

“Living Meaningfully, Loving Deeply – Listening to God, Others and to Myself” (Disclaimer)

Intro: Most of us, whether we know it or not, are searching for meaning in life... What have you found fills your life with meaning?

- a. Self-expression, the arts – when we listen to ourselves and the world around us and bring forth the beauty we have seen and heard...
- b. Another gives to us a gift from their heart... Some soul-connection through the gift...
- c. A major goal accomplished... A big success...
- d. Coming through a major trial or challenge...
- e. Becoming part of a desired group... acceptance by people deemed important...
- f. Having made a difference in this world...
- g. To love and be loved – and know it.
- h. That is...
 - a. Expression
 - b. Achievement
 - c. Intimacy
 - d. Other?

I. To Listen is to Live Deeply and Meaningfully for those whose Souls Find meaning in Intimacy.

- a. **Definition of Intimacy** – “Close familiarity or friendship” and there are many levels and stages of intimacy, but none of them are gained without “listening” to another.
- b. When we listen meaningfully we...
 - a. Open our minds and hearts to another.
 - i. ***“Listening is an attitude of the heart, a genuine desire to be with another which both attracts and heals.*** (attr to J. Isham)”
– Sura Hart, Respectful Parents, Respectful Kids: 7 Keys to Turn Family Conflict into Cooperation
 - ii. ***“Listening is a gift of spiritual significance that you can learn to give to others. When you listen, you give one a sense of importance, hope and love that he or she may not receive any other way. Through listening, we nurture and validate the feelings one has, especially when he or she experiences difficulties in life.”***
– H. Norman Wright
 - iii. Speaking and Listening in the Pandemic-- Both are life giving
 - b. **We pay them the honor of valuing them and their ideas...** Even if we disagree.
 - c. **We create an hospitable place / relationship** in which they can relax, explore, listen to themselves... To ask a simple question and wait for the answer is to create a safe place in a moment for the other and for us to join the other there...
 - i. Tom Yorty .. We listened to each other and formed a relationship.
 - ii. Readers Digest some years ago had an article that suggested that if you want to fall in love with someone ask them questions and listen carefully to their responses... then ask and answer more questions...
 - d. **Types of listening...**
 - i. Reflective listening – attempt to relate back the essence of what the person is saying to show understanding and connection

- ii. E-Listening (Emotional Listening) - "That sounds sad... I hear your excitement growing as you talk..."
- iii. Silence, especially with people struggling...

"To listen is very hard, because it asks of us so much interior stability that we no longer need to prove ourselves by speeches, arguments, statements, or declarations. True listeners no longer have an inner need to make their presence known. They are free to receive, to welcome, to accept."

Listening is much more than allowing another to talk while waiting for a chance to respond. Listening is paying full attention to others and welcoming them into our very beings. The beauty of listening is that, those who are listened to start feeling accepted, start taking their words more seriously and discovering their own true selves. Listening is a form of spiritual hospitality by which you invite strangers to become friends, to get to know their inner selves more fully, and even to dare to be silent with you."

– Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith*

- II. **Listening to Others.... Ten minutes ...** Divided into two's... Be curious.... Confidential...
 - a. Alternate asking questions... Two/ Three questions... Start simple and progress...
 - b. You have the right to decline to answer a question...
 - a. **Possible Questions** – (Choose two or three out of four)
 1. What is one of your happiest childhood memories?
 2. If you could visit anyone anywhere, who would it be? Where would you go?
 3. Who is your best friend? Describe that person?
 4. Describe a time when you really had to lean on your faith and what happened?
 - c. Afterwards? How'd it feel...?

- III. **Listening to Ourselves...** Sounds selfish or myopic? In an attempt to know ourselves... Step back and ask... Greek Inscription, "Know Thyself." Inscription on Temple in Delphi, Greece.
 - a. If you were to describe yourself now to a good friend from the past, who would you say you are now?
 - b. "What is my thought default? Where does my mind go when the subconscious bubbles up? What is that saying about your needs? Desires? Fears? Hopes?"
 - c. "What is my emotional state at the moment?"
 - d. "What is my body saying to me about myself?"
 - e. Discouraged? Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired?" So how do I care for me... At peace? Filled? Content? Alive and Leaning into life?"
 - f. How is my relationship with God? Am I aware of God's blessings? God's love for me?
 - g. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090- 1153): ***"The one who is wise, therefore will see his/her life more as a reservoir than a canal. The canal simultaneously pours out what it receives; the reservoir retains the water till it is filled, then discharges the overflow without loss to itself... Today, there are many in the church who act like canals, the reservoirs are***

far too rare... You must learn to await the fullness before pouring out your gifts; do not be more generous than God."

- h. Mahatmas Gandhi: "Don't listen to your friends when the friend inside you says, 'Do this...'"
- i. **Jesus in the Wilderness** – the great biblical example of listening to one's self. Jesus answers some deep inner questions before he is ready to begin ministry...
- j. **Take the next ten minutes --- to listen to yourself, your inner friend... As one of the above questions. They will remain on the screen... step away if you like...**

IV. Listening to God – Principles of Intimacy Apply...

a. Preconditions:

- i. Peter Marshall's story quoted in Willard's Hearing God...
- ii. We were each created for relationships – with others and with God.
- iii. God of Love and Truth is always communicating with us... God wants to be with us...

I. When They "Heard" God's Voice...

- a. 2 Kings 22:3ff High Priest Hilkiah finds and brings the Book of the Law to Josiah
- b. 2 Samuel 12: 1-14 – Nathan the prophet rebukes David, who is spirit-convicted.
- c. Matthew 3: 12-17: Jesus (and Others) hears, "You are my beloved son..." at Baptism.
- d. Acts 9:1-19: Paul is converted by meeting Jesus, and Ananias is directed by an angel.
- e. Acts 13:1-3: "While they worshipping and fasting, the Spirit said..."
- f. Luke 5:1: "... the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God."
- g. Revelation 1:9-20: God/Jesus reveals His desires/plans/word to John to write

II. Ways God "Speaks," Communicates in the Above Passages:

- a. The Reading of Scripture, powered by the Holy Spirit – 2 Kings 22:3ff
- b. Through prophets – 2 Samuel 12:1-14
- c. Engaged with Father and the Holy Spirit in real time and "audible" voice – Mt 3:12-17
- d. Vision of Jesus and hearing voice and conversation – Acts 9: 1-19
- e. God's Spirit speaks in worship and community – Acts 13:1-3
- f. Through Jesus' teaching/preaching, "Word of God, preached" (Barth) – Luke 5:1
- g. Private Vision/Encounter to communicate God's revelation to the church – Rev 1:9ff
- h. In our daily life through what we read, conversations we have, events...
- i. Other?

III. Our Stories of God Communicating / Speaking with us... Think back / Ask God to bring to your mind, times when God "spoke to you..."

IV. Practices which Position / Attune us to Better Hear the Voice of God:

- a. Personal Daily Bible Reading: <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/devotion/daily/>
 - i. Dwelling in the Word / Word, Share, Prayer and other forms
 - ii. Ask: What does this passage teach me about God / about humanity?
 - iii. Talk with God over the passage... God, does this passage intersect with my life? If so, what are you inviting me to?
- b. Fasting and Various forms of Prayer...
 - i. Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication – ACTS

- ii. Christ in the Chair across / with you – Visionary Prayer
- c. **Being in Christian Worship...**
- d. **Being in Christian Community...**
- e. **Reading Writings of Historical and Contemporary Christians...**
- f. **Spiritual Disciplines train us / form us to be like Christ and position us to hear God...**
 - i. **Disciplines of Abstinence:** Solitude, silence, prayer, fasting (from activities)
 - ii. **Disciplines of Engagement:** Worship, Service, Community, Bible Study, art, etc...
- g. **Spiritual Direction:** *“The purpose of group spiritual direction is to provide a place where individuals can experience what it means to be listened to and loved by others, so that they can learn to listen more attentively to God in their daily lives and be used by God to spread God’s grace and love throughout the world.”*

- Alice Fryling, *Seeking God Together*, IVP

V. **Your One Takeaway is...**



Christ In The Wilderness is a painting by Briton Riviere which was uploaded on January 31st, 2011.

***Hearing God*, Dallas Willard, Developing a Conversational Relationship with God, IVP Books; 2012.**