

LISTENING ALONGSIDE



ECHOING CHRIST

Lenten Devotions 2017

**Sunday,
March 5, 2017**

Throughout this Lenten devotion series, in addition to sharing reflections from members of the congregation and other poems, quotes, and thoughts about listening for God, we will also offer suggestions for spiritual exercises or disciplines that may be useful as we seek to listen alongside one another and learn better how to echo the life and teachings of Christ.

From *The Good and Beautiful God* by James Bryan Smith

Listening for God in the silence

Our world is noisy and hurried, and few of us stop to be still. The God who is good can only reach us when we are quiet. To paraphrase the psalmist, we must be “still” to know that God is “good.” This week, I encourage you to try to find five minutes each day to sit in silence. Get a cup of something warm and delicious, find a comfortable chair, and just sit quietly. That’s all. It is not terribly difficult, but it yields great benefits. Some tips:

- *Look for little free spaces in your day, such as a break between activities.
- *Get up a little earlier or leave for your next appointment a little sooner so that when you arrive you will have extra time to find a quiet place and “just be.”
- *A lot of people find that their thoughts run to and fro during this time of silence. That is normal. Your mind is used to helping you solve problems; it is not used to being still. Here are two tips that will help with the crazy “thought monkeys” that plague the discipline of silence:
 1. Have a notepad nearby to jot down things that may come to your mind, such as a phone call you need to make or the laundry that needs to be done. This will help to quiet your minds.
 2. You may want to “ease in” to the five minutes by reading the Bible for a minute or two.

It may seem challenging at first, but with a little effort you should be able to do this easily every day. I suspect that soon you will find this exercise increasingly important to your daily life. It will help you slow down and become present, more able to focus on God in your midst. It might lead you into a regular practice of developing “rests” that make the notes (your actions) in your life become beautiful music.¹

Prayer

God of the seasons,
God of the years,
God of the eons,
 Alpha and Omega,
 before us and after us.

You promise and we wait:
 we wait with eager longing,
 we wait amid doubt and anxiety,
 we wait with patience thin
 and then doubt,
 and then we take life into our
 own hands.

We wait because you are the one and the only one.
We wait for your peace and your mercy,
 for your justice and your good rule.

Give us your spirit that we may wait
 obediently and with discernment,
 caringly and without passivity,
 trustingly and without cynicism,
 honestly and without utopianism.
Grant that our wait may be appropriate to your coming
 soon and very soon,
 soon and not late,
 late but not too late.

We wait while the world groans in eager longing.
 -Walter Brueggemann
 From *Prayers for a Privileged People*

¹James Bryan Smith. *The Good and Beautiful God*. InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2009, 52-53.

Isaiah 40:28-31

Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.
He gives power to the faint,
and strengthens the powerless.
Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;
but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.

Revelation 3:14-22

“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God’s creation:

“I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. For you say, ‘I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.’ You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent. Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”