



# LISTENING

Healing Nights Training

Fall 2019

## PRAYER

Lord, in this Listening lesson help us be quick to hear and slow to speak when ministering to others. May we simultaneously hear Your voice and attune to the seeker's desires and needs. May we be vessels of Your healing grace for their lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## SCRIPTURES

### Proverbs 18:13 (ESV)

*If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.*

### 1 Samuel 3:10

*And the Lord came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for Your servant hears."*

### Isaiah 34:1 (NLT)

*Come here and listen, O nations of the earth. Let the world and everything in it hear My words.*

### Isaiah 50:4

*He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.*

### James 1:19

*Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger...*

## INTRODUCTION

Think of this lesson as a personal invitation to experience more fulfillment in your relationship with God, with yourself and with other people. Many of the ideas here come from *Listening For Heaven's Sake* by Dr. Gary Sweeten, Dave Ping, and Anne Clippard.

Have you ever wondered how to find health and happiness? You're certainly not alone. Since the moment Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden, humankind has been on a desperate search for the peaceful state of being that was our original birthright.

The book of Ecclesiastes documents one of history's most systematic pursuers of happiness. King Solomon tried unsuccessfully to find happiness through fame and wealth, wisdom and knowledge, political power and hard work. He sampled all the pleasures that wine, women and song could provide, but King Solomon was still frustrated and unfulfilled. In despair, he bitterly complained that trying to find happiness is like "chasing after the wind."

After trying all the possibilities, he concluded that without healthy relationships with God and others, everything else is “meaningless under the sun.” In other words, wealth, power and prestige are worthless without the divine and human relationships that truly make life rich.

...without healthy relationships with God and others, everything is “meaningless under the sun.”

Do you remember the story in Matthew 22:36 – 40? A lawyer went to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind (Deuteronomy 6:5).

He continued: “And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Leviticus 19:18). Then Jesus summed it up by saying, “All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Do you see the three strands?

1. As human beings our health and happiness depend on a loving relationship with God, our Heavenly Father.
2. Health and happiness require loving relationships with the people around us.
3. If we are to have quality love for others, we must obviously have love for ourselves.

## TEACHING

### Overcoming Communication Barriers

We must overcome communication barriers that separate us from God and other people. When human beings communicate, we scan memories, mental and emotional perceptions, abstract ideas and our five senses for the message we want to communicate. Then, at unimaginable speeds, we transform our message into words, symbols, pictures and/or non-verbal gestures that we can transmit to another person. With the amazing gift of language, we’re able to send messages of incredible subtlety and complexity, messages colored and flavored by our unique culture, experiences and beliefs.

We can receive the messages another person sends and attempt to decode them by filtering their symbols through our own unique set of experiences, perceptions, prejudices and beliefs. If we’re not careful, this is the point where common communication barriers can interfere with our ability to accurately receive, interpret and reconstruct the messages that were sent.

You and I have the capacity to send and receive several levels of communication simultaneously. Part of the difficulty we have in accurately decoding and reconstructing the messages we send is that in any communication there are at least six separate messages:

1.	The message I intend to convey	4.	The message you hear
2.	The message I verbalize	5.	The message you understand from what you hear
3.	The message my body language sends	6.	The messages that are triggered in your personal memories and emotions

Because these various types of messages all interact with one another in different ways, sorting through them to find accurate and clear communication can be a real challenge. In terms of human interaction, sorting out these messages accurately is often difficult and makes communication problems and misunderstandings inevitable.

We can improve our communication by addressing several key barriers that distort their understanding and lead to unnecessary conflict and confusion. These barriers to effective communication tend to fall into three categories:

- Problems of focus
- Problems of feeling
- Problems of fellowship.

### Focus Problems

Did you know that our minds generate words at least five times faster than we can verbalize them? Or that we can absorb six pages of typed words in less than one third the time it takes to read them aloud? It's hard to imagine that our brain's speed and efficiency operate to obstruct communication—but that's just what it does. **Our brain works so fast that we must slow it down considerably before we can listen effectively to others.** This requires energy and focus.

Have you ever been listening intently to someone only to suddenly realize that you momentarily tuned them out? Your mind, instead of tracking with what's being said, is off on a journey of its own! That's why **effective communication requires focused energy.**



Do your thoughts sometimes wander ahead of what people are saying? Are you sometimes too busy thinking of what you are going to say next to truly listen? At times do you become so intrigued with an interesting concept someone expressed that you are busily examining it while that person moves on with the conversation?

As prayer facilitators who desire to show compassion and caring, we must consciously work at "staying with" the people who are talking with us. We must rein in our minds' natural tendencies to wander ahead or behind. This involves disciplining ourselves to slow down and **listen to others at their pace.** This has proven to be a key to deeper understanding, deeper compassion and increased helpfulness.

### Impatience

Cultivating an understanding heart requires patience. First Thessalonians 5:14 tells us to "*be patient with everyone.*" But sometimes our busy lives dictate the opposite attitude. Many of us have fallen prey to the frantic pace of modern living. Perhaps we've even begun to resent the "interruptions" brought on by personal relationships. We may find listening to friends while they sort through their thoughts and feelings laborious and painfully time-consuming. So, we fidget impatiently, hoping they will "get to the point."

Such impatience may result in the conscious belief that somehow I should have “the right answer” to everyone’s problems. If they would just be quiet long enough for me to tell them what to do, everything would be fine. If I adopt this kind of attitude, I feel intense pressure to provide quick answers or instant solutions to their problems, no matter how long-standing or complex the problems may be.

While this approach may be taken with good intentions to help another, a hurried impatient attitude usually conveys just the opposite of Christian caring. If you’ve ever received this kind of hasty helping, you know how condescending and disrespectful it can feel.

## Jumping to Causes and Conclusions

Jumping to hasty conclusions or assuming we have insight into the hidden causes of other peoples’ actions is another common barrier to healthy communications. This unhealthy process takes two forms:

- Jumping to cause: “You said that because you don’t like women.”
- Jumping to conclusions: “You’re going to mess up your life if you don’t go to school this fall!”

Besides the obvious drawback of often being wrong, jumping to causes also leads to broken relationships important to communication. The same thing is true, of course, when we take a giant leap to a hastily drawn conclusion without taking time to listen fully to the person.

## Fellowship Problems

### Over-Identification

Being able to relate to another situation can be most admirable and helpful. On the other hand, over involvement gives us trouble. Sometimes, we can feel completely overwhelmed by the problems of others, leading us to either withdraw from a relationship or get too involved. Over identification can cause us to be terribly uncomfortable when attempting to help people who are experiencing deep emotions because we just can’t separate our feelings from those of the people we are helping.

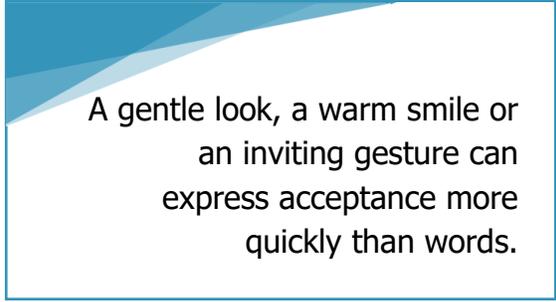
### Under-Identification

When it comes to unbalanced compassion responses, we can also tip the scales in the direction of not caring enough. Differences such as gender, cultural background, education, personal experiences and even genetics can cause us to perceive the world differently from others. When two or more persons from diverse backgrounds try to communicate, they often find that accuracy and real understanding are difficult because they simply can’t relate to what the other person is talking about.

## Communicating Warmth

Maybe you know someone who has a gift for helping others feel welcomed and accepted. Somehow when you’re around them you feel important—like what is on your mind is deeply significant. Without saying much of anything they can communicate interest and caring love. Can you think of a person who has communicated this special kind of loving caring to you?

A gentle look, a warm smile or an inviting gesture can express acceptance more quickly and deeply than words. Such nonverbals, working together with voice tone, inflection and actual words, project friendliness, consideration and warmth.



**A gentle look, a warm smile or an inviting gesture can express acceptance more quickly than words.**

Throughout the Scriptures we are reminded to follow the model of Jesus by showing warmth and compassion toward one another.

Paul also says in Romans 12:10, *“Love one another warmly as Christian brothers and be eager to show respect for one another”*. Psalm 103: 2-4: *“Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits – who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion.”*

## Nonverbal Clues

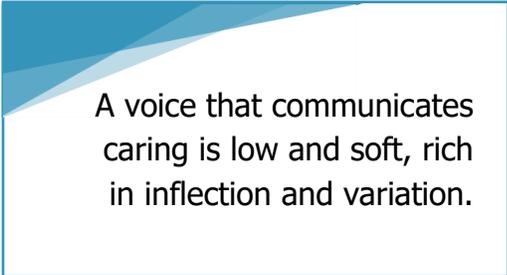
The mouth, head, face, shoulders, arms, legs—the total body—provide a wealth of clues about what’s going on inside of our heads and hearts. These are clues about our feelings and our inner states of being. Most of us read these signals in others without having to think about them. For example:

- Sagging shoulders may project a feeling of discouragement, exhaustion or despair.
- Arms folded tightly across the chest tend to give the impression of defensiveness, impatience or alienation.
- Clinched hands and jaw may suggest anger or anguish.
- A quivering chin can suggest a struggle with intense emotion.
- Fidgeting and foot tapping may indicate nervousness and anxiety.

These nonverbal signals are usually obvious in others but are often difficult to detect in ourselves. Prayer facilitators are especially tuned in to these signals because physical mannerisms can be informative when we are ministering healing prayer. What other nonverbal habits can you think of that offer clues to healing needs when you are listening to a seeker? As prayer facilitators we do not want our own nonverbal behaviors to convey anything but warmth and acceptance.

## Voice Clues

Another key to communicating personal warmth is our voice. Research shows the volume, pitch and tone of our voice are an important part of our communication. When you think of a warm voice, what are the qualities that usually come to mind?



**A voice that communicates caring is low and soft, rich in inflection and variation.**

When you think of a warm voice, what are the qualities that usually come to mind?

A voice that communicates caring and interest is usually low and soft, but clearly audible. Instead of being a monotone, it is rich in inflection and variation, reflecting the energy and mood of the

other person.

## Guidelines for Improving Warmth

Of course, we must all adapt these basic principles to our own personalities and cultures.

**Sensitive Seating.** To communicate caring and acceptance, it's usually most comfortable and effective to sit face-to-face with the other person but with your body positioned at about a 45-degree angle. In other words, you don't want to face the other person "head on" in a position that is too confrontive, stiff or stilted. When standing, this angled position is also the most natural and inviting. Some suggest that in America, the ideal distance between two people who are standing or sitting is usually about the length of one arm.



**Openness.** Emotional and spiritual openness to others is communicated primarily through our posture and body language. Sitting or standing with your arms or legs crossed while engaged in a conversation with others often sends nonverbal signals interpreted as a standoffish or distant—or even one of disregard or apathy. You can fold your hands in front of you or hold your arms relaxed at your side.

Crossing your legs so that one leg becomes a barrier between you and the person you're talking with also lowers the prayer recipient's perception of your warmth. The ultimate key to success is finding a comfortable relaxed position that says, "I care about you and what you are saying."

...find a comfortable relaxed position that says, "I care about you..."

**Leaning.** When we are interested in what people are saying, we naturally lean toward them, so they are encouraged to continue speaking. Leaning too far forward, however, can be inhibiting and awkward for both parties. By the same token, moving too far back can send a negative message, indicating we would rather be someplace else.

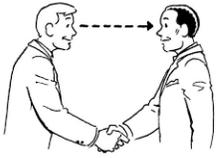
**Appropriate Eye Contact.** God created a special channel of silent communication when He created our eyes. In effect, appropriate eye contact is crucial to helping another person feel comfortable. There are times when establishing direct eye contact may cause extreme discomfort in a seeker.

When people are overcome with grief or shame, for instance, they will often not want to meet our gaze. But most of the time people appreciate the acute sensitivity that can only be expressed through our eyes. Even in the painful moments, it's reassuring to see caring and understanding in the eyes of others.

Of course, we certainly don't want to "stare down" or gaze unblinking at others until they feel awkward. Nor do we want to avoid eye contact altogether. **Appropriate eye contact shows that we are paying attention to the other person.** It's an inviting and healthy nonverbal that helps establish warmth. In fact, if we break eye contact too frequently, we may be sending an unintentional message that we don't care what the other person is telling us.

**Touch.** Because the need for caring touch is extremely powerful in human beings, this is an area of extreme sensitivity. In our sexually supercharged culture, touch has taken on meetings that

can cause conflict and misunderstanding. Whether the person you're talking with is of the same or the opposite sex, touch can frequently be misinterpreted. Even the most innocent hug could be interpreted as an aggressive gesture.



Early in a relationship, any touch other than a handshake is usually too threatening and may cause the person to withdraw. As you develop a caring relationship and mutual trust, however, an encouraging pat on the back, a touch on the arm or even a hug may be appropriate. The most effective touch is always gentle and non-possessive.

**Environment.** Numerous studies have been done on ergonomics, the effective placement of chairs, desks and other furniture in a room. We suggest removing physical barriers separating people that could detract from warm relationships. Tables, floral arrangements, house plants and knick-knacks that we've gotten used to can get in the way of open communication and personal warmth when people must peer through them to see us.

**Accommodating Attitude.** An attitude that understands and accepts the differences of others is a must in communicating warmth. Synchronizing with the prayer recipient's energy level is important in communicating warmth. If she is very excited and I sit placidly smiling and nodding my head, she could interpret this as disinterest or a patronizing attitude. If, on the other hand, I match her energy level as much as I can, she will likely sense that I care about how she feels.

When Scripture exhorts us to mourn with those who mourn and rejoice with those who rejoice, it is encouraging us to **extend grace by entering their frame of reference.**

The guidelines presented above emphasize the various elements that go into human warmth. It's important, however, to remember that developing these attitudes and skills is not a program but a process, and like any process, it must be practiced. Once you have learned it well, communicating with warmth and a caring heart will feel more and more natural. So, hang in there and keep practicing! The results will be worth it!

## EMPATHY

### Reflective Listening

The primary method for demonstrating empathy is called active or reflective listening. Although it can be learned as a skill, **reflective listening requires an attitude of respect and concern along with the Spirit's fruit of peace, patience and self-control.**

The first step in any effective helping process is understanding what the prayer recipient wants and needs from us. Our temptation is often to inappropriately jump in with our own answers without fully understanding what the person is seeking. The actual helpfulness of our response depends on how accurately we're able to determine the kind of assistance the recipient really desires.

In many instances, people are simply looking for directions or information. Effective prayer facilitators will make sure they understand exactly what the seeker is asking for first and then, if possible, offer the requested information. Similarly, if I ask you to help me fix my car or give me a

ride, I am looking for action. The appropriate response is to listen first to make sure you understand the request and then tell me if you are willing to perform the action I am requesting.

If the person wants to involve you in gossip or other inappropriate interactions, the best response is to affirm the person while declining to participate in the unhealthy activity. Inappropriate interactions point to the recipient's deep heart issues and require a combination of peace, self-control, and reflective listening that encourages them to explore the threatening areas of pain.

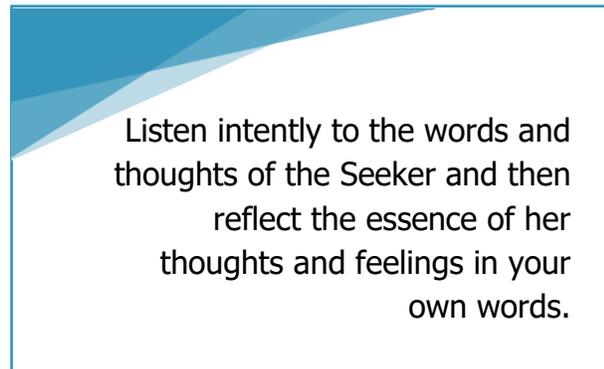
Reflective listening, then, is most important when interacting with people who want:

- To have someone understand them
- Help in clarifying a problem
- Involvement and friendship
- To express deep feelings such as anger, pain, sadness, confusion, excitement, happiness or joy.

Reflective listening is beneficial in establishing a healthy helper/seeker relationship because it:

- Tests the prayer facilitator's understanding of what the recipient has said
- Helps the Seeker feel understood
- Helps the Seeker better understand himself or herself
- Encourages the Seeker to continue to talk and explore at a deeper level
- Allows for a gentle and safe entry into the deep heart.

Reflective listening works by the principle of reflection. We listen intently and carefully to the exact words and thoughts of a person and then check out whether we heard accurately or not by reflecting the essence of the thoughts and feelings in your own words.



If we have heard and reflected accurately, they will let us know by saying, "Yes!" or "That's it!" If we miss all or part of their meaning, we will usually be corrected. "No, it's not like that. It's more like..."

Once we've established that a person is looking for an understanding, involvement, friendship or a chance to express their feelings, there are only three basic steps to formulating an accurate empathic response:

- Identify the feeling content that you hear expressed
- Identify the thought content that you hear expressed
- Tentatively summarize or paraphrase what you hear in your own words.

We must be careful not to confuse thoughts with feelings. How many times have you heard someone say, "I feel Mr. Smith is a good instructor"? This statement is not a feeling. It's a thought. You think Mr. Smith is a good instructor. This is a judgment made about a person, not a feeling.

People commonly confuse feelings with beliefs or judgments. If you are analytical, you may discover that you have some difficulty identifying feeling words: mad, sad, glad, afraid, confused, ashamed and alone. Just remember that in listening to a seeker's statement, we focus on the terms that describe emotions as well as the thoughts or beliefs the person is having.

**Be Tentative.** Keep in mind that empathy assists seeker self-exploration. In learning to listen reflectively, we must be tentative in our lead statements with another. Responding tentatively not only prevents our coming across as a know-it-all, but it also leaves the responsibility for the decision of "Yes, that's what I said" to the Seeker.

Even when we are pretty sure we have correctly perceived what someone else is telling us, we are usually better received when we are tentative. We want to communicate genuine understanding and concern, not the impression that we are omniscient. Here are some suggestions for tentative openings:

- I wonder if...
- I am not sure I'm following you, but...
- I think I heard you say...
- Am I hearing you say...
- Correct me if I'm wrong, but...
- Is it possible that...
- You seem to be saying...
- I sense that you're feeling...
- I wonder if you're feeling...
- Sounds like...
- Do I hear you saying....

**Avoid Asking Questions.** In general, effective empathy avoids direct questions and relies, instead, on listening to the words and watching for nonverbal cues this Seeker uses. Especially in the initial phases of helping, we want the Seeker to set the pace and direction. The goal of empathic listening is to encourage people to explore their own inner lives. If we take control of the conversation away from the person by asking direct questions, it may become threatening and counterproductive and engender defensive resistance.

Have you ever had someone say to you things like:

- I know just how you feel...
- Let me tell you what happened to me...
- You think that's bad! Did You hear...
- You're feeling that way because...
- You better not think that way...
- You shouldn't feel that way...
- Listen, I know what you should do...
- I'm sure that everything will be alright...
- Just hang in there...
- Now don't be upset...
- Well, praise the Lord anyway!

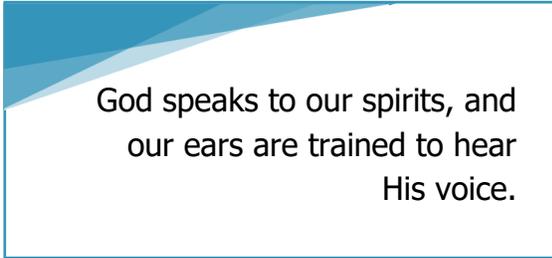
Reflect a moment on a recent conversation where the person interacted with superficial clichés rather than really hearing you out. How did that feel?

Developing empathic listening skills feels unnatural for most of us at first. These new ways of listening rub against our ingrained habit patterns. Like any new skills, it will feel awkward and embarrassing at first, but with effort, practice and God's help you will find yourself applying the skills with effortless grace.

## Listen to God as You Listen to the Seeker

Faith is the key to listening prayer. Romans 10:17 says, “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. Hebrews 11:6 reminds us that “without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.”

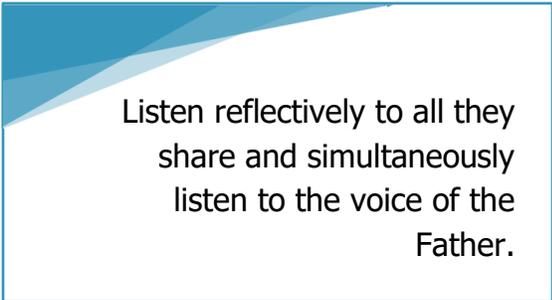
Isaiah 50:4 says, “The Sovereign Lord has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, **wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed.**” Here we learn that God speaks to our spirits, and our ears are trained to hear His voice.



God speaks to our spirits, and  
our ears are trained to hear  
His voice.

The mind wants to move fast, taking our own action, but Isaiah 30 tells us that this is serious error. Our noisy souls must be told to quiet as we submit our spirits to God’s Spirit. We intentionally wait to hear God’s still small voice. *The Lord longs to be gracious to you; therefore He will rise up to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for Him!* (Isaiah 30:18)

When helping a prayer recipient, we listen reflectively to all they share and simultaneously listen to the voice and direction of the Father who loves them and holds the power and love to heal.



Listen reflectively to all they  
share and simultaneously  
listen to the voice of the  
Father.

What is the relationship between healing prayer and listening? “...**the central role of the intercessor is to bring people, situations, relationships before the throne of God.** There, we are to seek God’s heart.” (–*An Introductory Guide to Listening Prayer* by Bob Japenga)

Scripture agrees with the value of caring and listening. James 1:19 exhorts: “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry...” Proverbs is also pointed in its admonition to avoid giving advice at the expense of listening: “A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions.... He who answers before listening— that is his folly and his shame.” (Proverbs 18:13).

As we learn to **listen intently to the Father while also listening reflectively to the Seeker, we become vehicles for His healing grace** in their lives.