

## Called to Listen, Called to Live

**B**ishop Margaret G. Payne has invited us this year (June 2007-May 2008) to consider ourselves as “People of the Way,” the identity that followers of Jesus had before they were known as Christians. She also has invited us to listen in our study of scripture for the difference between a theology of glory and a theology of the cross.

The following five pages include resources for listening.

- 1) Listening Guidelines
- 2) ***Listening***, a prayer by J. Barrie Shepherd
- 3) Resources for Year 1 (2007-2008)
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- 5) On the Way and Listening: A Bibliography for the first year of “Called to Listen, Called to Live”

## **Called to Listen, Called to Live**

*“In every experience of true listening, especially to God but also to another person, there is a mysterious moment in which the one who listens steps out from a fortress of self-concern and dwells silently in the truth of the one who speaks... This is the posture of the servant, whose attentiveness is not a sign of cringing compliance, but a mark of human life lived ever more fully in the Spirit of love.” (Weavings, May/June 1994, p.3)*

### **Listening Guidelines**

1. Become centered in an awareness of God’s presence.
2. Listen more than you speak.
3. Do not interrupt.
4. Make eye contact with the person who is speaking, and listen for more than words.
5. Do not plan what you want to say while someone else is speaking. Do not rush to a response.
6. Speak for yourself only, expressing your own thoughts and feelings, and describing your own experiences.
7. Use “I” statements.
8. Do not rush past differences or discomfort. Gently explore them.
9. Pause between speakers to absorb what has been said.
10. Hold your opinions and convictions lightly. Honor and ask about the opinions and convictions held by others.

## **Listening**

by J. Bathe Shepherd

As I begin to pray this morning,  
I am aware that I have far too much to say,  
and far too little to listen for.  
Catch hold of me in prayer, Lord.  
So much of what I say  
is simply a going-through-the-motions,  
calculated to produce a warm,  
if somewhat vacant glow deep inside.

Break into my prattle, Lord.  
Drive out the money-changers  
from the temple of your presence,  
those bargain-basement prayers:  
Father, make me pure – but not yet.  
God, grant me success – then I will believe.  
Lord, let me fall in love – and I'm all yours.

Interrupt my fevered chatter, Father.  
Replace my empty noises with the fullness of your silence.  
And in that silence let me hear  
your simple world of truth that calls me into life:  
The truth that I am yours, and not my own.  
The truth that your faithfulness will never abandon me,  
that even in the most painful and desperate moments  
all of your love, all of your power  
is on my side, forever.  
The truth that there is work for me to do,  
to share that love and power, to make it a reality,  
not only in my life, but in the lives of those around me,  
and especially those in need.

Let me hear, and know, and live your truth, Lord.  
Then send me forth to do your holy will  
in Jesus' name.

## CALLED TO LISTEN, CALLED TO LIVE

### Resources for Year 1 (June 2007-May 2008)

This material is for use by groups or individuals and can (indeed, *should*) be freely shared in any contact. Listening, active spiritual listening as described in this context, is learned. And what is learned here is transferable at work, at school and at home, as well as in church.

In groups, the materials are ideal for:

- adult forums
- retreats
- small groups, such as women's circles, prayer groups and men's groups
- congregation council and committee devotions
- call committees
- conference gatherings
- prayer groups in an office or other workplace
- hospital/hospice/nursing home contexts
- as an addition to premarital counseling
- new members classes
- community organizing teams
- groups dealing with a particular crisis / opportunity

Individually the materials can assist:

- Persons doing daily devotions
- Persons in spiritual direction
- Persons discerning a vocational call
- Persons facing difficult life choices
- Persons facing medical procedures
- Persons new to a community
- Persons in transition or those "stuck"
- Persons in need of new insight

In short, these can be used by nearly anyone, individually or as part of a group exercise. At hand can be some additional materials that may be helpful:

- Several versions of the bible
- A concordance
- A bible dictionary
- A concise commentary
- Paper / pencils /newsprint

**On the Way and Listening**  
**A Bible Study on Luke 9:57-62**

Bishop Margaret G. Payne has invited us this year to consider ourselves as “People of the Way,” the identity that followers of Jesus had before they were known as Christians. She also has invited us to listen in our study of scripture for the difference between a theology of glory and a theology of the cross. This passage from Luke’s ninth chapter begins with the words, “As they were going along the road ...” still early on in Luke’s 10-chapter description of Jesus’ journey toward Jerusalem and the cross. Intended for use in small groups or for opening devotions for church meetings, this brief bible study helps you imagine yourself to also be “on the way and listening to Jesus.”

**Opening Prayer:** O, God, the story of your love is written in the lives of your people. Open our ears, minds and hearts to hear your Word, so that we may faithfully follow as people of the way. Amen.

**Read the passage aloud.** Luke 9:57-62

<sup>57</sup>As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.”  
<sup>58</sup>And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”<sup>59</sup>To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”<sup>60</sup>But Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”<sup>61</sup>Another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.”<sup>62</sup>Jesus said to him, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

**Listening to the text.** Before entering into conversation about the text, spend a few moments in silent reflection, listening deeply to what God is saying to you. It may help to write down your thoughts during this time of quiet listening.

- What word or phrases are the first to catch your attention?
- What conversations take place in this passage? Who initiates each of them?
- What words or phrases get repeated more than once or twice in these conversations?
- What is Jesus saying to people who want to be “of the Way” he is walking?
- Are these words easy or difficult for you to listen to?

**Listening to one another.** After spending time listening to the text and writing down your thoughts, read the text aloud again and then engage in group conversation about what you’ve heard, being careful to listen as attentively to others as you would have them listen when you speak.

- Share your responses to the questions above. Listen carefully to the insights of others.
- This passage includes images of nesting animals, funerals, families and plows. In your life of being “on the way” with Jesus, which of these (or other) images speak most clearly to you, either of Jesus’ call or of your response?
- Can you describe a time when Jesus seemed to be inviting you to join him on a particularly difficult and costly cross-shaped way?
- Knowing yourself and your life today, when Jesus says “Follow me” what words would most accurately complete your response, beginning “Lord, first let me ... ?”

- What new things did you learn or discover because you took the time to listen more deeply to this Word of the Lord?

**Closing Prayer:** Lord Jesus, on our way from who and what and where we are to who and what and where you call us to be, we want to be walking on your way, listening to your voice and listening to one another. Grant us these gifts for your name's sake. Amen.

## **On the Way and Listening**

A Bibliography for the first year of “Called to Listen, Called to Live”

### **The Jesus Way: a conversation on the ways that Jesus is the way**

by Eugene H. Peterson

In his unique and creative way, Peterson ranges throughout the Old and New Testaments to help us search for the way of Jesus. He reminds us: “To follow Jesus implies that we enter into a way of life that is given character and shape and direction by the one who calls us.”

### **Christianity for the Rest of Us** by Diana Butler Bass

Listening was the tool for Bass to learn what enables congregations to find transformation and renewal. A congregation does not have to be a mega-church to touch lives with the way of Jesus.

### **Listen: Finding God in the Story of your Life** by Keri Wyatt Kent

In this remarkable book, Kent shows us how to open ourselves to more love and joy by listening – to God, to our hearts and to one another. Listening is the central spiritual practice that enables other practices – prayer, worship and scripture reading – to transform us.

### **Listening to Your Life** by Frederick Buechner

This is a “classic Buechner” collection of daily meditations. A familiar guide for seekers as well as devout believers, Buechner helps us listen to the “fathomless mystery” of our lives.

### **Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction** by Margaret Guenther

For those who want to know more about the art of spiritual direction, Guenther describes herself as an amateur, Jesus as our primary teacher for discernment, and listening as a way to allow God to move and work more fully in our lives. For others who simply want to learn how to find holiness in listening and God in our conversations, this book is a readable and inspiring guide.

### **Listening**

The May/June 1994 issue (Volume IX, Number 3) of *Weavings: A Journal of the Christian Spiritual Life*. (Back issues of *Weavings* may be ordered by calling 1-800-972-0433 or writing to Customer Service Inquiries, P0 Box 340009, Nashville, TN 37200-0009. [www.weavings.org](http://www.weavings.org))

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