

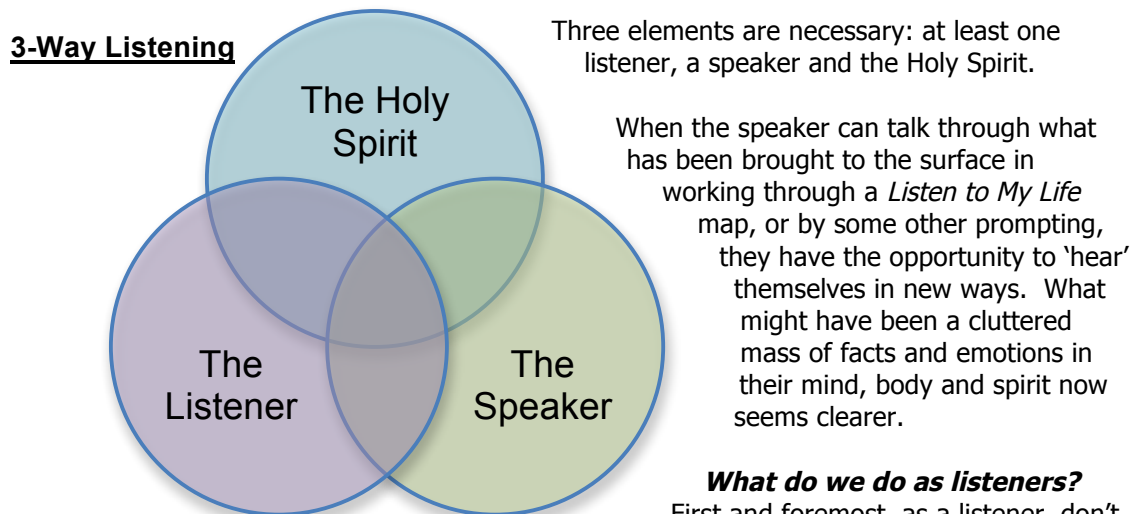
3-Way Listening

Written by Sharon Swing, deeply informed by Sibyl Towner and Susan Shadid

Far from the ordinary conversation over coffee or banter of a small group, the experience of “3-Way Listening” is focused and intentional. It requires that the listener be aware of some simple, yet profound truths about a deeper kind of listening.

- Listening is an act of loving submission to God and to another person.
- Listening allows a person to hear him or herself, and hear God, while feeling accepted and loved.
- Listening is not about offering advice or fixing another person’s problems.
- As you, the listener, present yourself as an available tool for use in the hands of God, He may choose to use your presence to assist the speaker in receiving clarity, guidance or healing.

Sibyl Towner and Susan Shadid call this kind of listening “3-Way Listening.” They have been teaching it for years in the context of teaching people to become spiritual mentors or spiritual friends. They developed a Venn diagram to illustrate the concept that looks like this:



First and foremost, as a listener, don’t interrupt the speaker. We let the speaker know with our body language that we are listening attentively to something very important. We silently pray for God to bring clarity, truth, healing and restoration to whatever is needed. We pray for God’s love to prevail, replacing lies with truth. Simply, we pray that God will do whatever, in his perfect wisdom, he sees fit to do. Our presence as a listener holds open the time and space for the speaker to stay focused on whatever they feel is helpful.

What might happen?

When we engage in 3-way listening we are a part of creating an environment that is conducive for the speaker to have an encounter with God through the Holy Spirit. When we look at the diagram, this is represented by the space where ‘The Speaker’ and ‘The Holy Spirit’ overlap. We are simply willing tools in God’s hands. We offer our presence, prayers and belief that God will do what is most needed. We are not listening for our own benefit, understanding or entertainment. There are many ways in which we, as listeners, can get in the way of the speaker encountering God, to avoid doing so we must actively and intentionally replace some habitual listening practices with new practices. We are actively offering our attentive presence with the hope and expectation that God will choose to be present with us and do what he does best.

The listener might gain a gift of clarity regarding their past or current circumstances, or sense God offering his loving direction or correction. It may be subtle or profound. It may take a short or a prolonged period of time. It may happen in the moments we are together, or it may happen at a later time when the person is alone. It may be that nothing happens at all. For us as listeners, it is just about lovingly offering our gift of presence and believing in God for the speaker, even if they cannot believe in God's redemptive power for their story for themselves.

“Being listened to is so close to being loved that most people don’t know the difference.”

David Augsburger

Many people expend extraordinary efforts to forget or hide things that they don't think others would understand or accept. This kind of isolation is precisely what the evil one uses to keep us from experiencing grace, or even believing that it could be extended to us. Some people in our 'Listen To My Life' experiences have described what happened to them as bringing what was hidden into the light where there is a release from fear and judgment – in essence, an encounter with healing grace – that allows them to be free in some new way. Creating safe places for people to come out of hiding is one of the many ways God can choose to use our listening presence for his redemptive purposes. We can be present as truth and grace triumph over fear.

Between the Listener and God

The space where the 'Listener' and 'God' overlap in the Venn diagram represents our connection to God as we listen. We actively, but silently, pray for this person while giving the speaker our attention. We may pray, "Holy Spirit, lead this person to Jesus," or "Holy Spirit, bring clarity and healing," or, "Holy Spirit, let him feel your love." In addition, the Holy Spirit may bring scripture or a question to your attention. After the speaker is done talking, they may ask for questions or prayer. You may feel prompted to ask those questions or share the scripture that came to mind, or you may sense that you are to remain silent. Pray for discernment, only speaking if you feel prompted to do so, putting all ego needs aside.

A simple question may help the person reflect on what they have said, like, 'Thinking back on what you chose to share, did you notice anything that stood out to you?' or 'Is there something that God might be directing your attention toward?'

Not to be overlooked, is the aspect of listening to one's self. It is useful to pay attention to what comes to mind about your life or story while you are listening to another. You will need to put that aside while you are listening, and ask the Holy Spirit to hold it for you until a later time. Sometimes something profound happens in the spirit of a listener; healing, exposing, troubling, or opening up a new thought that needs to be attended to. Make time to re-visit what came to mind as you listened.

Between the Listener and the Speaker

The space where the speaker and listener overlap in the diagram represents our connection to the other person. As we listen deeply to one another, God grows our capacity to love and offer grace. It is a wonderful gift to have friends who know your story and don't just love you in spite of what they know, but they love you even more deeply because of that deep knowing.

You might set the expectation prior to listening that silence is useful, normal and expected. Many times it is the best part, because it allows the person to have silent space in the midst of telling their story, or after being asked a question that might assist them in reflecting, without the need of verbalizing an answer.

Between the Three of Us

The center of the diagram, where the Holy Spirit, the Listener, and the Speaker overlap is the space that we like to call 'Holy Ground.' When, at times, you are privileged to be present for an act of redemption, it is a memorable picture of God's miraculous power and tangible love. As one of our 'Listen To My Life' facilitators commented, 'Witnessing redemption is never boring!' At times, you may realize that you are experiencing in a new way the truth of the Matthew 18:20 TNIV, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am with them."

Clues for Entering into 3-Way Listening

Here are a few clues that help me discern if I am practicing "3-Way Listening."

- I consciously remind myself that I am there to serve the other person and help them to hear themselves and respond to God.
- My body language tells the listener that I am listening with my whole self, and that I am not rushed or distracted.
- I find myself able to listen attentively to the other person, and also be attentive to listen for the Holy Spirit.
- I find myself not needing to advise, control or fix the person to whom I am listening.
- I don't need to interject my own story, because I realize that what is happening between the speaker and the Holy Spirit is much more important, and that my comments will only distract from what God might do.
- I can want what is best for this person, but trust that God knows what is best, and I don't have to have an answer. I release my ego's need to be noticed as smart, wise, or insightful.
- I ask the Holy Spirit to release me to only speak what he deems useful.
- I may sense a prompting to share a scripture that may replace lies with God's truth, ask a question that will draw the speaker toward truth and toward God, or impart a blessing to remind them of their unique, God-given design.

"Listening is the art of creating space so God can do His work in the heart of another."

Sharon Swing

It is interesting that "3-Way Listening" requires us to NOT do many things. Listening in this deep, spiritual manner requires us to say 'NO' to our normal habits of casual, conversational listening so we make room for more beautiful interactions that are graced with God's presence and lead us down a path toward a deep knowing of God, one's self, and others.



Holding the Space

A friend of the *Listen to My Life* ministry asked an artist to create a painting to represent her reflections on the new ways in which she was experiencing and learning about listening. She envisioned a doctor performing open-heart surgery, and the sternum being retracted to make room for healing hands to reach the vital organ. The retractors, although not doing healing work themselves, make room for the master surgeon's hands to do his healing work. We act as 'retractors' as spiritual listeners, making space for God to do his work in the heart of those to whom we listen.

Here is a link to a webinar called "Guidelines for Listening." You might find the section on "Responsible To vs. Responsible For" very enlightening.

<http://www.onelifemaps.com/Downloads/Guidelines%20for%20Listening%20Webinar%20Aug%202009.wmv>

The Listening Guidelines written in the 'Listen To My Life' workbook offer descriptions of what listeners and speakers can do to create a safe environment in which '3-Way Listening' can be done. To order the workbook, please go to:

http://www.onelifemaps.com/lifeshop_workbook.html

If you'd like to take a listening survey that might help you pinpoint habits that may be keeping you from being able to listen well, please go to: <http://www.equippingministries.org/listening-survey.html>

Learn more about the Listen to My Life resources and retreats at <http://www.oneLifemaps.com>