

LISTENING ALONGSIDE



ECHOING CHRIST

Lenten Devotions 2017

**Tuesday,
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A Listener's Prayer

By Elizabeth Edwards

Why is it so hard for us to hear you, God?

You speak in every moment and every heartbeat, in accents and inflections that are unmistakably yours. Your voice whispers in every breeze and hums in the rustling of leaves. It trills in the songs of birds and shouts to us in the thunder. We can hear your intonations in words of encouragement offered by friends, in the laughter of children on the playground, in songs that bring to mind sweet memories, and in the rhythms of our own breathing.

And yet, we fail to listen.

Sometimes we walk through your world too distracted by the pings of our smart phones or the chatter of 24-hour news cycles to notice that you are trying to get our attention. The busyness of our schedules and the illusions of our self-importance leave little time for listening.

Even when we are still and quiet, all we hear is the drone of the to-do list that burdens us, the recitation of resentments we harbor, murmurs of criticisms that have been hurled at us, or the babel of our own insecurities and fears. The din of noises which assault our hearing leave little room for discerning the still, small voice of your Spirit within us.

And perhaps we are afraid to listen too closely, frightened that we will hear a message that will change us, terrified that you may say something that will challenge our long-held and comfortable assumptions or that will send us out from our sanctuaries of complacency. Maybe it's unsettling to listen too carefully for fear that you may tell us to take a risk, to reach out to someone who is hard to love, or to leave the security we know for an unfamiliar land.

Listening is hard, Lord, and we are worried about what we might hear. So, calm our restless souls and teach us to listen attentively, we pray, for yours is the voice we long for, the word we need to hear. Open our ears to all the ways you speak to us, for it is your voice which will call us, guiding us to listen alongside your creation and our brothers and sisters in the human family. Pronounce words of peace and of re-creation around and within us so that we might echo your good news of justice and compassion. Grant us the courage to quiet the distractions, especially those of our own making, and turn our focus toward you, trusting that in listening mindfully and earnestly, we will hear Christ's voice calling us to the abundant and joyful life you have promised.

Speak, Lord, for your servants are listening. Amen.

2 Timothy 1:6-10

For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Mark 4:1-20

Again he began to teach beside the lake. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the lake and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the lake on the land. He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold." And he said, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"

When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables; in order that 'they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.'"

And he said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word. These are the ones on the path where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: when they hear the word, they immediately receive it with joy. But they have no root, and endure only for a while; then, when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are those sown among the thorns: these are the ones who hear the word, but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing. And these are the ones sown on the good soil: they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold."