

LISTENING ALONGSIDE



ECHOING CHRIST

Lenten Devotions 2017

**Wednesday,
March 15, 2017**

By Carol Boseman Taylor

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me."

Words of Jesus, John 10:27

I remember the weekend well for many reasons, but one reason that stands out in particular was an exercise in listening. My husband and I had only been married a few years when we decided to go on a marriage retreat with our Sunday School class. It was in the depth of winter and we were in Harker's Island, NC. (That experience in itself is worthy of a short story.)

As a part of the retreat, our leader had us engage in a listening exercise. None of us was particularly concerned about engaging in this exercise. We all spend our lives listening and talking, right? The retreat leader asked us to sit down in front of each other. Each spouse would be given 10 minutes to talk, UNINTERRUPTED, after which the other spouse would have his/her ten minutes to talk. A timer was set and the first spouse began to talk.

Initially it was difficult to know what to say if you were the one talking. At first the chatter was not about very meaningful things, but after a while, some pretty deep things came out: What you like about your spouse, your marriage; What troubles you about your spouse, your marriage; What you might like to see change in your marriage relationship? So you can imagine that as one talked on, one had to find more things to say and more feelings and issues came to the forefront. I think it was good for the spouse to get those things off his/her chest and out into the open.

As the LISTENING spouse, things were interesting. I can only speak for myself, but as I listened to my husband talk, my thoughts were swirling about how I would answer, how I would defend myself. After a while, I FORGOT what I was going to say. It was at this point that I released my thoughts of defense and rebuttal go and I began to really LISTEN to what my husband was saying. Really listen.

And then it struck me: We DO NOT listen to each other. Not just to our spouses or to our children, but we really do not listen to anyone. Not really. You think you listen. You think you hear. But actually, you are busy trying to figure out how to respond. When you are not allowed to respond and defend, it is amazing what you actually hear.

In the past few years I have practiced listening to God. I sit quietly with Bible and journal and pen in hand and listen for that still, small voice to tell me what to write. I have prayed for better listening skills and those skills are being honed daily.

In this season of Lent, I challenge each of us to really listen. Listen! As you hear your friends and neighbors espousing their points of view, do not constantly think of why they are wrong and what you might say to convince them of your opinions. Instead, be present. Be quiet. Be loving and compassionate.

But even more important during this Holy season, listen to the still, small voice of God. Make time in your busy lives for God's voice to be heard. Hear God in nature. Hear God as you read your Bibles and devotional guides. Recognize God in the voices and lives of those around you. Allow yourself to come close to the Holy and listen and hear God's teaching, instructions, comfort and love for you and for your loved ones. Listen alongside and echo God in your life.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you were ever ready to listen to those who cried out to you. You gave us ears to hear: help us to hear. May we listen to all we meet, and to those who come to us in trouble. Remind us daily that there is a time for silence and a time for speaking, and show us when to speak and when to hold our peace. Never let us miss a cry for help because we are too busy talking about ourselves. Make us ready to listen to others, because we listen each day in silence to you, O Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

—Michael Counsell

From *2,000 Years of Prayer*

James 1:19-25

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.