



If my people . . .

PRAYER + FASTING

“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray, and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin, and I will heal their land.”

– 2 Chron. 7:14

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

Main Idea:

Prayer and fasting is a time for listening.

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING



If my people . . .

PRAYER + FASTING

“My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding...”

- Prov. 2:1-2

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

Listening: 4 Truths

#1) Listening requires acceptance.

“My Son, if you accept my words...” (v.1)

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

Listening: 4 Truths

#2) Listening requires valuing.

“...and store up my commands within you.” (v.1)

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

Listening: 4 Truths

#2) Listening requires valuing.

“...and treasure my commands within you.”

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

Listening: 4 Truths

#3) Listening requires attention.

“Turning your ear to wisdom...” (v.2)

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

Listening: 4 Truths

#3) Listening requires attention.

Hebrew - command:

“Make your ear attentive to wisdom.” (v.2)

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

Wisdom is the capacity that allows us to understand life from God's perspective.

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

Listening: 4 Truths

#4) Listening requires proper heart disposition.

“And applying your heart to understanding.” (v.2)

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.”

Stephen Covey, *7 Habits*

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

“From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched (nata) his tent...”

- Gen 12:8

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

“From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched (nata) his tent...”

- Gen 12:8

“Therefore, I will stretch out (nata) my hand against you...”

- Ez. 25:7

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

Listening: 4 Truths

#4) Listening requires proper heart disposition.

“And (nata) your heart to understanding.”

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

Listening: 4 Truths

#4) Listening requires proper heart disposition.

“And (nata) your heart to understanding.”

“Establishing your heart toward understanding.”

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

Listening: 4 Truths

#4) Listening requires proper heart disposition.

“And (nata) your heart to understanding.”

“Establishing your heart toward understanding.”

“Committing your heart to pursue understanding.”

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

Truth:

God is for us.

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

Listening: 4 Truths

Listening requires acceptance.

Listening requires valuing.

Listening requires attention.

Listening requires proper heart disposition.

If my people...
PRAYER + FASTING

Sunday Sermon

1/22/23

Series: If My People (Prayer and Fasting)

Passage: Proverbs 2:1-6

Title: A Time for Listening

Good morning, Church! Please turn in your Bible today to Proverbs 2. If you don't have a Bible of your own, I invite you to take the bible in the pew in front of you home with you. That is our gift to you. The Word of God is living and powerful. If you are new to Christianity, try it out. You will find contained in its pages truth that is higher than any human wisdom.

Today we are continuing in our series "If my People." It is a series we've been going through as we participate during the month of January in a time of Prayer and Fasting as a body.

Our call to pray and fast during the month of January isn't something legalistic, but an opportunity to prepare ourselves for whatever the Lord might have for us this year. If the Lord moved tomorrow, are we prepared to follow him? If you haven't been participating because you don't have the time, or the willpower, or the desire, or a month just seems like a really long time, then let me encourage you to try one day, one meal. Skip one meal and pray. If you can't skip a meal, again, not legalistic, set aside a half hour to be with the Lord. See what the Lord has for you.

Because God says, ***"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray, and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin, and I will heal their land."*** – 2 Chron. 7:14

The first week of our series we learned that prayer and fasting is a time of preparation. Washing ourselves. Waiting for him to move so that we might follow. Week two we learned that prayer and fasting is a time for repentance. Asking God to reveal our sin to us. Doing something with that sin – laying it down and returning to the Lord. Last week we studied how prayer and fasting is a time of denial. The practice of laying down self, dying to our own desires, and choosing to follow Jesus – trading the lesser thing for the greater thing.

Here's our main idea for this week: Prayer and fasting is a time for listening.

41 times is listening talked about in the gospels.

15 times Jesus commands his followers to listen.

10 times does the phrase "He who has ears to hear, let him hear" appear in the NT.

413 times does scripture use the phrase, "This is what the Lord says" assuming that those hearing the voice of God are listening.

Jesus says, "My sheep know my voice."

Martha was serving, Mary sat listening at the feet of Jesus. Jesus said that what Mary had chosen was better.

Listening is a crucial practice for any relationship to thrive, and it is especially important in our relationship with the Lord. And prayer and fasting makes a great time for listening.

There are a couple of places I could have gone this morning, but I've chosen to camp out in Proverbs 2:1-6. In this section of Proverbs – God's wisdom is personified as a father writing instruction to his son. And here in chapter 2, God's wisdom is helpful for us in defining and understanding the role of listening as we live in relationship with him.

So with that said, read along with me this morning, Proverbs 2:1-6. [read and pray]

President Franklin Roosevelt was known for his ready grin and his boisterous personality. But he quickly discovered that, even to him, a President, people really aren't good at listening. So one evening, in one of those long reception lines people lined up in to shake his hand, he decided to play a little trick on his guests.

So, one evening President Roosevelt decided to find out whether anybody was actually paying attention to what he was saying. As each person came up to him with extended hand, he flashed his big smile and said, "I murdered my grandmother this morning." People would automatically respond with comments such as "How lovely." or "Continue on with your great work." Nobody listened to what he was saying, except for one foreign diplomat. When the president said, "I murdered my grandmother this morning," the diplomat leaned in and responded softly, "I'm sure she had it coming to her."

It's a funny story, but it begs the question "How often are we guilty of the same lack of listening?" For many of us, we have lots to say, but when it comes to listening, we are not very good. In fact, people pay lots of money just to have someone good at listening listen to them.

When it comes to our lives, God has many things He desires to say to us, to reveal to us, but we don't hear them because we are the ones doing the talking, or we are too busy for a relationship, or we're too distracted to hear him.

Every year our high school students take a retreat to URIMON, which stand for "Unknown retreat in the middle of nowhere." It was dubbed that in 1999 and the name just stuck. That week was always my favorite week of the year. But it wasn't because of the fun or games or even the content. It was because for a week, the students were provided an opportunity to stop, and unplug, and listen. And because of that, the Lord moved. Every year the students found him speaking. Every year, they found themselves suddenly able to hear.

The truth is, our lives are like a car that is revved to the point where it's redlining. With full schedules and responsibilities and commitments, most of us are just pedal to the floor all the time [revving sound]. Full and loud and distracting. Listening becomes really difficult in that environment.

I can't tell you how many times I'm in the car listening to the radio or music when a little voice from the back seat says, "Dad, (muffled)." What? "(muffled)". Then what happens? You grab the dial and turn down the volume, and suddenly you can hear your kids speak.

Prayer and fasting allows you to take your foot off the gas. It allows the revving engine to idle. It allows the volume on the radio to come down. So that, like the students at URIMON, like Elijah

at the mount of the Lord, you too can begin to hear the still small voice of the Lord when he speaks.

Now, side note, sometimes God does speak loud and clear. It feels like when Jesus rebukes the wind and waves, sometimes we are like “Ok God, I hear you loud and clear.” But most often when God speaks, it is a prompting in our spirit. It’s a still small voice. It’s a gentle word. It’s the kind of voice that we miss, if we are not taking the time to listen.

And that’s where our passage this morning in Proverbs can help us. Because the truth is that we need to be “in tune” with God so that we’re ready when he calls.

The Scriptures are filled with prayers, songs, stories, and miracles that demonstrate God’s power and show his desire to communicate with his people. But, in order to hear what God is saying to us, we have to **learn** to listen.

Because the truth is that there is more to listening than simply hearing.

Let me ground this in a real-life experience I had this week.

This past Wednesday, Becky had what they call her “survivorship appointment.” We’ve been looking forward to this appointment because, all throughout Becky’s treatment, through the surgeries, the chemotherapy, the radiation treatments, not one single scan has been done since she was first diagnosed more than a year ago. Not one! So when you get to the end of the treatments – you ring the bell. There’s celebration for sure. But there still the looming questions, “Is it gone? Am I cured? Did you get it all? How do we know it worked?”

So for months Becky’s been living in this limbo. I think I’m cured but I don’t really know. So this survivorship appointment was a big deal for us. Finally, we will get the definitive answers we are looking for, and we’ll be able to exhale, close that chapter, celebrate, and move on. Well, we get to the appointment, and those of you who have been through it probably know – no scans. They took a look at things. Poked and prodded a bit. Asked some questions. But all of it was superficial – on the outside, no one took a look at anything that was on the inside!

So Becky asked the question, “Um, how do I know I’m cancer free?” And the doctor looked at her and asked, “Do you need a definitive declaration that you are free from cancer? Would that help you exhale?” And Becky said, “Yes!” And I’ll never forget this because I had about a thousand emotions all at once and not all of them good. The doctor looked at her and said, “You are cancer free.”

Now I’m going to pause there for a moment because it wasn’t until later, while we were walking out of the office and driving home that the Lord revealed to me that this was a picture of what it means to live by faith. And the reason I’m telling the story today – it was a lesson about listening.

“My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding...”

Becky and I had very different reactions to the doctor’s words. For her, those words were life to her. They were bondage breaking. The emotional dam broke, the angst released. The doctor explained why she could definitively say she was cancer free. And for Becky it was life.

For me, I was like, “What?” Everything in me still wanted to say to her, “But you don’t *know*, because you haven’t *looked*.”

What’s the difference in our reactions? One of us was listening - and I’ll give you a hint, it wasn’t me.

These words in Proverbs 2, give us four truths which key us into what it means to actually listen. These can help us in our pursuit of God. They are also absolutely true about our earthly relationships as well. If you’re taking notes, write these down.

The first truth we see is that **Listening requires acceptance.** ***“My Son, if you accept my words...”***

When the doctor said that Becky was cancer free, I had trouble accepting those words. Right, wrong, good, bad, reasonable or not – I was like, “I don’t know.” Listen: Acceptance is the idea that we open to receiving what another person is saying. There’s nothing profound in the translation here. Sometimes when God speaks, we’re like “I don’t know, not sure I believe that.”

Listening requires acceptance.

Second: Listening requires valuing – *“and store up my commands within you.”*

Hebrew word translated “store up” is literally the word “treasure.”

The idea is this: We only treasure the commands of someone we value. If we don’t value the source, we won’t value the message. To truly listen requires me to place value in the source.

The question becomes: How much value do you place in the one doing the speaking?

Becky treasured the words of the doctor because she valued the source from which those words were coming. We value the words of a friend because of who they are. We value the words of an expert because of who they are. How much more should we value the words of God because of who he is?

Third: Listening requires attention. ***“Turning your ear to wisdom...”*** The Hebrew here is actually a command, “Make your ear attentive to wisdom.” The idea is that listening requires a focusing of attention. We use the phrase “give them your full attention.” Why? Because when we are trying to listen while distracted, we often miss some or even all of what the other person might be saying. There are times at home when I’m doing something while someone’s talking to me, and I have to put down whatever I’m doing and turn and face the person in order to catch what they are saying. Parents: Before we say something important to our kids what do we say? We say, “Look at me.” Because I know that if they physically have to turn and face me, they are ready to listen.

The same is true of us and God. Listening requires us to make our ears attentive, but where it is beneficial to us is what we are taking the time to focus on – God’s wisdom. Wisdom is **the capacity that allows us to understand life from God's perspective**. Where I was missing the mark in the doctor’s office is that I had to understand Becky’s cancer treatment from the doctor’s perspective, her wisdom, which she graciously explained to us. I had a limited perspective, but she had a higher understanding.

Prayer and fasting can be such an effective time for us because in it we stop and turn our attention to the Lord. It puts us in a posture of attentiveness whereby we can receive from him.

Finally: Listening requires proper heart disposition. “And applying your heart to understanding.” Stephen Covey in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, has this observation, **“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.”**

The word translated “applying” is a fascinating verb in the Hebrew. It’s the word “nata.” It’s the same word used for “pitching your tent.” It’s also the same word used for when the Lord “stretched out his hand” against Egypt. Here it’s translated “applying your heart.” What’s going on?

Pitching a tent is the idea of establishing yourself, setting up camp. With that in mind, this could be translated “establishing your heart toward understanding.”

The idea of the Lord stretching out his hand is the idea of him being committed to the pursuit of something. So with that in mind we could translate this “Committing your heart to pursue understanding.”

The idea here is that a listening person has a heart that is established in or committed to the pursuit of understanding. In other words, a heart that is facing the right way – having a proper disposition.

When I counsel, I often tell people, “I am for you.” It’s not me verse you. We are on the same side. Sometimes tend to doubt peoples motives, we have the tendency to take an “us against them” approach. In the doctor’s office I might have been tempted to say, “The doctor doesn’t know what she’s talking about. She’s just trying to deceive us. She’s blowing smoke. Just saying what we want to hear!” No she’s “for” us. She wants us to be able to enter into the truth of the reality that Becky is now free of cancer. But if I’m going to listen, I need to have the right heart disposition.

The same is true of God. **God is “for” us**. He cares about us. He sent his Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for our sins so that he could save us and bring us into a relationship with him. Why wouldn’t we listen to him? Why wouldn’t we follow him? Put your heart, your life in his hands this morning. Follow him as your Lord and Savior. He loves you. His character is good. Even if he has allowed the hard, he is “for” you and me.

In our pursuit of Wisdom, not earthly wisdom, but God’s Wisdom, we must be able to listen.

Accepting his words, valuing his instruction, turning our attention to him with a committed heart.

God says, "If you do that, (verse 5) you will be moved to a new place of understanding and encounter God in deeper more profound ways."

Prayer and fasting moves us into a place in which we can listen well.

When it comes to our life with God, when it comes to seeking the Lord and listening to him – our reality is often like that doctor's office. We come to him with our concerns, we come with questions ready, we come to him with expectations, and requests and preconceptions based in our own desires and wisdom. But in that place, we struggle to listen. Either we tend to never stop talking or we tend not to slow down long enough for him to speak. We take everything and we filter it through all the baggage and expectations we bring with us, saying to him, "But you don't *know*, because you haven't _____."

But Proverbs says, "Accept, store up, turn your ear, apply your heart. In other words, "Listen." Because doing those things will bring about understanding. And in doing those things you will find God.