

# Reflections by the Pond

THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S. LAMPEL



*Just to Listen*



Let us take time, as often as we pray, to listen to His voice: Every one that asketh, receiveth.

*Andrew Murray*

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# The God Who Speaks

Dear God,

Please help my sister, who is feeling kind of depressed these days. Give her husband the right words to say to her. And Father, please help my son with this test coming up; it's a tough subject for him. Our Sunday School teacher is having surgery this Wednesday. Please get him through this all right. Give great skill to the surgeon so that nothing goes wrong. Be a comfort to his wife through it all. Thank you for hearing my prayer.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

ALONE IN OUR PRAYER CLOSET or groaning a silent plea while traveling on the freeway to work, we pour out our heart to our God. In the name of Jesus we share our innermost thoughts, our doubts, our needs and desires. We confess, we apologize, we praise and thank, and occasionally we even worship. We offer our omnipotent, ever-attentive God a laundry list of pleadings, for ourselves and others, calling upon Him to intercede in our individual and mutual tragedies, illnesses, and shortcomings.

And why not? God's word *tells* us to do this.

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 4:6-7*

But prayer in full flower is more than a bullet list of requests and needs; it is more than just speaking.

It is listening.



Our God has always been a speaking God. The universe itself began at the sound of His voice; it was not created by a magician's flourish, by an atom accidentally exploding or by any other vagaries of time/space—none of which, by the way, even existed at the time. No, it was the voice of God that did it all.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and

void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day. Then God said, "Let there be..."

*Genesis 1:1-6a*

The leader, prophet and priest Moses enjoyed an especially intimate relationship with Yahweh. To him the Lord would speak "face to face."

And it came about, whenever Moses went out to the tent, that all the people would arise and stand, each at the entrance of his tent, and gaze after Moses until he entered the tent. Whenever Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent; and the LORD would speak with Moses. When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would arise and worship, each at the entrance of his tent. Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses returned to the camp, his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

*Exodus 33:8-11*

On the day that the tabernacle was anointed and consecrated, Moses entered the Most Holy Place, and from the mercy seat above the ark of the covenant He heard the Lord's voice.

Now when Moses went into the tent of meet-

ing to speak with Him, he heard the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim, so He spoke to him.

*Numbers 7:89*

The history of man's relationship with God has also included the Lord God speaking *through* others, including prophets and the second member of the Godhead.

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

*Hebrews 1:1-2*



Our God has always been a speaking God. Yet in our prayers we rarely give Him opportunity to answer—to say what *He* has on His mind once we have said what it on ours.

It is true that the Lord no longer speaks audibly to our ears, but He does to our heart and our mind. To Moses and a few others God had to speak audibly to their ears, for there was yet no written word, nor did His Spirit permanently dwell within them. Yet at the time they were, in turn, His principal voice on earth, so His word to them had to be clear and understandable. But in every believer there dwells the Holy Spirit, who does not just express the comfort and peace of a gracious God, but expresses, as well, His counsel, His mind. Every believer can “hear” the voice of God because He still speaks to us through His written word and through His Spirit.

If we but listen.

To offer a prayer—to give utterance to certain wishes and to appeal to certain promises—is an easy thing, and can be learned of man by human wisdom. But to pray in the Spirit, to speak words that reach and touch God, that affect and influence the powers of the unseen world—such praying, such speaking, depends entirely upon our hearing God's voice. Just as far as we listen to the voice and language that God speaks, and in the words of God receive His thoughts, His mind, His life, into our heart, we shall learn to speak in the voice and the language that God hears. It is the ear of the learner, wakened morning by morning, that prepares for the tongue of the learned, to speak to God as well as men, as should be.

*Andrew Murray*

# The Measure of Our Devotion

*I'd like to spend more time in prayer, but I'm just too busy. I haven't time to just sit and listen for the Lord to speak.*

THERE ONCE WERE TWO WOMEN who lived in the village of Bethany. They lived in the first century, but were chosen to speak to the weaknesses of modern man. They were sisters, Martha and Mary, and were familiar and comfortable friends of Jesus, as was their brother Lazarus.

Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

*Luke 10:38-42*

As a good hostess, Martha busied herself with the mealtime preparations. She was eager to please Jesus, to prepare for Him a good meal, to perhaps impress Him with her acts of hospitality—certainly respectable, even laudable aspirations. In contrast to her industrious sister, Mary could think of nothing more important than just being with Jesus, being close to Him, hanging on His every word.

Martha, in her busyness, with social details occupying her mind, missed out on what Jesus was saying to her sister. In place of that, rising indignation overwhelmed her spirit, to the point that she unburdened herself to their guest, hoping for His support in correcting her sister.

But what Martha saw as laziness in Mary, Jesus saw as devotion, and an eagerness to learn more from the Teacher while He was in their midst. And of the two, it was the attentive Mary

who received the Lord's blessing.

When we say we are too busy to spend time waiting upon the Lord we are in fact declaring that compared to what is on *our* plate, it is the Lord God (the sovereign ruler of the universe) who comes out the slacker. We are saying, in essence, *My time is more important than God's. What I have to do is more important than anything He has to say to me. What I have to do is more important than what He wants to do in my life.*



Most of us have been there—especially those of us with long, dangling roots in the faith, those of us who first heard of Jesus from our parents, or in the Beginner's Sunday School class, or began hearing the words and concepts of the Christian faith in a church service of our fragile youth. Most of us, at some time in our more jaded adulthood, have arrogantly snubbed God in the very same way.

It is a familiar moment: We are reading a devotional—because we're supposed to, right? Christians are supposed to read devotionals—when a Scripture passage is quoted that is so familiar that we can almost, if not literally, quote it by heart. We have read it and heard it so many times that the keen edge of its blade has become dulled by time and sheer repetition. And in that moment we make a hasty and rather rude decision: We decide that our time is more valuable than God's.

There is the temporal equivalent to this situation. A friend begins his telling of an old hackneyed saw; within a few words we nod our head in recognition, and with a grimacing smile playing at the corners of our mouth we stop him with, "Yeah. I've heard that one." We don't need to hear again the old joke—and it wasn't that funny at the first telling. We may be within our rights with our friend's redundant attempt at humor, but there is a generous helping of arrogance on our part when we treat the Almighty with the same dismissive regard.

That attitude—that easy sloughing off of God’s word—says two things about us. First, that we consider our time to be too rare and too valuable to be spent in repetitive communion with the Father. After all, we must be efficient with our time: we could be out saving souls, or healing broken hearts, giving ourselves as a “living sacrifice.” God is logical, and orderly, isn’t He? Surely He respects the careful way in which we manage our time.

Second, this attitude betrays our opinion that we have already gleaned everything there is to know about a familiar passage of Scripture. We understand the words that comprise it, the point the passage is making, and how it fits into its context. What more is there, for pity sake?

Job done. Finis.

Of course, God is buying none of this. And, speaking of familiarity, He is all too familiar with our callous disregard for what He has to say—whether in prayer, or in the pages of His book. His timeless, longsuffering love for us means that He will keep trying from His end, but He is saddened by the apathetic response of His child.



The infinitude of an invisible, all-powerful God is not difficult for the average human being to grasp. It is easy to understand that the Almighty, the Creator of everything that is, would be, in His nature and behavior, infinite light years beyond anything we could imagine. But then, strangely, we forget about this singular infinite quality of God when it comes to His ability to speak to us through His word, or through the ministry of His Holy Spirit. Somehow in our dim imaginings we think not only that His book is finite, but that equally finite is His ability to communicate new colors and shadings, new pertinent applications of His truth through it.

But just as each of us has demonstrated these ubiquitous bad manners, each of us has also experienced that glimmering, crystalline moment when an already familiar Bible passage leaps off the page and smacks us upside the head with new revelation—or its timely application to a

specific situation. In that moment we marvel, we gasp, we shudder with holy ecstasy at God’s intimate condescension to our humble life. And, in that brief moment, we clutch His word to our breast, vowing never to release this precious handbook from our grasp.

But we do, of course. A week or two later we are back to skimming and abridging—as if mentally writing our own *Reader’s Digest* version of God’s word.

And, again, He sighs.

We have been snared in the coils of a spurious logic which insists that if we have found Him, we need no more seek Him. Thus the whole testimony of the worshiping, seeking, singing church on that subject is crisply set aside. The experiential heart-theology of a grand army of fragrant saints is rejected in favor of a smug interpretation of Scripture which would certainly have sounded strange to an Augustine, a Rutherford or a Brainerd. In the midst of this great chill there are some, I rejoice to acknowledge, who will not be content with shallow logic. They will admit the force of the argument, and then turn away with tears to hunt some lonely place and pray, “O God, show me Thy glory.” They want to taste, to touch with their hearts, to see with their inner eyes the wonder that is God.

A.W. Tozer

Every year around the time of Christmas we hear the old familiar imagery of God “seeking” man, in the form of the baby Jesus, to draw unregenerate humanity unto Himself. While that is true, it is equally true that regenerate man is to be seeking God—seeking His wisdom, embracing His Spirit, learning from the example of His Son. The spiritually minded Christian (and, sadly, there are many who are not) is to embrace the process of sanctification that will gradually change him or her into the image of Christ.

One does not fall in love, then ignore the object of one’s desire. True love is ever-growing, ever-deepening within the experience of mutual converse. We speak to God with our heart; He speaks to us through His word and His Spirit.

If you are a child of God, if you claim Jesus the Christ as your Savior and Lord, is there *anything* more important in your life than Him? Is there anything more worth your time than sitting at His feet, listening to His every word?

Perhaps it is time to stop assuming we have heard it all before.

# "Listen to Him!"

*I want to spend more time in prayer, more time with God, but so often I have nothing to say.*

THERE ARE TOO MANY VOICES listened to today. The airwaves, cables, satellite beams, and internet bandwidth are twenty-four-hour, nonstop vehicles for, in most instances, little better than the rantings of chattering magpies. The ears and brain-box of the typical dweller on this "blue marble" are deluged, overwhelmed night and day by wave after wave of information, opinion and, worst of all, the nattering nabobs of putridity that raise their voices from the bowels of Twitter and Facebook.

We are not edified by these oceans of voices. We are numbed by them. That part of our physiology trained to filter out nonsense has now atrophied from disuse. Modern man now listens to everything—and nothing. Most of what he hears is just babble, and most babble fades to forgetfulness.

We are told that today's technologies make us more connected to others. If that is so, why is everyone so self-absorbed and so defensive, so angry, so vicious? We are told that today's technologies make us more productive. Why is it then that the average citizen accomplishes less in his or her lifetime than those living in the eighteenth century, when our nation was being created? These venerables did it with no electricity, no telephones, no automobiles, no planes, and of course no word processors or internet. Why is it that so many of America's founding fathers and leading lights, back in the eighteenth cen-

tury—John and Abigail Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, for just a few—could accomplish so much, including volumes of daily handwritten correspondence using a writing instrument no more sophisticated than a quill pen? How in the world could they do that without Twitter?

One reason is that they had not lost their ability to filter out nonsense. Their minds were, as a rule, set on higher and more noble contemplations than the mindless prattle of those who knew and comprehended less than they.



Some eight days after these sayings, He took along Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming. And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were Moses and Elijah, who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions had been overcome with sleep; but when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men standing with Him. And as these were leaving Him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles: one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah"—not realizing what he was saying. While he was saying this, a cloud formed and began to overshadow them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!" And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent, and reported to no one in those days any of the things which they had seen.

*Luke 9:28-36*

God's promise will be to us what God Himself is. It is the man who walks before the Lord, and falls upon his face to listen while the living God speaks to him, who will really receive the promise. Though we have God's promises in the Bible, with full liberty to take them, the spiritual power is wanting, except as God Himself speaks them to us. And He speaks to those who walk and live with Him.

*Andrew Murray*

Here in one succinct yet staggeringly profound statement from Father God is at once the invi-



tation—command, really—and obstacle to our sublime communion with Christ Jesus: “This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!”

The obstacle? Paul wrote to the believers in Colossae,

For by Him [the Son] all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

*Colossians 1:16-17*

You mean to say that we are to listen to the One who spoke the universe into existence? The One whose voice—just His voice!—threw out every planet, moon, and star; every galaxy; on this earth alone created every geographical feature, every animal, everything that renders this world inhabitable for man—our human ears are to listen to *that* voice? When Yahweh spoke audibly to the people of Israel from Mount Sinai,

All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. Then they said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die.”

*Exodus 20:18-19*

If we, like Israel, are afraid to listen to a holy God, we are forgetting, if even for a moment, that the very One who spoke this world into existence came to dwell in it in the flesh of man, and to have that flesh nailed to a cross so that we could be saved from our sins. We should want to hear what such a loving, condescending Savior has to say.



God, His Father and ours, does not suggest that we listen to His Son. He does not recommend that we do if we have the time or opportunity. He does not say that He thinks our listening to His Son just might be beneficial, if we are so inclined. No, God the Father *commands* us:

“This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!”

We acknowledge the command: we will listen to Christ Jesus. But how? The command was much more understandable and easy to obey for

Peter and John and James; they were right there, Jesus was in their midst. How do we, here and now, “listen” to someone who does not share our same airspace, someone well beyond arm’s reach and indeed inaudible and invisible to our corporeal senses?

It is clear that the earth no longer shakes with the thundering violence of the Lord God’s audible voice. That conduit is closed until the Day the Lord returns in triumphant judgment.

But it is not enough to point out the obvious, that God speaks to us now through His written word. Every follower of the Son must, *must* be regularly reading the word, studying it, scouring it to harvest the heavenly and holy counsel found there. That is a given.

There is another voice, one less legible than the written word but also less lethal than the searing thunder of Father God from the quaking mount. Through the gift of the indwelling Spirit God the Father and God the Son still speak—silently, yet discernibly, speak.

If we but silence the din of competing voices; if we learn again how to filter out the prattling nonsense that shouts at us from every corner, every device, every minute of every day; if we would only muster the patience and humility to respond, as young Samuel was instructed by Eli, “Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening,” then we would hear our Master speaking.

The Holy Spirit is more than a pledge of our eternal salvation; He is more than a Get-out-of-Jail-Free card. He is more than a translator and interpreter of God’s written word, and He is more than our built-in barometer of truth. The Holy Spirit is the voice of God living inside us.

...but just as it is written,  
 “Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard,  
 and which have not entered the heart of man,  
 all that God has prepared for those who love him.”

For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we



also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

*1 Corinthians 2:9-13*

Go into your prayer closet and, by all means, unburden your heart to the Lord. Confess your sin and plead the desires of your heart. Fill your mouth with praise and thanksgiving, get down on your knees and worship the one true God who awaits your adoration with joy.

But then be quiet. Do and say nothing but listen. If you have asked Him a question, listen for the answer. He may answer you in the pages of His word, or He may answer you through the lips of a friend or counselor. But He may instead choose to speak to you through the voice of His Spirit, to fill your mind with words and

images that give you precisely the counsel you just sought.

And if, as can happen, you haven't anything to say, then just sit quietly and listen—to the Master's voice.



Guard your steps as you go to the house of God and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil. Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few. For the dream comes through much effort and the voice of a fool through many words.

*Ecclesiastes 5:1-3*

And even so faith is also the ear through which the voice of God is always heard and intercourse with Him kept up. It is through the Holy Spirit the Father speaks to us; the Son is the Word, the substance of what God says; the Spirit is the living voice. This the child of God needs to lead and guide him; the secret voice from heaven must teach him, as it taught Jesus, what to say and what to do. An ear opened towards God, that is, a believing heart waiting on Him, to hear what He says, will hear Him speak. The words of God will not only be the words of a Book, but, proceeding from the mouth of God, they will be spirit and truth, life and power.

*Andrew Murray*

## *a Postscript*

**S**ELDOM HAS THE WRITING and production of an issue of *Reflections by the Pond* been so keenly illustrative of the topic of an issue.

Halfway through the writing of the first article, the idea seemed to wane in my mind. Was this the topic of God's choosing, or should I return to the idea I had earlier entertained—or perhaps something entirely different? What did my "Boss" want me to write this month? Thus I dutifully brought it to Him in prayer.

*Lord God, what do you want me to write? What would bring glory to Your name and edify your church? If something else, please steer me in that direction. If this topic, please feed me with the words, the thoughts.*

Before the last words had even passed my lips, God began to speak. Immediately, and at moments throughout that day, thoughts and pertinent Scripture passages, even specific turns of phrase sprang fully formed into my mind. My gracious God had not just answered my prayer, He was actually "speaking"—via the Holy Spirit—the very words I needed to flesh out this issue about listening to Him.

Fellow saints, our God is not some mystical void into which our hearts' desires are poured to no avail. He is, through Christ, nothing less than an attentive, loving Father.

We speak and He listens.

He speaks and we listen.