

CAN YOU LISTEN?



Scripture:

Psalm 15

¹O LORD, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill?

²Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart; ³who do not slander with their tongue, and do no evil to their friends, nor take up a reproach against their neighbors; ⁴in whose eyes the wicked are despised, but who honor those who fear the LORD; who stand by their oath even to their hurt; ⁵who do not lend money at interest, and do not take a bribe against the innocent.

Those who do these things shall never be moved.

Luke 10:38-42

³⁸Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. ³⁹She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying.

⁴⁰But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." ⁴¹But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; ⁴²there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



When Jesus responded to Martha's anxiety and worries he said, "There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

The one thing. Hmmmm..... Remember in the film *City Slickers* the old, wise, rough cowboy Curly (played by Jack Palance) kept saying there was only one thing that was the secret to life? Throughout the movie Billy Crystal's character was

going crazy trying to figure out what the one thing was.

(A video clip from *City Slickers* was shown to the congregation.)

Do you remember what that one thing was in that movie?

Jesus gives us a good clue right here in this scripture passage. What was he talking about?

According to an article in the Huffington Post, the one thing that is the secret to life is not money, not fame, and not even your health. It is feeling good about yourself, loving yourself. Do you believe it?

LEARN TO LOVE YOURSELF

Jesus would agree with the Huffington Post but he would say it in this order: “Love the Lord your God first, then love your neighbor as yourself.”

It is true; to be able to love the Lord your God and to love your neighbor you need to learn to love yourself. When we don’t love ourselves we don’t feel worthy of the love of God.

So, maybe after many, many years of not knowing how, how do you finally learn to love yourself?

KNOW YOURSELF

First, to love yourself you must know yourself. As Shakespeare said in Hamlet, “To Thine Own Self Be True!”

But how do you get to know your own self? And then how do you learn to love yourself and be true to yourself?

To know yourself it takes time alone in silence, pondering the things that you value. Think about the things that make you feel like yourself, not dependent on someone else, but merely considering what it is that you believe in, that you want to be remembered for, and the things that you wish you could spend more time doing.

If you were stripped of all the material goods you have around you, what would be left in you? How would you survive, or would you be able to? How would you spend your time if there were no demands on your time now and you could just be? Who would you be?

THE BEAUTY OF NATURE HELPING THOSE IN NEED AND PRAYER

I find taking a walk in nature, breathing in the tree scented air, looking up at the sky, and clouds, and embracing nature’s beauty helps me feel like myself. And when I am on a mission trip, working on helping those in need, that is another time I feel like my deep, true self shines forth.

Engaging in silent meditative prayer also helps me re-center myself. When I worked in the Emergency Room at San Francisco General

Hospital caring for abused children brought in by the police, the director of our program always made sure we took time off to defuse for a few days and re-center about every six months. We were sent to the Zen Center to be silent and get to know ourselves again. When you work with abuse cases every day you get a very skewed perspective on the world and on humanity. You begin to believe everything and everyone is evil.

With all that’s happening in our country and around the world, with Turkey’s coup, the violent truck killings in Nice, France, the police shootings, it helps to get some distance from it, and listen for God’s reassuring voice. God will help you get back your faith in yourself and faith in humanity, too, when you take time to pray.

LISTENING

So how do we hear God’s reassuring voice in the midst of all the noise in our world today?

Listen! Sounds simple, but it starts with listening, listening to God and the promises God made to you the day you were created.

And it also takes not listening to the negative distracting talk inside your head that echoes from your parents or from negative television that puts negative self-talk into your mind.

You must find a way to not listen to those voices in our world today that reinforce the negative view you have of yourself and others. Instead listen deeply to what God has to say to you and listen to those around you who truly love you for who you are and how you were created to be. Take guidance from Philippians 4:8 where it says, “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.”

IMAGINE JESUS SPEAKING TO US

Fear and anxiety cause negative thoughts and feelings about ourselves and our world. So to quell your fears and to heal your anxieties, close your eyes and imagine you are sitting at the feet of Jesus as he speaks. Jesus reminds you of God’s love and promises to you as he recites.....

Proverbs 1:33: But all who listen to me will live in peace, untroubled by fear of harm.”

Jeremiah 29:11: For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”

Isaiah 40: “Those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.”

John 14:27: “I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid.”

Philippians 4:19 **The Apostle Paul reminds us that:**God will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:37-39 **Paul said,** “No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

And my most favorite promise of all is **Philippians 4:6-7:** “Do not worry about anything, 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 understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” That’s a promise within your grasp.

COMBAT THE NEGATIVE INFLUENCES

These are the things Jesus wants us to keep pondering in our hearts and minds to combat the negative influences in our world today. When you keep these close to your mind you will have clarity and the strength to love God and love yourself and then you’ll be energized to love your neighbor too despite the chaos happening in the world.

Then the positive cycle of love will keep going and keep you going into a positive future to help you combat the negativity and evil forces that invite us to get apathetic and depressed.

To overcome evil with good though we must listen. But I know listening is hard. Our new technology today makes listening especially difficult. We have too many high tech gadgets distracting us from being silent enough to listen to the voice of our loving God.

But did you ever notice the word silent is an anagram for the word listen. The same letters make the two words. We must be silent to listen.



MARY AND MARTHA

Jesus was pointing this out to Martha in the scripture in Luke. Mary was sitting at the feet of Christ listening to every word he said. Martha was running around trying to be hospitable. But missing out on the relationship with Jesus she could have had.

Do we do this today? How often do you skip relationship building with Jesus because you are too distracted by other events or priorities in your life?

Evelyn T. Marshall has an eternal perspective on this topic. As the head of the Mormon Relief Society, she says in her weekly blog:

Even special meals can become too complicated. Do we spend time planning and executing a lavish Sunday dinner for family members more than we do giving positive attention to our family when they arrive? Do we value a perfectly clean home over spending time with our children? The story of Mary and Martha, “reminds every Martha, male and female, that we should not be so occupied with what is temporal that we fail to cherish the opportunities to be with one another and with God that are unique and eternally spiritual.”

What in our own lives have we chosen that is good, lasting, and eternal? Have we separated the trivial from the important? In an age when information virtually explodes around us, are we developing the skills to sort out what we will

choose to take into our hearts and minds, and what we will discard?

(And her last question is: Have we developed an eternal perspective so that “the good part” is what we emphasize for our souls?)

When we take time to listen in worship, pray and read the Bible at home, or come to a Bible study at church, we are focusing on the good part, investing in our relationship with Jesus. God knows and is especially happy for us when we prioritize our relationship with Jesus because then our lives are more abundantly peaceful. As you get to know Jesus better, you have a trust and a confidence in his love that underpins your whole life and frees you to love others. When you don't prioritize your relationship with Jesus, and just come to church for social reasons, or just out of habit, then you are cheating yourself out of a richer and deeper experience of faith.

That is what Jesus was talking about to Martha. When Mary chose to spend her time focusing on her relationship with Jesus, listening to his words of hope and promise, and treasuring his presence, she was enriching her own life. She was becoming more loving because she could truly feel the love of God through being near Jesus. She was becoming more giving, because she was learning Christ-like patience, generosity and compassion that come with trusting that you are truly loved by God, the one thing that keeps your life whole.

We all live in too much noise. We must escape the noise and prioritize listening in silence each day for the voice of God. Let's listen now.

The things that Mary chose were things that no one could ever take away from her. They were being embedded in her soul. And as she continued to listen and learn from Jesus, she was becoming love as God is love.

Take time to listen to God in the silence each day and let God transform you with his silent affirmations of love, too. Amen

Benediction:

“Constant kindness can accomplish much. As the sun makes ice melt, kindness causes misunderstanding, mistrust, and hostility to evaporate.”

– Albert Schweitzer

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen



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July 17, 2016**