

Whoever will listen will hear the speaking of Heaven. This is definitely not the hour when men take kindly to an exhortation to listen, for listening is not today a part of popular religion. Religion has accepted the monstrous heresy that noise, size, activity and bluster make a man dear to God. But we may take heart. To a people caught in the tempest of the last great conflict God says, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10), and still He says it, as if He means to tell us that our strength and safety lie not in noise but in silence. It is important that we get still to wait on God. If you would follow on to know the Lord, come at once to the open Bible expecting it to speak to you. Do not come with the notion that it is a thing which you may push around at your convenience. It is more than a thing, it is a voice, a word, the very Word of the living God.

(A.W. Tozer)

# Listening

## priorities

### ONE OF THE GREAT MYSTERIES OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

is our inexplicable proclivity for placing time with God near the bottom of our priority list. Why is it there are times when just about anything else seems more

important than time spent with the Lord?

Like most people, I have my morning routine. Before my morning ablutions, I put on a pot of coffee. After my morning ablutions (with that all-important first cup of coffee grasped firmly in hand), I retire

to the reference room—the most secluded room in the house—for a few moments of Scripture and prayer. Then, at my desk, I read the first batch of e-mail and the morning news according to *The Washington Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page. Breakfast follows, then I turn to the real work of the day.

Oddly enough, out of all the elements in my standard morning routine, the one that is the easiest to do without is my quiet time with the Lord. If I don't read my e-mail I get the bends; if I don't read the morning news I feel deprived, and utterly uninformed. If I skip any other part of the

standard routine, I feel as if a critical piece of the day is missing—as if I've stepped out of the house without trousers. That missed element remains on my mind, and I don't rest until I find an opportunity to accomplish whatever was left out earlier.

Yet, sadly, I must confess that I can easily accommodate the absence of prayer.

The troubling mystery is *why*? Why is it easier to miss the Lord than the morning newspaper or that first cup of coffee? Why is it harder for me to miss a favorite radio or television program than it is to miss time in prayer with the Lord?

## The One Being Heard

One explanation for this curious incongruity is the realization that it is easier to listen than to speak. It is always easier to be passive than active.

Every morning when I check my mail, I'm reading correspondence initiated by someone else. When I read the newspaper, I'm reading about events that happened to someone else, events written about by someone else. When I listen to a radio commentator I'm, well, listening. These activities are *passive*—and easy.

The common perception of prayer is that it is primarily *active*. *What am I going to say? What petitions am I to bring? What words of praise can I offer up?* So it becomes easier to put off prayer when the answers to these questions do not come; if I can't think of anything to say, then I won't say it!

Our prayers should indeed contain words of praise and adoration, words of confession and contrition, words of supplication and intercession, words of thanksgiving. But many days begin without our being able to put literal words with those thoughts. We feel illiterate before our God, so, failing the words with which to describe our heart, we decide not to initiate the prayer at all. Because our idea of prayer is active, requiring more effort than our more comfortably passive regimen, it is easier for us to set it aside.

Far too many of us think of prayer as a monologue in which we're the one doing all the talking. Prayer has become an exercise in informing God of our feelings, our thoughts, our longings. Once we have accomplished that valid but ultimately self-centered task, we sign off and go on our way, happy in the knowledge that we've checked in with heaven and done our bit for the day.

Prayer should be, instead, a *dialogue*—a dialogue in which God does most of the talking. Oh, we are certainly to bring Him our petitions, our praise and our longings; He encourages us to do just that.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which

surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

(Philippians 4:4-7)

Here is the paradox, however: When I read a favorite columnist, or listen to a radio speaker every morning, I do so that I might benefit from their wisdom. I acknowledge that in their area at least, they have something worth listening to. But then I turn to the all-wise, all-knowing God—and do all the talking myself, never giving Him the chance to speak to me!

It is easier to give ourselves permission to pray when we admit that what God has to say to us is far more important than what we have to say to Him.

## Upside Down

Another explanation for the ease with which we demote God in our daily routines is that we still dwell in a place where those other things *are* considered more important. We may be redeemed, but until death or Christ's return our address is still "The Earth," and "Heaven" remains but a future forwarding address.


*No chilling winds nor pois'nous breath  
Can reach that healthful shore;  
Sickness and sorrow, pain and death  
Are felt and feared no more.*

(Samuel Stennett)

This is a time and place in which God has become an inconvenient distraction to what most people consider really important. God is someone people make jokes about, and only take seriously when tragedy strikes and the bagpipes are called upon to drone out the ubiquitous *Amazing Grace*.

So, given the climate, is it any wonder that some of this confused attitude will inevitably seep into the believer's life? Even the best-intentioned among us is swimming upstream against the temporal gospel that swirls about our heads, permeating every channel of access to our brain.

Until we meet our Savior face to face we must dwell in a dark and alien land in which our faith and its practices are deemed undesirable. So it only follows that our own priorities may be adversely influenced by the distorted standards of the age.

This makes it all the more important that we begin each day with God's voice. No matter how we choose to listen, it is important that we begin each day with His perspective. 

***Still, still with Thee, when purple morning breaketh,  
When the bird waketh, and the shadows flee;  
Fairer than morning, lovelier than the daylight,  
Dawns the sweet consciousness, I am with Thee.***

***Alone with Thee, amidst the mystic shadows,  
The solemn hush of nature newly born;  
Alone with Thee in breathless adoration,  
In the calm dew and freshness of the morn.***

***When sinks the soul, subdued by toil, to slumber,  
Its closing eyes look up to Thee in prayer;  
Sweet the repose beneath Thy wings o'er shading,  
But sweeter still to wake and find Thee there.***

***So shall it be at last, in that bright morning  
When the soul waketh, and life's shadows flee;  
Oh, in that hour, fairer than daylight dawning,  
Shall rise the glorious thought—I am with Thee.***

***(Harriet Beecher Stowe)***