



FREE GUIDE:  
**INVESTING SPIRITUALLY**  

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**IN YOUR SPOUSE**



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# INVESTING SPIRITUALLY IN YOUR SPOUSE

We are so glad you have taken the initiative to learn more about how to support your spouse in their faith journey. It is our honor to join you in this journey of discovering how to invest spiritually in your spouse. Let's explore this together.

Our marriage mentors, Gary and Ann Wooley, helped us understand that investing spiritually in your spouse is **“taking the initiative to engage your spouse in a conversation, listening for clues about their relationship with Christ. Then encouraging their next step of faith or obedience.”**

Spiritual growth in our lives happens one decision at a time and one step of obedience at a time.

We know how many marriages have been incredibly blessed by putting this simple framework into practice so let's get started!

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## 1. TAKING THE INITIATIVE—GET IT ON THE CALENDAR



The first step in investing spiritually in your spouse is simply to start a conversation. Set a time, get your favorite drink or food, and head to the kitchen table, or grab a coat and ask your spouse to walk around the neighborhood or jump in the car for a drive. Whatever environment feels the most natural for you guys, roll with that, but nothing will happen until you initiate the conversation. For us, the environment changes depending on the season we are currently in. In the summer, we try to go on more walks in the awesome Colorado landscape; in the winter, we drink more coffee and tea by the fireplace.

Once you are both in a good environment, it's time to initiate the conversation. Remember, the whole point is that you are trying to encourage your spouse spiritually, so you want to be "listening for clues about their relationship with Christ." Asking open-ended questions that lead in that direction is the most helpful. We will get into question-asking here in a bit.



You've taken the initiative with your spouse and are in the best environment to connect. Now it's time to be fully present (put away the phone 😊) and actively listen.



## 2. ACTIVELY LISTENING—HEARING THE CLUES

God's plan for marriage is clear, "...and the husband and wife shall become one flesh." According to Genesis 2:24, **oneness** is God's plan for marriage. Christian couples who want to fulfill God's plan by becoming one must be able to listen to each other without distraction and with empathy. To listen with empathy means to be attentive to the emotions, thoughts, or attitudes of the one speaking. In one sense, it could mean putting yourself in their shoes and feeling what they are communicating.

**Why is active listening so important?** Because it allows us to see the heart of our spouse.

In Luke 6, Jesus is teaching through what is called The Beatitudes. Michael J. Wilkins describes how, "The Beatitudes are a radically bold statement of Jesus' intent to establish the kingdom of heaven on earth, which will bring true peace and freedom for all who dare to follow him as his disciples. His kingdom will bless all of the earth's peoples through those disciples." Here, we have Jesus teaching how the kingdom of heaven will be brought on earth and how it will be established through his disciples.

In Luke 6:45, we read a significant passage: "The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." Understanding this is key to your marriage and how you will serve and love others. This verse shows that the words that come out of our mouths are from the abundance of the heart; whether it's good or bad, they come from the deepest parts within us.





We can't go into depth here on the theology of the heart. If you are interested in doing that, you must grab A. Craig Troxel's excellent book, *With All Your Heart*. In his book, Troxel provides a helpful definition of the heart as "the governing center of a person. When used simply, it reflects the unity of our inner being, and when used comprehensively, it describes the complexity of our inner being—as composed of mind (what we know), desires (what we love), and will (what we choose)." (Troxel, page 21)

We will talk about HOW to listen next, but make sure to notice the point of what you are listening FOR; you are listening for the heart so that we can encourage your spouse in their next step spiritually.

We are listening to their words as it reveals what's going on with their minds, desires, and will.

**How do we listen?** A lot goes into becoming a good listener, but the most helpful tool is an illustration called "the artist." The "artist" is a mental picture that helps us to take the right posture in actively listening. In the "artist illustration," we have two people: one is describing a specific scene or scenario, and the other is re-creating that image from what they have heard.



Gary and Ann Wooley (we learned a lot from this fantastic couple!) taught us that "an artist tries to see with sensitivity, to discover and interpret what he has seen. The artist looks for details, nuance, and feeling for texture before producing art. The listener always listens in the same way the artist sees, with careful attention and sensitivity. When he is finished, the skilled listener's "art" is an interpretation of the speaker's world in a statement of accurate empathy."





Over the years, we have learned so many helpful tools, but "the artist" has been one we have repeatedly returned to. The Artist seeks to understand and asks questions to help bring clarity.



When taking the posture of the "artist," the two steps you must take are first:

1. Ask open-ended questions.
2. Summarize what you heard.



Much of our culture has lost the art of asking great questions. It is one of the strongest tools we can all grow in in our marriage, ministry, and work. The key to asking open-ended questions is for them to be OPEN, not CLOSED (I know, groundbreaking stuff). Here is a simple way to identify open-ended and closed-ended questions:

#### Open-ended questions

- Usually started with "How," "Why," and "What."
- Have no set or predetermined answers
- Requires a response to explain



#### Closed-ended questions

- Have some form of predetermined answers
- Usually feature a "Yes / No" response
- Does not require an explanation



Open-ended questions allow the person being asked to explain or "paint the picture" in their own words. So what kind of open-ended questions do we want to be asking?

Any open-ended question is going to help give us insight into how our spouse is doing spiritually. Some of our favorite questions to ask each other are:



- "How was your faith journey this week?"
- "Is there any passage of scripture or verses that you have been encouraged by lately?"
- "What has been stressful this week that I might not be aware of?"
- "Is there any relationship that has been encouraging or discouraging this week for you?"
- "What's fueling your spiritual life right now?"

Whatever question you decide to open with, you must take the time to listen—don't comment with a clever joke or a sly remark. Once they answer the first open-ended question, you need to follow that up with another one that helps clarify what they are sharing.

Try follow-up questions like:

- "That's interesting. Can you tell me more about \_\_\_\_?"
- "That sounds painful. Can you tell me more about why you felt like \_\_\_\_?"
- "That's encouraging to hear. Can you share why you think that strengthened your heart?"





Open-ended questions ask the speaker to describe what they know to help them talk about specific circumstances, behaviors and feelings. They work towards the goal of having the speaker use specific words.

When you ask open-ended questions, it's essential that you are listening to the answer to summarize what picture you believe your spouse painted. Summarizing is a great way to indicate that we have understood and can move forward in the conversation. Summaries focus on the feelings or mood described by your spouse; they don't simply list the facts.

A strong summary statement will capture the feel of what has been said at the emotional level. If it is accurate, your spouse will say something like "Exactly!" or "That's what I'm talking about." If we weren't accurate in our summarization, it allows our spouse to help correct our understanding by clarifying it for us.

Author Simon Sinek says listening is more than just hearing the words spoken. Listening is understanding **why** the words were spoken.

Once you've listened for clues about your spouse's faith journey by listening for the heart, it's time to take the next step and encourage them.

### **3. ENCOURAGEMENT - TAKING THE NEXT STEP OF FAITH**

We have been actively listening and helped "paint a picture" that was summarized and confirmed by our spouse. The next step we need to take is to offer encouragement in their next step of faith.

Our pastor regularly said, "the next step of faith to take is always the hardest one to step out in." This is your opportunity to build them up in Christ (1 Thess. 5:11) and to stir them up to love and good works (Heb. 10:24-25).

To help clarify, let's define what encouraging obedience is NOT:

- It's not telling them what they should do.
- It's not giving your personal opinion.
- It's not an opportunity to fix them.

This time of encouragement is about helping them to take the next step of faith based on what you were actively listening for. This could be encouraging them to have a conversation that is heavy on their heart or to pursue reconciliation in a relationship that is not doing well, or to memorize scripture related to their current season. The scenarios are endless, but they all have one thing in common: they are centered on Jesus and aligned with God's word.