

## Sacred Listening-Actively Waiting Prepositions Proverbs 8:22-36

Adam Hamilton's book, *The Walk*, introduces ways of listening. Perhaps it might be better to say the modes of listening: nature, arts, through personal and other's experiences, reading the Scriptures, prayer, the inspiration of Holy Spirit, communion, all means of listening to get to know God. Listening is challenging.

Sometimes, the English language drives me crazy when I am asking a question.

Does listening involve "listening to God", or is it listening for God? I asked this question with two different questions empowering preposition. "To" and "For."

In what ways can you practice listening to God? Listening to someone has benefits. It's a time to focus, helping someone while helping yourself. Effective communication ensuring what you hear is what was said.

In what ways can you practice listening for God? How does God speak to you? How does God move you? What has God called you to be as well as do?

Each preposition frames the question differently. "How we practice listening for God means we first have to listen for that small still voice. Listen to God, and when God speaks, you are listening to what God is asking of you.

So, I named each perspective with the following phases or thoughts:

To listen for God requires sacred listening.

To listen to God requires active waiting.

In each discipline, you are doing both-first listening for God, then actively waiting upon God.

Hearing God's voice requires a listening heart. Mastering the art of sacred listening is my greatest challenge. When listening, I've found myself developing a terrible habit. I tend to jump in and finish people's sentences or thoughts.

The art of sacred listening for God invites me into a realm I find uncomfortable: silence. I must quiet my heart. I must embrace the stillness that allows me to listen. To know that it is God who is speaking.

So, I've been disciplining myself to remain silent. I'm refining this area in my life. I've wondered and become aware of how often I do this with God. How often do I cut God off? Assuming I already know what, is going to be said? Or Do I try to put words into God's mouth?

While this may sound counterintuitive, silence is a key to satisfying the hunger for hearing God. When you think about feeding your appetite, you might have visions of rushing up to a dining room table filled with savory chicken and side dishes that smell like Thanksgiving.

However, sometimes rushing the meal is the worst thing we can do. God wants to feed us, but first, we must learn to sit quietly. Allow God to serve a banquet for our souls. Do not rush the meal. Listening for God takes time and silence.

Silence asks me to close my mouth to open my heart. It is challenging.

I remember the first time I tried to practice silence. The first few moments of silence are the hardest. I become painfully aware of the hum of the refrigerator, the muffled clang of the dryer. In the stillness, a wave of chores left undone crashes over me. I was easily distracted by a chirping bird.

As I move deeply inwardly, I notice an itch. It's a distraction, tempting me to scratch. My nose tingle, my mind wondered. Then I begin to focus on sacred listening.

I dealt with each distraction by first acknowledging them, then gently calling myself back with an image or a word. For me, I used an image like "a lighted candle" or a "word" I whisper in my mind's eye: "center." It helps me to focus wholly on the divine presence to hear, to listen for God.

Slowly, my mind, body, and spirit embrace the silence as a gift. As my listening sharpens, I realize that sacred listening in the silence has its beautiful rhythm. In this place, I actively waited.

Sometimes I hear nothing at all. Other times I'll begin thinking of someone long forgotten. Or I'll remember the need of a particular friend. When a thought emerges, I embrace a word or thought in the Scripture I read. I offer up prayers to God or ask a question- How does this matter? What is revealed? How can I serve?

At times, I'll feel compelled to pray, serve, or give in some way. Other times, I'll sit in silence with a renewed awareness of what's important to God.

These moments taught me God is passionate about the poor. God aches for justice, longs for relationships. I've learned about the tenderness of God, discovered new depths of divine love, and treasure the sweet moments of being in the divine presence.

Sacred listening forced me to learn and practice the patience of actively waiting: waiting to listen for/to God. When God speaks, God reveals new insights.

Actively waiting isn't easy and doesn't always deliver the answer we desire. In truth, listening took me to a place I did not want to go. Thomas Merton, influenced by a Spanish Mystic John the Cross, used the term, when I hear it, frighten my soul, "The dark night of the soul."

It is a wilderness journey where God is silent, absent. You feel abandoned. A time to let go of the old self to embrace a newer self. A time of turning your world upside down that strips away to construct a new self. Learning to hear, recognize and discern how God speaks isn't snappy. Waiting and listening times

are where God works within us in ways that are unrecognizable at first, but over time reveal their priceless worth. In my darkest moment, I wrote these words in Oct 2013.

Spiritual journeys/experiences are much like an artist's rendering. An artist picks up the selected brush, approaches the canvas, and pauses. Before them is a blank slate, prepared to accept water/acrylic colors on the painter's palette. Where to start? Where to make the first stroke? Like an artist sketching a picture, or a pebble skipping across the surface of a pond, a young heart lays in the meadow waiting. Our souls long for depths like ripples.

### The Pebble

A pebble skipped across the surface, again and again,  
Until it reaches its final resting place,  
Waiting to be picked up again, desiring to go deeper.

What I failed to realize is awakenings are emerging, adding to my sacred story. Never-ending stories evolving my whole life, continuing to emerge, connecting my past with my present and the present with my future.

How can I help others if I am not willing to find myself?

Proverbs 8:36

Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gate, waiting at my doorway.

If you are like most people, you probably hate to wait. I am not a good waiter. Yet, that is what God wants me to learn: actively wait. We are busy people; we all have more to do on any given day than we can accomplish. Over and over again, Scripture commands us to wait. "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him (Psalms 37:7). The key is waiting on God to speak at any moment, at any time, is to listen while waiting.

Whether you are sitting at a stoplight, standing in the long checkout line at the supermarket, flipping idly through an old magazine in a physician's waiting room, I am sure you are thinking about "What a blessing it is to wait? We know the old saying, "Good things come to those who wait, right?"

The Bible teaches to wait for God. In our listening, watching, and waiting, we develop a spiritual discipline bringing God's blessing.

When life's circumstances seem to delay us from our intended goal, we can be sure God has a good reason. In our listening, our watching, our waiting, God is building our faith and character. Faith is being sure of what we hope for and

certain of what we do not see' (Hebrews 11:1). When we wait, our faith becomes strong.

In all the ways of listening for God's voice, the common thread is a simple discipline but challenging practice: be still, then actively waiting-listen, watch, and wait. When I hear the words "wait," I think about the lyrics of a song by John Waller entitled "While I'm Waiting:

**I'm waiting  
I'm waiting on You, Lord  
And I am hopeful  
I'm waiting on You, Lord  
Though it is painful  
But patiently, I will wait**

**I will move ahead, bold and  
confident,  
Taking every step-in obedience  
While I'm waiting  
I will serve You  
While I'm waiting  
I will worship  
While I'm waiting  
I will not faint**

**I'll be running the race  
Even while I wait**

**I'm waiting  
I'm waiting on You, Lord  
And I am peaceful  
I'm waiting on You, Lord  
Though it's not easy  
But faithfully, I will wait  
Yes, I will wait  
I will serve You while I'm waiting  
I will worship while I'm waiting  
I will serve You while I'm waiting  
I will worship while I'm waiting  
I will serve you while I'm waiting  
I will worship while I'm waiting on  
You, Lord**

Only God can see the big picture. He has planned everything to intertwine perfectly in the end. Part of His plan includes working through all the means of listening as we wait.

Actively waiting, sacred listening gives us time to take stock of our blessings. Are you breathing? Then, rejoice in life! Do you see the blue sky or even a cloudy one? Thank God for the ability to see. Can you hear the sound of the wind blowing through the trees or a child laughing? Praise God for hearing!

Turn the waits, turn the silences into a treasure hunt for the blessings we often take for granted. I encourage you to keep a journal, listing all your prayers, recounting the blessings, moments of God speaking to you. Moments when God asks you to be or do something unexpectedly.

Never forget that answers come in God's time -- not ours. Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV) says, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'" God has promised His own a hopeful future. Rest in God's faithfulness. He will answer you.

We all know that God's timing is perfect. And as we actively wait upon God to open up the next door in our lives, let us listen for His small still voice. For good things come to those who wait upon the Lord.

Prayer: Lord, I wait on You and listen for your voice. Speak to my heart about the things I need to hear. Teach me all I need to know. Thank You for the great blessings that await anyone who waits at Your door and listens for Your voice. In these times of waiting, let me know that you are transiting my life into your image.  
Amen