

## Pause, Then Proceed (Week 4) - Listen Yesterday's Sermon Summary

### Pause, Then Proceed (Week 4) - Listen

1. Our suggested action in focus this week is listening - both to God and each other (pg. 34 in the devotional book). Here Hudson writes, ""We (can) embark on a spiritual adventure in learning to listen... Listening will become a spiritual practice, an everyday habit, a way of life."



2. First, let's ask - why is it so hard to listen? Well, because we're all products of our environment. Note that no one ever taught you to listen (unlike reading, doing math, etc.) This betrays the fact that how we listen - and communicate in general - is largely ingrained from our families of origin, for better and/or worse.

3. But another piece of our influential environment is our culture, which struggles to listen well, to say the least. William Ury of Harvard has quipped that in the so-called Age of Communication very little real communication seems to be happening. Writer and poet Joshua Farley puts into words what we all feel: the "modern world can't keep its gargantuan mouth closed" and "can't quit banging on metal garbage cans" that rattle every thought from our heads. Research on listening would ask us to acknowledge three basic conclusions: a) listening is at least 1/2 of communication, b) none of us listen as well as we think we do, and c) we neither listen as much as we need to, nor are listened to as much as we need.

4. And biblically there is a real cost to not listening well. [James 1.19-20](#) says that when we don't listen, we often speak too much, which then stokes anger (in us or others), which then means that God's goodness and justice is rendered impossible. No two verses in all of scripture better explain America 2026: we are exceedingly angry in part because we stopped listening and started talking way too much, and in such a scenario God's good and just outcomes are forgone.

5. Ok, another question about listening - to whom should we be listening? Sure, everyone...that's true. But who might we take care to prioritize? Proverbs in your Old Testament would tell us people a) who know what we don't ([Prov. 19.20](#), for example), b) who can correct, confront, or offer constructive criticism in a way that is life-giving ([Prov. 15.31](#)), and c) who offer you a contrary perspective that undermines your smug sense of being right ([Prov. 12.15](#)).

6. One of our own PCUSA creeds tells us another group of people to whom we should prioritize listening: [The Brief Statement of Faith \(1985\)](#) states that one of five telltale actions toward which God's Spirit empowering and motivating God's people is that we will "hear the voices of peoples long silenced." That begs a few questions - whose voices have been marginalized historically in our country, and whose are being minimized now?; what groups different from you do you not understand or have access to?; etc. Thus, as a Presbyterian congregation, one of our chief goals should be to listen well to those who "have long been silenced."

7. Ok, last question - so how should we listen? One step better and beyond "active listening" is a kind of listening that's been called "deep listening," "mindful listening," or "explorative listening." "Deep listening" means that we seek to draw out the deep waters of each other's heart and mind (see [Prov. 20.5](#)). "Explorative listening" may be a more evocative phrase; it connotes that listening is an adventure, an expedition both with and into someone else. It is no less than honoring someone as being as fully human as you are; it lets them know that only they can tell their stories, and their stories really matter to you.

8. While there are some resources in the next section of this email to help you learn more about "deep" and "explorative" listening, here are a few of its characteristics: a) you make the effort to take the other person's point of view, which means setting aside your own, b) taking a "beginner's stance," assuming you know nothing and that they are the experts, at least on their own perspective, and c) asking questions not to criticize but to invite them to be more open or dig deeper within. As David Kyle Bond at UC-Irvine puts it, this kind of listening is a gift that brings healing to those who receive it; in his words, it's how we say to each other, "I'm here. I'm with you. You can be who you are, and I'll just go along with you for the ride."

9. You have to wonder how listening to God deeply and exploratively might alter our relationship in the same way it might with other people? As Frank Laubach, one of the great writers on Christian spirituality in the 20th-century said it, "Listening to God is far more important than giving Him our ideas." For too many of us, we inadvertently talk too much to God, and listen too little. What if we showed up to our devotional time, a church service, a class or small group, or any other personal spiritual habit and said in effect, "God, I'm not here for me. I'm here for You. You set the agenda; I have none. Just make Yourself known to me in the way that You want to."

10. Marilyn Nelson, former professor at the U. of Connecticut and poet laureate of the state, gets at the beauty and power of listening - be it to each other or God - so very well in her poem, *Generous Listening*:

"A conversation can be a contest,  
or a game of catch with invisible balloons.  
They bounce between us, growing and shrinking,  
sometimes floating like cloud medicine balls,  
and sometimes bowling at us like round anvils.  
You toss a phrase and understanding blooms  
like a bright wildflower of colored lights.  
My mind fireworks with unasked questions.  
Who is this miracle speaking to me?  
And who is this miracle listening?  
What amazingness are we creating?  
Out of gray matter a star spark of thought  
leaps between synapses into the air,  
and pours through gray matter, into my heart:  
how can I not listen generously?"

## Listening Well this Week

1. Some questions to linger with this week:

- What patterns for listening and/or speaking did you learn in your family of origin? How have you changed over time? How not?
- How have you experienced the lack of communication in our so-called Age of Communication?
- Go back to points 5 and 6 in the sermon summary. Who are those people in your life? Who could you ask to be? What "silenced voices" do you need to prioritize hearing right now?
- Who in your life listens to you deeply and exploratively? To whom can you give that gift this week?

2. Learn more about deep and explorative listening:

- [The Art of Listening](#)
- [Deep Listening in Personal Relationships](#)
- [The Art of Listening](#)

3. What about this whole listening to God thing? How's that work exactly? Note - the first link is to a seven minute introductory email, and the second resource below is a free download from our old friend, Trevor Hudson:

- [How Do I Hear from God? | Renovaré](#)
- [Learning to Hear God | Renovaré](#)
- [Hearing God's Voice: 12 Ways to Hear and Discern God's Voice - Soul Shepherding](#)
- [Renovaré | An Everyday Experiment in Hearing God - Richard J. Foster](#)