

NBC Devotional
January 3, 2024
“Listening to God”

On the second Sunday of Advent this year, Psalm 85 verse 8 began to resonate within me. “I will listen to what God the Lord says; ...” Psalm 85:8a

I felt like the Spirit was saying to my spirit, “listen;” that’s what I want you to do.

Experts have determined that the average human attention span is now 8.25 seconds. In the year 2000, it was 12 seconds. Even worse, the average attention span of a goldfish is 9 seconds!



Occasionally I struggle to be an attentive listener. I’m often distracted by formulating a response in my head, when what I should be doing is really listening. If my wife Susan gives me more than three things to get at the store, I need a list. As she’s speaking, I’m already responding in my head thinking about where those items are in the store, and I stop really listening.

Learning to Listen to God

Sometimes I can tend to do that with God as well. You may suffer that same struggle. While God speaks continuously, sometimes we’re only listening shallowly, and after a mere 8.25 seconds, we find ourselves distracted by the noise of life, and we lose focus of God’s voice.

In Luke chapter 2, we read that Joseph and Mary take the infant Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to present him to the Lord as written in the law of Moses.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

For my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel.” Luke 2:25-32

We also meet two characters, Simeon, and Anna. We learn that God had made a promise to Simeon, and he heard that promise. God had revealed to him that he would not die before he had

seen the consolation of Israel, the Messiah. And guess what? Simeon wasn't dead yet, so he was still listening and watching!

That morning when the Holy Spirit spoke to him, he was listening, and he followed the leading of the Spirit into the temple courts. When Joseph and Mary show up with the infant Jesus, Simeon sees what he had been hearing, takes the infant Jesus in his arms, and praises God (Luke 2:29-32). From that praise, we have what is known to the church as the "Nunc Dimittis."

Simeon's name in Hebrew means "he who hears" or "man of hearing." The primitive root of Simeon is the Hebrew word *shama'*. The Holy Spirit had revealed something deeper to Simeon, because he had learned how to listen deeply, to listen beyond the distractions of life. We're not told when the Spirit revealed this promise to him, but from that moment, he was listening for the future, for hope, for the one who comes bringing peace and light.

Undoubtedly, in the waiting, Simeon's ears were distracted by the noise of life around him. Yet, he was still listening deeper, and because he was listening on that day, he heard the invitation of the God he loved. When he heard, he went, and he welcomed the "One who comes" with a song of salvation.

Anna is also there. We are told she is very old, enjoyed a short marriage, was widowed, and never left the temple. Worshipping night and day, fasting and praying, her hearing perhaps dulled by age. Even so, she was listening and waiting as well.

On that day, she would see what Simeon had heard, because she was listening! While Simeon is blessing the couple, Anna approaches, "Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38).

As Simeon sings and Anna speaks to everyone, moving from one person to the next, it seems that the only people hearing what these two saints see are Mary and Joseph.

This should have been among the greatest moments of worship with the fullness of the Godhead present (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). The temple ought to have been resonating in worshipful praise and song. The Messiah was there!

Yet, it seems there was silence. What Simeon and Anna had heard, seen, and proclaimed, now fell on unperceiving ears that were neither listening nor watching. When Joseph and Mary had done everything required, they quietly left and returned to Nazareth in Galilee.

What about us? Are we the same way? I wonder if I had been present at the temple that day, would I have seen what they heard?

We spend time in prayer, talking, telling, and asking God to intercede. But how much time do we spend listening, really listening? As we move into this new year, let's allow the Lord to teach us to hear (??? *shama'*), to listen, as a verb, hearing to understand and obey - to listen deeply to what the Lord is saying - to pray prayers of listening - to engage Scripture with ears attuned to God's voice. It is there, after all, in the Word, where we learn to distinguish God's voice from the noise of life.

I am confident of this, as His people and His church, if we learn to listen deeper, God will speak candidly. If we learn to trust, God will lead, and if we learn to follow, God will show up and meet us there!

When God shows up and meets us there, we will be like Simeon and Anna. We won't be able to stop talking about Him. And the worship on our lips will never be stilled. We might even ask others "do you see what I hear?"

Questions:

1. If we became a church that is learning to listen deeper, what might God reveal to us?
2. What might God desire to tell you, or where might you be challenged, if you learn to listen attentively, watch expectantly, and respond faithfully to God's leading?
3. How might our worship be impacted if we start recognizing what God has told us to listen for?

Prayer: Lord, teach us to listen deeply. May we know the calm assurance of Jesus' presence resting upon us and may we be the bearer of God's ongoing presence at work in our world.

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