

Values Day 2020

Everybody's shouting but nobody's listening

Introduction

My friend's rather surprised tone of voice said it all: 'That was a really good meeting – no-one was arguing or trying to put other people down. Everyone was listening... We got things sorted...'

We weren't expecting it to be like that since our experience was usually the opposite.

As I write, the controversial new leader of the Conservative Party and, by default, Prime Minister, is the hottest topic of the day. With Brexit unresolved, both leavers and remainers continue to fight their corners, demonstrating outside parliament, chanting, shouting and hoping against hope that someone in power will take notice.

There was only a narrow majority for Britain to leave the European Union. Now three years of discontent have divided the country as the issues not wholly apparent before the Referendum become clearer – or not. But by the time this material is issued we will be out of the European Union – maybe ...

Everybody's shouting but nobody's listening....

In the Bible and throughout history, wars have been started because one side believes itself to be right and is deaf to the viewpoint of the opposition. Sometimes even our church meetings can be like that!

Listening – real, intelligent, compassionate listening – is an art.

We've probably all met people who appear to be listening to us, saying 'Mmm, yes,' in all the right places but who are forming their next opinion or anecdote about themselves as we speak. Or the person who asks how we are but is looking over our shoulder for someone more

interesting as we try to share with them. Maybe we're even guilty of this ourselves?

Some are listening, but how many are hearing?

What does the Bible say?

The early books of the Bible record God speaking directly to specific people. And from the very start, though they heard His voice, His children in the Garden of Eden chose to ignore Him. 'Did God really say "You must not eat from any tree in the garden?"' Adam asks Eve and we all know the result... (Genesis 3:1 NIV)

God spoke to Moses in the still, small voice of the burning bush (Exodus 3) and probably more loudly when He dictated the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20). On the whole, Moses listened - though there were occasions when he doubted what God was promising (e.g Numbers 11).

An internet or Bible Concordance trawl of God speaking directly will give numerous further examples.

In Deuteronomy, He speaks again through Moses:

*I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him. I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name.
(Deut 18:18-19)*

The prophets were the mouthpiece of God for His people. But, fallen humans being what they are, many of these specially chosen people were ridiculed, despised, at best ignored and at worst killed (remember John the Baptist's grisly end...)

The main prophet in the New Testament is Jesus. He often exhorts his disciples to listen to Himself and His Father. He is also, of course, the supreme listener. And He responds appropriately, speaking into each

situation with compassion and sound sense. Check out the stories of the woman at the well (John 4), the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16-30) and James and John's request for preferential treatment (Mark 10:35-45) for just a few examples.

What does this mean for us?

There is a fundamental difference between hearing and listening. Let's apply this little phrase which is useful in any teaching situation:

I hear and I forget; I see and I remember; I do and I understand

We often *hear* the Word of God in a sermon, in Bible study or simply in our own consciences. And then, like some of the seeds in the parable of the sower, we forget what we heard in the busyness of life.

If we have truly listened to what we heard from or about God, we might then *do* something about it. Visit that person, make the phone-call, contact our local councillor, look into the Bible more deeply, ask for forgiveness ... You will think of more examples.

Applying the same phrase to listening to other people, a perfunctory 'How are you?' on Sunday morning isn't enough. *Seeing*, (or understanding) how the other person is behaving, not only through their words but their body language and perhaps what they're *not* saying is the first step to helping them.

Listening well to someone is one of the greatest gifts we can give them. Whether they are bereaved, abandoned, angry, confused, weary or in any other kind of distress, to feel that what they've shared has been truly heard and absorbed is a relief at some level.

It's what we *do* next that proves our worth as a good listener. This may be immediate prayer (and the promise of ongoing prayer too), the offer of practical help, a follow-up visit or exploring ways to meet their needs either ourselves or through other individuals or agencies. We need to be both God's ear and mouthpiece in a very needy world.

Sermon Outline

- Quotes/anecdotes on listening
- *Either 1 Samuel 3* – The Lord Calls Samuel *or*
Mark 4 – The Parable of the Sower ‘They may be ever hearing but never understanding... ‘
- The gift of hearing v the gift of listening...
- **Who is listening?**
 - God – listening to us talking to Him
 - Us – listening to Him
 - Others – listening to them
 - Those in power – who is really listening to us/how can we encourage them to take the issues troubling Christians seriously?
- **Practical application**
 - We need to be sure it is God’s voice we hear and not just our own thoughts.
 - We can give the greatest gift to others by truly listening to them.
 - We can affect society at a local or national level by engaging with those in power and encouraging them to see the Christian or moral viewpoint.

Some hymn suggestions

- *Be still and know that I am God*
- *Be still, for the presence of the Lord*
- *Dear Lord and Father of mankind*
- *God has spoken by His prophets*
- *God has spoken to His people*

- *How sweet the Name of Jesus sound*
- *Hushed was the evening hymn*
- *I heard the voice of Jesus say*
- *I, the Lord of sea and sky*
- *O Lord, hear my prayer (Taize)*
- *Open my eyes that I may see*
- *Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus*
- *Speak, Lord, in the stillness*

Prayers

Dear Father,

So often I come to you with lists and demands.
 Like a tornado I spew them out as commands.
 To the next task, I move on with my day
 Completely missing what you might have to say.
 The noise of the world clogs my ears
 And clouds my mind with fog and fears.
 I need you to clear my senses, O Lord!
 Give me a heart in tune with your Word.
 May I be ever eager to hear your voice;
 May listening continually be my choice. Amen

(Prayer for willingness to listen - Rachel Wojo)

Heavenly Father,

I wait upon you.
 I pause, still my mind and still my heart.
 I wait upon you.
 I stop, and listen beyond the everyday.
 I wait upon you.
 I rest, and allow my soul to have space.

I wait upon you.
 Quiet, at rest, held.
 I wait upon you.

And call Abba, Abba Father.
I know you have searched me, and you know me.
I know you are the beginning and the end.
I know you are the Redeemer.
I wait upon you,
Allowing your grace to penetrate my whole being.
And in this place, close, protected and eternal
I find that this grace renews my strength,
Wipes away my tears,
And promises new hope.

I wait upon you.

(Listening prayer – from Living Prayers – Contemporary Prayers for Today)

Father God,
You always listen to our endless outpourings and requests.
Give us listening ears
 to hear Your still, small voice
 to give our full attention to others in need and
 to learn from views that are different to our own
Help us to be Your ears in a needy world
and always willing to act on what we hear. Amen.

(A Listener's Prayer – S.O.)

Small Group Study

- **Icebreaker** Play Chinese Whispers with a fairly long sentence. Talk about how things get changed as people don't hear or interpret clearly...

(e.g. Sue's going to the Edinburgh Tattoo next week... Sue's getting a tattoo in Edinburgh!!)

Or In pairs, each share an incident that has happened recently (or in childhood) for three or four minutes each. Then report back what you heard as accurately as possible to the group...

- **Bible Study** Read **James 1:19-27** 'Listening and Doing'
 - **v19** Discuss how easy/difficult it is to hold your tongue when someone makes you angry.
 - How does this kind of anger stop us being in fellowship with God?
 - When is 'righteous anger' appropriate?
 - **v22** Think about Sunday sermons and/or daily Bible readings... How often do we put into practice what we have heard?
 - **V23-25** How does following God's perfect law help us in the Christian life?
 - **V26** Compare **Psalm 34:12-13**. How good do we feel about ourselves when we have passed on a piece of gossip unnecessarily or told a white lie to get ourselves out of a sticky situation?
 - **V27a** What is the wider equivalent of 'orphans and widows' today? How can we help practically in our local situation?
 - **V27b** How can we be 'in the world but not of it' and still make a difference?
- End with **prayer** perhaps including some silence to enable listening to God...
- **Take Home Idea**

In any one-to-one situation this week, monitor how much time you spend listening and how much talking (without telling the other person!). Give yourself a score out of 10 for good listening ...

Some Scriptures on Listening (NIV)

- In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly. **Psalm 5:3**
- In my distress I called to the Lord; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears. **Psalm 18:6**
- I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live. **Psalm 116:1-2**
- A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions. **Proverbs 18:2**
- Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. **Jeremiah 29:12**
- Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. **Matthew 7:24**
- He replied, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.” **Luke 11:28**
- Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. **James 1:22**
- This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. **1 John 5:14**
- Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. **Philippians 4:9**
- Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. **Romans 10:17**
- My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry... **James 1:19**
- And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him. **1 John 5:15**

- Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me. **Revelation 3:20**

Quotes

- Listen to God with a broken heart. He is not only the doctor who mends it, but also the father who wipes away the tears. **Criss Jami**
- We have two ears and one mouth, so we should listen more than we say. **Zeno of Citium**
- Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply. **Stephen R. Covey,**
- There's a lot of difference between listening and hearing. **G. K. Chesterton**
- The simple enquiry, 'Tell me more', can unlock a heart. **Jeff Lucas**
- The word 'listen' contains the same letters as the word 'silent'. **Alfred Brendel**
- The most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and be understood. The best way to understand people is to listen to them. **Ralph G. Nichols**
- This is the problem with dealing with someone who is actually a good listener. They don't jump in on your sentences, saving you from actually finishing them, or talk over you, allowing what you do manage to get out to be lost or altered in transit. Instead, they wait, so you have to keep going. **Sarah Dessen**
- You cannot truly listen to anyone and do anything else at the same time. **M. Scott Peck**
- For whatever reason, it's rare to find someone who has the priceless gift of listening, who doesn't treat conversation as a potential monologue, where your answer is simply an opportunity for them to take a breath before they hold court once again.... Why is social networking such a successful phenomenon? It enables us to say what we think, report on what we're doing, even if what we're doing is cooking an omelette. We update our status in the hope that someone, somewhere, might be interested. We want to be known. **Jeff Lucas**
- People start to heal the moment they feel heard. **Anon**

Further Resources

- Google YouTube: ***Will You Not Listen?*** by Michael Card for a poignant meditative song
- From ***The Upper Room*** Bible Reading Fellowship notes (May-August 2019)

Read **Isaiah 55:10-12**

My word that goes out from my mouth... will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:11 NIV)

I had spent over ten years as a minister, and then one day I found myself without a church. Much of my identity had come from being a minister. What identity did I have as an unemployed one? With a daughter to feed, I needed a job quickly. Then, through a strange series of events, I received an offer to drive a taxi. Running out of options, I accepted.

I wasn't the most enthusiastic taxi driver – at least in the beginning. Perhaps I was arrogant and thought it beneath me. God wasn't going to let me get away with that, though.

One day I was driving a woman who had a drug addiction home from the hospital after her close call with death. We had a sincere conversation, and when she got out of the taxi she said, 'Thank you for that moment of peace and for listening.' Though brief, ours was a true connection. Later that evening I was blessed to see a spectacular sunset of golden pink hues from the taxi, and peace about my vocation washed over me. Suddenly I knew that God would use me for ministry no matter where I ended up – whether in a pulpit or a taxi.

Our God is so expansive that he was able to pitch a tent for the sun (see Psalm 19:4). Every day he give us fresh revelations; we only have to pay attention. Thanks be to God!

Prayer: Dear God, help us not to miss new insights about how to serve you. Amen.

Thought for the day: Ministry can happen anywhere.

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