
(avoid judgments or getting defensive)

IV B 2. Decide to listen
(put aside listening obstacles and choose to be an active participant)

IV B 3. Involve the whole person
(show interest through body language)

IV B 4. Be present to speaker
(let them know they are being listened to)

IV B 5. Give feedback
(ask questions, rephrase to clarify and check out the message)

IV B 6. Go beyond words and be aware of feelings
(more than understanding with the head)

IV B 7. Be aware of the person behind the words
(unspoken messages of “notice me,” “care about me,” “help me”)

IV B 8. Notice non-verbal communication
(tone of voice, eye contact, touch, physical reactions such as a reddened face, fidgeting, shrugging shoulders)

IV B 9. Listen for the sake of the other

IV C. Explain why we listen with the heart (CL or CS: 0:30)

End this section by explaining why we listen with the heart.

Suggested wording:

Listening with the heart provides us an opportunity to experience intimacy and belonging in our relationships. It offers the person who is listened to an experience of being accepted, valued, and respected, which are critical needs for everyone. It is important to realize that, depending on how we choose to listen, we can create distance or intimacy in our relationships.

<p>V. Listening and its effects (Parable of the Sower: Matthew 13:3-9, 13-15) (Total time: 4:30)</p>

V A. Read and teach the Parable of the Sower (CL or CS: 2:30)

CL or CS reads the Parable of the Sower, below (as printed in the Workbook), and tells the couples why we use this parable. Since many couples may be very familiar with the parable, this section should be informative, but not overly “teachy.” Draw the parallel between the condition of the soil, as described in the parable, and the condition of our hearts when we do or do not listen. Illustrate this with a brief personal example. For instance, the soil of my heart can be hard and rocky and unreceptive to what my spouse is saying to me, or it can be shallow and only allow for limited growth.

And he told them many things in parables, saying: “Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!”

“The reason I speak to them in parables is that ‘seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.’ With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says:

‘You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. For this people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn – and I would heal them.’”

V B. LH or LW shares how he/she listened in a new way on their Marriage Encounter experience during a dialogue in an area where it was difficult to listen (LH or LW: 1:00)

LH or LW moves from the Parable of the Sower to this section with a transition statement.

Suggested wording:

As in the parable you just heard, the soil of our hearts can be fertile and yield fruit 100-fold for our relationship. I listened in a new way on our Marriage Encounter experience....

Give an example of how you listened in a new way during a dialogue on your original Marriage Encounter experience or shortly after. Begin by sharing how you failed to listen in the past when this area was discussed, then be sure to include the feeling your spouse shared in this dialogue. Expand on some of the “elements of listening with the heart” introduced in section IV to reinforce this concept. Go back to the listening patterns that limit your listening (II B.) and include the obstacles to listening that were overcome in order to listen to your spouse with your heart. In particular, focus on how (changes in attitudes and behaviors) and why (your motivation in wanting to listen with your heart) you overcame your obstacles to listening.

This sharing should not focus on the area of your relationship, but on the steps you took to listen differently, with your heart, perhaps for the first time. Let the couples know that, as you listened, you were able to go beyond the words and become aware of the feeling and the person behind the words, your spouse. He or she was the focus, not the situation, and that changed everything. You may refer to meaningful words from the Parable of the Sower so the couples will connect to the parallels in their own listening. This example can provide motivation for them to believe that they, too, can listen to each other in a new way from this point forward.

Formation:

The example above is taken from our original WWME experience (or shortly after) in order to inspire the couples to begin now to listen to their spouse in this new way. We do not want to give the impression that listening with the heart only comes through years of experience. We teach them what listening with the heart means, how to do it, why to do it – and then illustrate how we were able to put that into practice ourselves on our WWME experience. Once we experienced truly being listened to, we opened ourselves up to connecting on a much deeper, more intimate level. This is a sign of hope for the couples that they, too, can change how they listen for the sake of their relationship. It is doubtful that any of us, as presenters, could have experienced such profound changes in our own relationship on the WWME experience if we had not also had the experience of listening and being listened to with the heart.

V C. Other spouse shares on the effects of being listened to during the same dialogue (LH or LW: 1:00)

This section mirrors V B., but here the other spouse focuses on the effects of being listened to during the same dialogue on the original WWME experience or shortly after. Share your feelings and the intimacy and joy that you experienced in being listened to in this area of your relationship. This sharing can inspire the couples to make a decision to “listen with the heart” to their spouse.

VI. Sharing on the area in which I find it most difficult to listen to you
(LH or LW: 3:00)

VI A. Name the area

Begin by briefly naming the area of your relationship where you find it most difficult to listen to your spouse. Give only enough explanation so that the couples understand the area, without a lot of detail.

It is suggested that the areas of finances, sex, or death not be used, as these topics are included in the Areas for Reaching Out to Each Other talk that follows. If there is difficulty in identifying an area, the worksheet from the Areas talk may prove helpful, as would an honest and open discussion to choose the topic (remembering that the area is not the focus of the talk). This can be an area that you have discussed in the past where you may still find it difficult to listen to your spouse. It does not have to be an area that involves feelings that are difficult to share. This should not be an area outside of your relationship that you simply find boring or irrelevant.

VI B. Why is it difficult to listen?

Share why it is difficult to listen to your spouse in this area. Emphasize what it is about yourself that makes it difficult for you to listen - for example: attitudes, behaviors, temperament, personal qualities, past history, etc. Be aware that listening or not listening is a behavior. Recognizing attitudes and behaviors that interfere with listening with your heart frees you to make a decision to change for the sake of your relationship.

VI C. What is my strongest feeling when you talk about this area?

State your strongest feeling when your spouse talks about this area. Then give a rich description of that feeling, using 3 or 4 of the methods previously listed in the Workbook to model ways to describe feelings. This is an opportunity to encourage the couples to describe their strongest feeling to their spouse. Be sure to describe what else is going on inside you as you are trying to listen in this area (thoughts, attitudes, behaviors, superiorities) so that the couples identify with the struggle to listen.

VI D. What is the condition of the soil of my heart when I try to listen in this area?

Relate back to the Parable of the Sower to illustrate the condition of the soil of your heart as you attempt to listen to your spouse in this area.

VI E. What personal decision did I make in order to listen?

Share the specific, personal decision that you made or the obstacle that you set aside (listening patterns, attitudes, judgments, defensiveness) in order to listen with your heart in this area. This is a decision to step out of behaviors that come naturally and to choose life-giving behaviors for the sake of your spouse.

VI F. What did I hear or experience or learn as a result of listening to my spouse with my heart?

Describe what you heard or experienced during the specific situation or dialogue when you listened with your heart in this area:

- What feeling did your spouse share with you?
- How did you show that you were listening (your words and/or body language)?
- Describe how you felt as you listened to him/her share their feelings.
- How did your spouse respond to you (his/her words and/or body language)?
- What did you experience or learn because you listened to your spouse with your heart in this area?

VI G. What were the specific effects on our relationship when I listened with my heart?

End this section by sharing the specific effects on your relationship when you listened with your heart in this area. Do not share the effect on your spouse, but rather the impact that your decision to listen had on your relationship.

Important:

This can be a very motivational sharing if done with true feelings and self disclosure. This sharing does not need to be done in the context of dialogue.

VII. Conclusion (CL or CS: 2:00)

VII A. The way I listen to my spouse deeply influences the way I listen to others and to God

Make the couples aware that developing good listening habits can and does have benefits beyond the scope of the spousal relationship. These listening habits can help them become better listeners with their children, others, and even God, with similar positive effects.

VII B. Give the dialogue question and teach what is meant by an “area”

Read and teach the dialogue question. Advise the couples that this should be an area of their relationship in which they repeatedly fail to listen with their heart, rather than just an isolated situation. Give several examples of what is meant by an “area” of their relationship, such as parenting, in-laws, jobs, finances, spirituality. Refer the couples to the list of areas in the Workbook.

NOTE:

Even though it is suggested that the areas of finances and sex not be used for the sharing in section VI, they are included in the list of examples below because they may be areas where the couples themselves have the most difficulty in listening to their spouse.

Examples of areas where it may be difficult to listen (as listed in the Workbook):

- Activities
- Children
- Decision-making
- Discipline
- Finances
- Health
- Household responsibilities
- In-laws
- Jobs
- Parenting
- Relatives
- Sex
- Spirituality
- Time schedules

The dialogue question is intended to direct the couples to the area in their own relationship where it is most difficult to listen; however, it is important to caution them that the dialogue should not be focused on the area itself. Remind them to answer the question in just 2 or 3 sentences; then spend the remainder of the writing time focused on identifying and describing the one feeling that is the strongest in them when their spouse talks about this area.

Questions:

In what area do I find it most difficult to listen to you? How do I feel when you talk about this area?

Writing time: 10 minutes

Dialogue time: 20 minutes

Wives stay in the conference room to write (recommended).

VIII. **WRAP UP & MOTIVATION & QUESTIONS** (CL or CS: 5:00)

VIII A. *MOTIVATION TO SEE THE PROGRESS ALREADY MADE*

YOU MIGHT ASK THEM HOW THEIR CLIMB TONIGHT HAS BEEN? PERHAPS A LITTLE ROUGH? IT USUALLY GETS EASIER, AND THE VIEW FROM HIGHER ABOVE WILL BE WORTH IT. SOME OF THE COUPLES MAY STILL

NOT BE USED TO SHARING FEELINGS, AND IT CAN PUT YOU IN A VULNERABLE PLACE. REMIND THEM THAT THAT IS WHEN OUR RELATIONSHIPS CAN GROW THE MOST.

VIII B. REMIND AND MOTIVATE REGARDING TAKE-HOME DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

GIVE OUT THE TAKE HOME DIALOGUE QUESTIONS.

VIII C. MISSION POSSIBLE

ENCOURAGE THEM TO DO THE HOMEWORK. EXPLAIN STEP 3 OF THE SEVEN STEPS TO COUPLE PRAYER - WHERE THE COUPLES ARE INVITED TO SIT SIDE-BY-SIDE, ONE PERSON PRAYING A SIMPLE PRAYER, LIKE THE LORD'S PRAYER, AND THEN THE OTHER DOES ANOTHER SIMPLE PRAYER. IF A VARIETY OF THESE IS IN THE PACKET, POINT THAT OUT.

VIII D. TEASER ABOUT NEXT SESSION

YOU MIGHT MENTION SOME OF WHAT'S TO COME NEXT WEEK: HOW TO HANDLE DIFFICULT TOPICS WITHOUT CAUSING HURT. HOW THIS SESSION FOCUSED ON THE MODERN WORLD'S PULL, BUT HOW NEXT TIME WE SEE WHAT GOD DESIRES FOR OUR MARRIAGE

CLOSE WITH A PRAYER AND BLESSING AND INSTRUCTIONS DEPENDING ON WHETHER YOU ARE INVITING THE COUPLES TO LEAVE RIGHT AWAY, TO RETRIEVE CHILDREN IN THE CHILDCARE AREA, TO STAY FOR SNACKS, ETC.

How we live out the concepts of this talk/presentation:

The concept of “listening with the heart” is absolutely critical in accepting our spouse’s feelings. We acknowledge our obstacles to listening to our spouse and strive to change our attitudes and behaviors to become active listeners who listen with empathy (not just understanding) to what our spouse is trying to say to us. Listening with the heart also brings with it a willingness to trust in the goodness of our spouse and to risk sharing our deepest feelings. Until we listen with our hearts and not just our ears, we will find it difficult to move past an intellectual understanding of feelings and actually experience our spouse’s feelings.

An assessment for us as a couple:

- Do I recognize the attitudes and behaviors I have in listening to my spouse every day?
- Am I willing to make a decision to change my listening behaviors for the sake of our relationship?
- Do I listen to my spouse today the same way I listened before our WWME experience?
- The last time I disagreed with my spouse, was I able to listen with my heart?
- Which element(s) of “listening with the heart” do I most need to re-evaluate to be more life-giving in our relationship?

Dialogue questions to help the presenting teams develop their presentations:

HDIF?	How do I feel?	HDIFA?	HDIF about?
HDIFAT?	HDIFA this (or that)?	HDIFAMA?	HDIFA my answer?
HDIFTYTYT?	HDIF telling you this?	HDIFRTN?	HDIF recalling this now?

1. What are the typical mistakes I make in listening to you? HDIFTYTYT?
2. Do I often assume that I know exactly what you are going to say? HDIFAT?
3. When I am talking with you, do I look into your eyes? HDIFTYTYT?
4. Do I touch you when we are talking intimately? HDIFTYTYT?
5. I find it most difficult to listen to you when you talk about _____. HDIFAMA?
6. What interferes with my ability to listen to you? HDIFAMA?
7. What helps me to listen to you? HDIFAMA?
8. Is it sometimes easier to listen to others than to listen to you? HDIFAMA?
9. In order to really listen to you, I may have to change something about myself. HDIFAT?
10. When I do not listen to you, what happens to our relationship? HDIFAT?
11. What is the biggest benefit that I receive by listening to you? HDIFAT?
12. When I want you to listen to me, do I also expect you to agree with me? HDIFAMA?
13. What have I said to you recently that had the opposite effect than what I intended? HDIFAMA?
14. God wants me to listen to you when you have something to share with me. I overlooked this last week when _____. HDIFAT?
15. In the last month, what was our best dialogue? What was special about how we listened to each other? HDIFTYTYT?
16. I find it hard to listen to you when you bring up _____. How do I deal with it? HDIFAMA?
17. Read Matthew 13:3-9, 13-15. HDIF when I consider this passage?
18. How, specifically, do I listen to you with my heart? HDIFAT?
19. What do you do that helps me to know that you are listening to me? HDIFAT?
20. How has listening to you influenced how I listen to others? HDIFAT?

Additional Dialogues:

Read the worksheet on “Some Patterns of Listening” from the Workbook. Check all that apply. Write a brief example of each that occurred in your relationship(s) during the past sixty days. Choose a separate dialogue question for each pattern you checked, focusing on HDIFAMA?