

IMPROVING OUR LISTEN

Faith Practices: Listening

January 15, 2023

*The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep.
The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice.
He calls his own sheep by name and he leads them out.
When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them,
and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.*

John 10:2-4

Listening and knowing

“I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. ³ The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them

John 10, note that “they” try to kill Jesus by the end of this discussion (see 10:31-33)

1. The shepherd knows the sheep by name before the sheep know the shepherd’s voice
2. Listening always results in following
3. The practice of listening begins with the discipline of discerning between voices (see 1 John 4:1)
3. The first gift to those who listen: knowing the shepherd’s heart

⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

¹¹ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

¹⁴ “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep

A song about listening and the word: Isaiah 55

Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.
³ Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live
⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.
¹⁰ As the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
¹¹ so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.
Isaiah 55

1. Isaiah’s song is God’s invitation to the goodness and transformation of God’s word
2. Isaiah’s song looks back to the central truth of the *shema*’ – “The Lord our God is Lord alone!”
3. Because God’s ways are “higher”, his word will be our primary way of knowing him

Listening to each other

¹⁹ *My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,* ²⁰ *for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.* ²¹ *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.*

²² *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.* ²³ *Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.* ²⁵ *But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.*

James 1

1. James knows that listening happens in the context of the curse and conflict
2. Listening is still a great response to conflict
3. “Mere” listening loses its transforming power

Blessings from listening

1. We begin with a God who listens

I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy.

² Because he inclined his ear to me,
therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

³ The snares of death encompassed me;
the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;
I suffered distress and anguish.

⁴ Then I called on the name of the LORD: “O LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!”

Psalm 116

2. Listening is at the heart of true wisdom

¹³ He who answers before listening— that is his folly and his shame.

Proverbs 18:13 (see 8:34 for the patience part of listening)

3. Listening answers some very important “pastoral” questions about salvation

²² Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon’s Colonnade. ²⁴ The Jews gathered around him, saying, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”

²⁵ Jesus answered, “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father’s name speak for me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.”

John 10

4. Listening is how we get to the promised land – and how we live in the promised land!

These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, ² so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. ³ Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you.

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 6

Resources for further studies in faith practices

“Faith Practices” is available from Faith Alive at <https://www.faithaliveresources.org/Products/810786/faith-practices.aspx>

Doug likes Spurgeon’s “sheep” sermon on John 10 at <https://www.monergism.com/sheep-who-will-never-perish>

Bob Deffinbaugh has two “Shepherd” sermons on John 10 at <https://bible.org/series/you-might-believe-study-gospel-john>

Yohanna Katanacho has a look at John 10 in his *Reading the Gospel of John Through Palestinian Eyes* (Langham, 2020), pages 51-57.

Two books that make a theological argument for listening during conflict:

Munayer and Loden’s *Through My Enemy’s Eyes* (2013) was written by a Palestinian Christian and Israeli Messianic Jew.

Managing Polarities in Congregations (Rowman and Littlefield, 2009) is the book that Rev. Al Postma uses when working through conflict in the church

Several of the “wonder” articles I looked at this week:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/passion/201509/7-ways-spark-your-sense-wonder>

<https://berghconsulting.com/13-ways-to-cultivate-your-sense-of-wonder/>

<https://www.thispilgrimlife.com/cultivate-wonder-kids/>

<https://richinwhatmatters.com/2022/03/05/reclaiming-the-wonder-of-ordinary-life/>

Lewis addresses wonder in his “[Weight of Glory](#)” essay at with a good analysis at

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/the-weight-of-glory-c-s-lewiss-remarkable-and-surprising-sermon/>

Several of the “listening” articles I looked at:

“Harvard Business Review” at <https://hbr.org/2012/06/the-discipline-of-listening>

From the CRCNA Network: <https://network.crcna.org/topic/spiritual-formation/faith-practices/difficult-spiritual-discipline-listening>

Piper’s “Ten Reasons to Listen” at <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/ten-reasons-to-listen-to-questions-before-you-answer>