

## **“A Listening Heart”**

**1 Kings 3:3-14**

**5/16/10**

**God is calling us to transformation within ourselves, and thereby a transformation of how we treat the world around us.**

God is always at work, moving, breathing His Word into our lives. But once and a while He does something that changes you.

We lived in a farmhouse in PA, which was set back off of a pretty busy road. I always said the hill we lived on held some weird special powers, because if someone was going to breakdown, it was always right at our house.

Well, one summer day, yet another car broke down and, as was custom for folks, they left it right in the entrance to our driveway, blocking our way and line of vision, which was dangerous with how fast cars went by. I dealt with it for a day, then when it was still there the next day, I called the state police, just so we could have it towed and free up our driveway.

We had a yellow lab, Clifford, at the time. He was as harmless as you could get—perhaps just lick you to death if you came to our house. But I put him inside so the police officer would not have to deal with him. Well, one hour, two hours, three hours went by. After four hours, I had to let the dog out. I didn't know if anyone was coming at all at that point.

Sure enough, over four hours after I called the police, I looked out the window to see a police cruiser in our driveway. Shelley and I walked out, and there was Clifford saying his usual, over-friendly hello to the state trooper. Clearly, the trooper was not pleased.

He stood there, brushing off the fur from his pants, a big, tall man with all his weapons and radio strapped on, as he looked down at me with an angry scowl and said, “You were supposed to secure your dog before I got here.” More comments were made as I apologized up and down, but the trooper quickly left, and in no good mood, leaving Shelley and me feeling like we had just committed a crime, truly hurt and demoralized by the man's words. He was pretty harsh.

We felt pretty bad after all that, just to get the car out of our driveway.

Well, we of course went back to our usual lives, no major harm done, but that always left a bad taste in our mouths. And then one day, two years after that event, I watched as a state police car drove up to our house. Sure enough, it was the same officer that our dog Clifford had greeted two years before.

Of course my first thought was that something was wrong. Shelley and I went out again to greet him, and yes, so did Clifford. But this time the officer was petting Clifford, obviously in a much different mood.

He asked us if we remembered him, which of course we did. And then something happened I never thought I would see: this big, burly state trooper, gun and taser at his side, stood there and in absolute humility, said he was sorry. Two years after the incident, he came to our house with the sole purpose of apologizing.

He said that for those two years he drove by our house everyday to go to work. He said many days he would see us all outside, our children and dog, all playing and clearly enjoying good family time. And for those two years, he said it burned in his heart how he treated us that day.

He went on to say that that particular day two years ago he was having a terrible day. He was the shift supervisor and things were going all wrong for him that day, so when he got to our house he was in a bad mood.

As we talked, it came out that I am a pastor, to which he felt even worse. He then said that he is a Christian and God had truly worked on him all this time and moved in his heart to come and talk with us. Of course we thanked him—I think Shelley even gave him a hug. ☺

God had worked on his heart, but he had no idea what a gift God had given to us in that. It was something I didn't think I would ever experience. And it gave us hope that people can and do change.

He listened to God's leading. God's Word burned within his heart. And he was transformed, which thereby opened our hearts even more to God's work.

There are a lot of voices out there. To whom do we listen?

Solomon was king of Israel. His father was King David, the great King of Israel. And when David died, Solomon took over and became great himself, wise and finally built the temple of the Lord. Listen.

**[READ 1 Kings 3:3-14]**

“Ask me what I should give you,” God says. Quite a statement! “Ask what I should give you.” What would you say if God said that to you? This isn't a quiz show with Solomon sitting in the hot seat while God fires a million-dollar question at him. God wants to know what Solomon wants for his life.

So Solomon says, “I need an understanding mind.” Solomon doesn't ask for long life, for riches, or his enemies' lives—all of which would be a natural response to such a loaded statement. He doesn't ask for a temporary fix to a problem. Solomon knew what he needed the most, what would be the most valuable part of his relationship with God—a heart for God. “Understanding mind” in Hebrew literally means “listening heart.”

He asks for a listening heart, so as to always know what is the God-thing to do.

And so God blesses him. Solomon becomes famous, not just because he was blessed, but because his great wisdom becomes a tremendous blessing to everyone else.

There is so much to pray for, so many needs and situations we get into. So many people to connect with in life. But first and foremost we need to know God and what He wants for our lives in every moment we are in.

**Pray for a listening heart.**

What does it mean to listen?

I listen to a lot of different sounds and voices everyday. I listen to music, to the rain falling, the car engine humming. I listen to the voices of my children and my wife. I listen to my heart beat as I lay my head down to rest.

Jesus said, “*Let anyone with ears to hear, listen.*”

In John 10:27 He said, “*My sheep listen to my voice.*”

You can hear, but not truly be listening.

Did you ever talk with someone and know full well they are not listening to you? You know, you start sharing with someone, “Hey man, I just had an amazing experience, I was walking down the street...” And sure enough the person's eyes start wandering, seeing something over there that is more interesting than what I am saying.

Or, if you're talking with someone and you can see that their mind is just waiting for your words to be done so they can get their next thought in.

My amazingly faithful wife, Shelley, married an introvert. She did not know all that she was getting into, but she has learned something about my inner mind. Often she will ask a question, and she doesn't get an immediate response.

The question might be simple. I am sitting at the table. She has set food before me. She opens the refrigerator door and asks, "What would you like to drink?" She expects an immediate, one-word answer, such as "tea." What she gets is silence and a puzzled expression.

What she learned is that, as an introvert, even though I hear her, I am preoccupied with another train of thought, and her question takes me a minute to process.

As an introvert, an inner conversation is already going on inside of me, and the giver of sustenance is put on hold. She may give me a drink of her own choice, or she may give me nothing, because I am not responsive to her words.

Like my wife, God speaks, but so often we are too preoccupied with ourselves to respond. Are we aware that the One giving us sustenance at this very moment has spoken? The Source of every good gives us life and everything necessary to live it in relation with him. He speaks that we might be sustained and refreshed in our knowledge of him. The most offensive thing we can do is refuse to enter the conversation.

Give your servant a listening heart, O God. What does it mean to listen?

**Listening is being open and responsive to what someone is saying.**

When I truly listen to someone who is sharing with me, I hear the words spoken, but I am thinking about what this person is really saying to me: why they are chosen, how they are spoken, and all that taken in context of who is saying them.

A listening heart. Attentive, open, responsive.

The heart for Solomon, or any Israelite, was both the seat of the intellect and an organ of perception. So,

**A listening heart is one that is open to divine direction.**

It is truly hearing, in the deepest seat of your being, what God desires for you to do and to be.

So how do we listen?

**Stillness is always a prerequisite for listening.**

Telephones and television sets cannot receive messages when they are too filled with static and noise. Stillness first, then listening. The order cannot be reversed. "Be still, and know that I am God," quotes the psalmist.

One of the most powerful expressions of this is found in Psalm 131:

*"O Lord, my heart is not lifted up,  
my eyes are not raised too high ....  
But I have calmed and quieted my soul,  
like a weaned child with its mother;  
my soul is like the weaned child that is with me."*

"An unweaned child is a noisy child. The unweaned child has learned that eventually noise leads to the satisfaction of its desires. Even if it doesn't, the noise itself appears to bring some relief. Or at least it makes others as miserable as the unweaned one.

"The weaned child, however, has learned that the presence of the mother is about more than the immediate gratification of desire. The weaned child has become capable of stillness. The weaned child can have a whole new form of communication with the mother. The weaned child has entered into a whole new relationship with its mother. Now the mother is more than

simply one who exists to satisfy need, to take away hunger. The mother can become a person, not just a need-meeter.

“There is a catch, of course. Weaning is not a popular process. At least, not for the [one being weaned]. Children rarely volunteer for it because it is both costly and painful. Weaning means learning to live in stillness with unfulfilled desires. It is the mark of maturity.

“The psalmist says this is a picture of my soul. I have learned to still my heart. There has been a spiritual weaning process so that I am no longer at the mercy of my desires and reflexes and demands. God is becoming more than just the Meeter of My Needs. I am entering into a new era listening. I have stilled my soul.” *John Ortberg, [Love Beyond Reason](#) (Zondervan, 2001), pp. 41-42*

And when I still my soul before God and listen, then I am transformed by His Word.

**A listening heart brings transformation.**

Let me tell you about Zacchaeus. You can read the story in Luke 19:1-10. He was a chief tax collector and rich, but he was also short. He knew Jesus was coming by, but couldn't see over the crowd, so he climbed a tree to get a glimpse of Jesus.

No one liked Zacchaeus, because he cheated everyone. But when Jesus walks by, He sees Zacchaeus and says, “*Hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.*”

And he did, happily Luke says. The crowd grumbled. But Zacchaeus was transformed. Immediately He was transformed and promised to give back what he took from everyone. Somehow, in some way, Zacchaeus listened. He heard, not just Jesus' words, but something deeper that welcomed him in love—the invitation to come to God and start a new life.

The crowd did not expect this from Zacchaeus. They saw him for his outward life, the stereotypical tax collector who ripped people off. So it was a surprise to see.

Shelley and I didn't expect to hear those humble apologetic words from this big, brawny, well-armed state trooper.

Transformation.

Be still, and get to where you can listen.

Solomon went to his place of sacrifice.

Zacchaeus removed himself from the crowd and climbed a tree.

The state trooper looked and saw us everyday as a family.

If God comes to you this day and asks, “What should I give you?” how will you respond?

Open my eyes, that I may see...Open my ears, that I may hear...Open my mind, illumine me, Spirit Divine! Amen.