

Reflections by the Pond

THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S LAMPEL



*“Speak, Lord,
for Your
Servant is
Listening”*

An ear opened towards God, that is, a believing heart waiting on Him, to hear what He says, will hear Him speak.

Andrew Murray

A leader in a church we once attended invited himself, one Sunday morning, into our small and private, two-couple Bible study. Our text was the letter written by James, and one of the topics of discussion that day was prayer. In a conversation about the content of our prayers the church leader volunteered that his own prayers were pretty much cut-and-dried: in his time for prayer he efficiently ticks off the items on his “to-do list,” or, more accurately, his “things-to-tell-the-Lord list,” followed by a snappy amen and then it’s back to business.



"Be Still, and Know that I am God"

*Just emerging from the waning days of a hard winter,
my mind travels back to still-fresh memories...*

I tread a meandering path through timber left mute by its frosting of snow. All is hushed and still. Not a sound breaks the spell.

The fresh, uninterrupted covering is brand new. The soft blanket of whispering flakes has yet to be trampled by the beasts of forest and field. No rabbit has yet bounded down this path in return to its burrow. No bird has yet descended in search of seed or bug. No mouse has yet hopped and skittered across its surface. And no deer has yet traveled down this familiar lane, leaving its deep and pointed impressions.

Overhead and all around, the

timber's skeletal remains have been frosted into splendor. Black, naked sentinels with their hap-hazard offspring populating the spaces between, have been transformed suddenly from bland ugliness into delicate beauty.

It is a wonderland. A serene, becalmed wonderland. Through the silence, however, a soft yet firm voice is heard.

"Be still, and know that I am God."

Here in the winter stillness of the wooded glen I listen for His voice. I cannot see my God, and I do not expect to hear His audible voice, but I know He is here. And when His Spirit quickens mine, joining in that sweet and mysterious union of holy God with redeemed flesh, He may as well be shouting. For in that moment His embrace is as real and tangible as the physical embrace of a human loved one.

Here in this garden of feathered ice I can experience some of what Adam once did in the original garden. Because my Savior came to earth to be born in flesh, because He offered that flesh on the altar of the cross, and because He rose from the grave to sit down at the right hand of the Father, I—even I—can enjoy some of the same sweet communion.

In fact, in Christ my relationship with God is far more intimate, far more exalted than that enjoyed by my long-ago predecessor.

Because He is with me. ❧

The God Who Speaks

Anyone who claims that God no longer speaks to His children is just not listening. He may no longer speak with an audible voice—although He certainly could if He so chose—but He has countless other means by which to share His thoughts with those who are willing to listen. In fact, to the attentive believer it can be almost impossible to avoid the voices of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit—all of whom incessantly communicate with those who care to listen for their voices.

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.

Philippians 4:6

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.

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 is 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 creation, His written word, and through His Spirit.

If we but listen. ☘

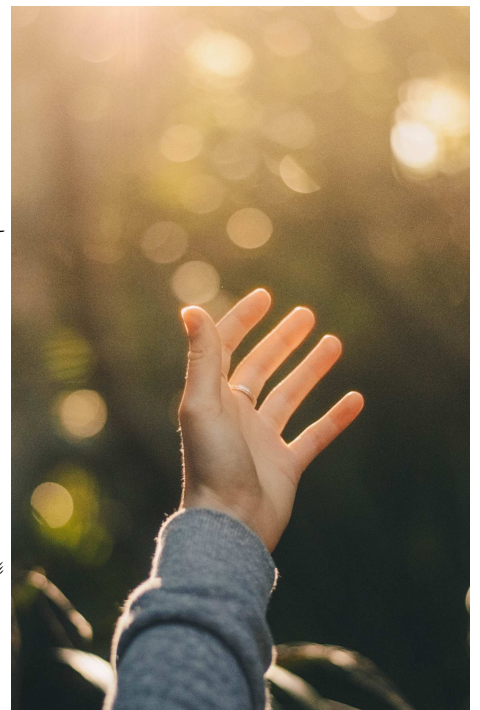


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A Measure of Our Devotion

It has become a perverse badge of honor in today's culture to think of and declare oneself to be "just soooo busy." (This is the ingrained companion to "I'm so stressed.") What these remarks represent, in many cases, is simply excuses for bad manners.

When we say we are too busy to spend time waiting upon the Lord we are in fact declaring that, *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, of course, the more pedestrian, 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,

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 worshipping, 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

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, and even more insidious, 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.

Just as each of us has demonstrated these ubiquitous bad manners, however, each of us has also experienced that glimmering, crystalline moment when an already famil-

iar 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.

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 Spirit-minded Christian 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 we should stop assuming we have heard it all before. ☘



photo by Ben White at Unsplash

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

There are too many voices today—and 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 fetid bowels of Twitter and Facebook.

We are not edified by these oceans of voices. We are assaulted by them, but we are also *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 toward others? 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 century—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 smart phones and 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 no-

ble 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

Here in one succinct yet staggeringly profound statement from Father God is at once the command for our sublime communion with Christ Jesus: "This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!"

God 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!"

If we obey 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 has been 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 Christ 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, however, 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.

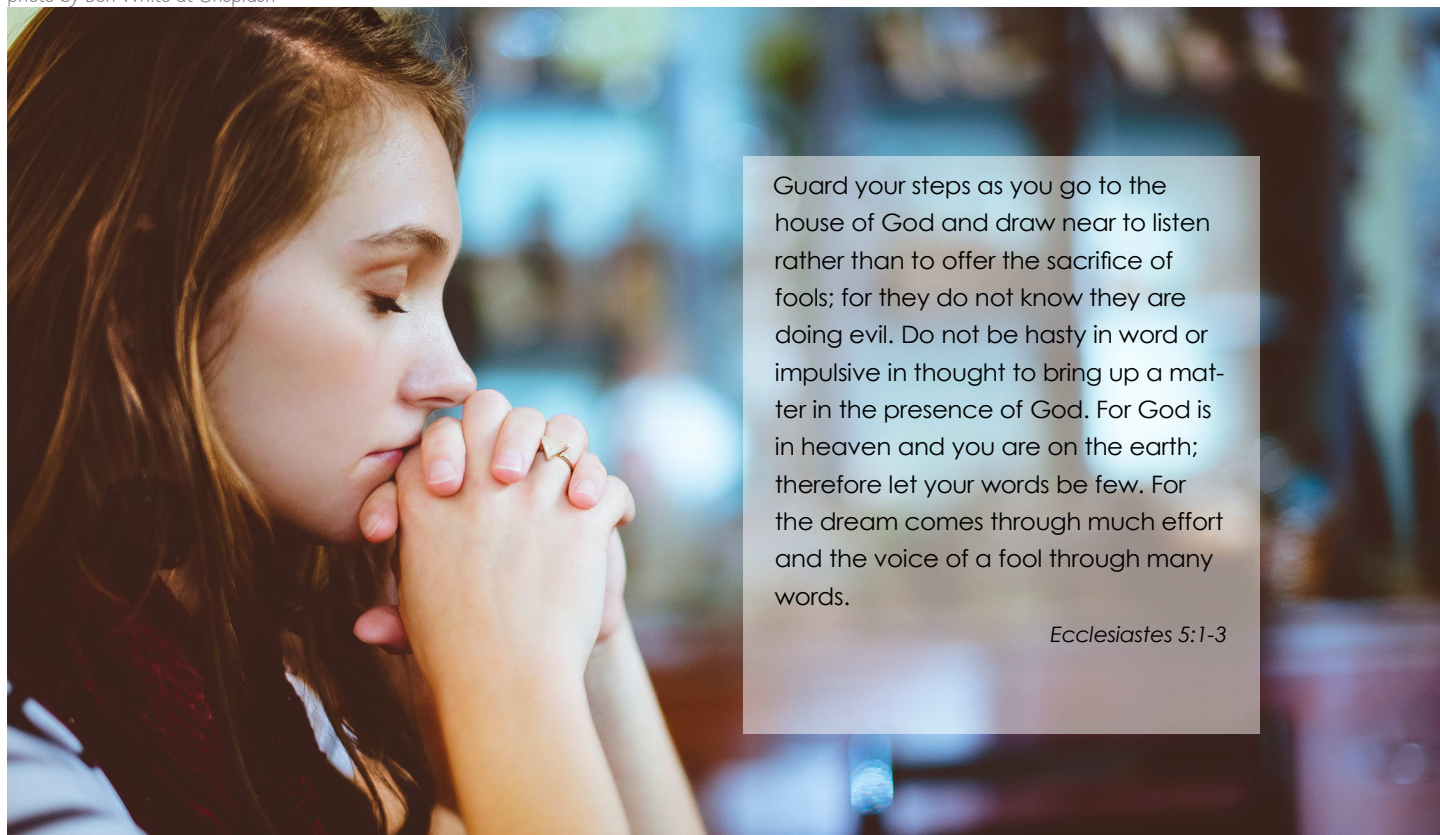
1 Corinthians 2:9-13

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. ☘

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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