

Loving Listening: The #1 Way to Avoid Pain in Marriage

Jeffrey J. Williams



Listening from a heart of love accomplishes more than any other single coaching skill to convey care, build trust and soothe ruffled feathers. It is how Jill and I strengthen the bond of our marriage, and sometimes it is sufficient to repair it. I can't count the times that we have effectively managed an emotional and potentially damaging conversation by slowing down to simply listen to each other in love. **Loving listening** is also the first skill we check for with couples we coach.

Consider one of our recent conversations to illustrate the power of **loving listening**.

"I hear you saying that you are disappointed by how things went between us last night after supper?" Jill asked as a reflection on my frustration that our shared plan for a quiet conversation under the stars didn't happen. Because she reflected my message in her own words with a sincere tone I was willing to share more. *"Yes. I'd been looking forward to some relaxed time alone with you after our full day of activities. So when you started doing yet one more task I interpreted that you didn't care about us having some time alone."* Jill reflected this and I continued to share because I felt like she cared and wanted to understand my perspective. After a few exchanges we shifted positions. Jill shared and I listened. Eventually we hugged and prayed. Prolonged painful conflict had been avoided by respectful listening to each other's hearts from our hearts.

Consider how many wrong turns we could have made if one of us didn't take the initiative to listen.

- If she shared her feelings before hearing mine. *"You were frustrated! I was frustrated!"*
- If she would have minimized my feelings, *"Oh come on. We've had lots of time together alone recently. Is it really that big of a deal?"*
- If she would have focused on a part of my message or changed the focus from my feelings to hers. *"You knew I had to get that task done before I could relax. By the way, did I tell you..."*

The skill of listening is easy to teach and fairly easy to do (reflect what you heard the speaker say in your own words). But it is the heart of listening that poses a challenge because it is not something that any of us can create or sustain in ourselves. The heart behind every Christian Coaching skill is the heart of Jesus, whose heart is love.

Consider the definition of love in action from I Corinthians 13 (*The Message*):

*Love never gives up.
Love cares more for others than for self.
Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.
Love doesn't strut,
Doesn't have a swelled head,
Doesn't force itself on others,*

*Isn't always "me first,"
Doesn't fly off the handle,
Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,
Doesn't revel when others grovel,
Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,
Puts up with anything,
Trusts God always,
Always looks for the best,
Never looks back,
But keeps going to the end.*

Let's use this passage as a measuring stick for what loving listeners do:

- They patiently persevere in trying to understand their spouse's thoughts, feelings and desires.
- They care more about what their spouse is saying than their own thoughts and feelings.
- They keep the focus on what their partner is saying rather than interjecting their own thoughts and feelings.
- They trust God to work through their listening.

Loving listening is an essential skill for every marriage. Therefore, it is important that Marriage Coaching couples have it in their toolbox and that they are able to model it authentically with information from their own life. Modeling demonstrates the effectiveness of this simple skill in a way that couples can relate to and it inspires them to try it.

Loving Listening Assessment

1. On a scale of 1-10 how would you rate yourself as a **loving listener**?
2. How would your spouse rate you? Would you be willing to ask her/him?
 - a. If the answer is less than 10, but greater than zero then something good is present in your listening AND it can get better.
3. Which is stronger for you, the skill or the heart of listening?
4. What do you think you can start or stop doing, or do more/less to convey your loving heart through your listening?

Reflection

What do you hope for as results of improvement as a **loving listener**?