



Soul Matters

**What does it mean to be
a people of DEEP LISTENING?**



Materials for Individual Reflection

October 2020

What Does It Mean To Be A People of Deep Listening?

*This is your chance to listen carefully.
Your whole life might depend on what you hear.*

- [Joyce Sutphen](#)

Listening helps us find our way. The listening of therapists allows us to navigate our way through life. We turn to prayer to hear God's guidance. We listen to experts so we can get ahead. Like a flashlight that leads us through the darkness, listening helps us keep on course.

And yet our faith says not quite. There's so much more to it than that. Listening doesn't just guide us through the world, it says. It also *creates* our world.

Just think about why you listen to those close to you. Is it really just to gather information? To hear the other clearly? Or is it because you've discovered in those rare moments of deep listening that a space suddenly opens up? A space that feels sacred. A space that, once you've experienced it, you never want to leave.

This is why the flashlight way of understanding listening is so limited and limiting. Listening's value isn't just instrumental. It doesn't just help us collect and expose information. It's not just a tool.

It's a place.

Those voices calling us home are our home. We don't have conversations; we are our conversations. Listening literally determines the world we live in. And whom we become.

That old story about the cricket and coins comes to mind. Two people are walking down a busy city street. Everyone is rushing to and from their work, trying to get ahead. One of the friends turns to the other and says, "Do you hear that? It's a cricket!" The other friend responds with doubt, but after focusing his attention finally hears it. "Wow," he says, "How did you hear that cricket with all the noise around us?" His friend responds, "It's all about how I was raised, about what I was taught to listen for." He goes on, "Here, I'll show you something." The friend then reaches into his pocket and pulls out a handful of coins - nickels, quarters, dimes - and he drops them on the sidewalk. Everyone who was rushing by stops... to listen.

One wonders if this is why the poet says, "Listen carefully. Your whole life might depend on what you hear."

Again friends, we must remember this: We don't have conversations, we are our conversations. Who and what we listen to is who and what we become.

May this month, and our time together, help us take one more step toward listening our way into being.

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A

Lectio Divina and Listening for God

This exercise invites you to try out a deep listening technique developed by our Christian siblings. It's called Lectio Divina. Learn more about it [here](#) and [here](#). The basic idea is to deeply listen to a text by reading it multiple times through a different reflective lens each time. You can also think of it as bringing different discernment questions to the text, with each question inviting you to listen to the text in a new way. Our favorite three questions are:

- What FEELINGS arise?
- What MEMORIES does it stir?
- What MESSAGE does it have for you? (“words of comfort or challenge”)

Christians believe this is a powerful way to allow God to speak through the text. They often describe it as a “prayerful” way (versus “analytical”) way of reading. Relatedly, it's important to note that many Christians agree with theologian, Henri Nouwen, who said, “The real “work” of prayer is to become silent and listen to the voice that says good things about me... [Prayer] is the place in which you can listen to the voice of the One who calls you the beloved.”

With all this in mind, we invite you to apply a lectio divina approach to two poems. Each, in their own way, lift up the idea of the Sacred saying, “You are beloved.”

Here are the two poems:

Wild Geese by Mary Oliver

http://www.phys.unm.edu/~tw/fas/yits/archive/oliver_wildgeese.html

God Says Yes To Me by Kaylin Haught

<https://wordsoftheyear.com/2015/08/14/god-says-yes-to-me-by-kaylin-haught/>

Read them three times. With the first reading guided by the question: “What FEELINGS arise as I listen to the words?” And the second reading guided by “What MEMORIES does it stir?” Ending with a third reading guided by “What MESSAGE does this have for me? What word of comfort or challenge is it trying to offer me?” (On this third reading it often helps to listen for which single word or phrase pops out at you, and then apply the question to that word/phrase.)

If you are up for a fourth reading, consider using this question to guide you: “Who am I in the text? Which character or action represents me and where I'm at right now?”

Option B

Listening Anew to the “Violence” of Today’s Protests

It’s striking how conversations about racial justice protests quickly move from the pain and moral demands that sit at the center of those protests to the violence that sometimes lives at the edges of them. Deep listening helps us notice how certain “narratives” and “frames” about the violence actually work to remove the protests’ moral demands and pain from the center of the discussion, how they distract and in many cases seek to undermine that work for justice. And these frames don’t just live “out there”; they live inside many of us as well.

So this month, using the below toolkit article as your guide, take some time to listen anew to these unhelpful frames, and learn how to challenge them in ourselves and others.

SURJ Toolkit: Calling People in Around “Violence”

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BQVqLVI-3zVb0VcsOZB7JKVaVsHllyjwM6cvdcqWHal/edit?fbclid=IwAR3w2QRnqIAiDaXfIQVbLGbAr9ch_7JLKKgNBN-u9qkXA-m7mQUMODI00_o

Option C

Listen to a Photo

Part of deep listening is paying close attention to “the issues.” But sometimes the most important voices and messages come from paying close attention to images. One of the most powerful and provocative images to arise from the Black Lives Matter protests was the 2016 picture of Leshia Evans at the protests in Baton Rouge, Louisiana after the death of Alton Sterling.

One of the things that makes this picture so powerful and important is the way its meaning has evolved as people have listened to each other’s reactions to it. For instance, the first reactions to it were like this one from a [Twitter](#) post:

“Grace, Beauty, Defiance, Strength: Behold Lady Liberty!”

But after such affirming responses, Leshia Evans felt she needed to add another perspective to the conversation. She lifted up the photo’s limits and dangers, saying, “It’s safe... It is the color book version of the truth.”

So, using this article which contains a podcast and a poem about the picture, take some time this month to listen deeply to this iconic photo. Come to your group ready to share the *many ways* it spoke to you.

Unrest in Baton Rouge: Anatomy of a Photo

<https://www.wnyc.org/story/unrest-baton-rouge/>

Option D

The Voice of Sounds

We listen with our ears. We also appreciate listening with our minds or hearts. But what about listening with your skin? Your body? Your imagination? Or even your memory?

This exercise invites us to creatively listen in new ways. Soul Matters Creativity Consultant, [Elizabeth McKoy](#), has created a SoundScape Journey to guide us through this exercise. This guided journey is captured on an audio clip. To access and play it, just click on the link below.

Use the audio in any way that is helpful to you. Listen straight through. Hit pause after each sound scape and make some extra room for reflection or writing your reactions down. Whatever works best.

Come to your group ready to share one or two of the most impactful things that came up for you.

Sound Scape Journey

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1-JGuj-gd8H_4sqjYQOLhllmJyVcenk?usp=sharing

Option E

Find Deep Listening in Our Recommended Resources

Our recommended resources are full of wisdom about what it means to be a people of and a person of Deep Listening. Engaging these resources and finding the one that especially speaks to you is a spiritual practice in and of itself.

So, if none of the above exercises call to you, engage the recommended resources section of this packet as your spiritual exercise for the month.

Set aside some regular time throughout a week to go through them and meditate on them until you find the one that most expands or deepens your understanding of deep listening. After you've found it, consider printing it out and carrying it with you or pinning it up so you can continue to reflect on it throughout the weeks leading up to your group meeting. Come to your group ready to share where the journey led you.

Option F *(new!)*

Listen to a Friend Tell You Which Question Is Yours

Engaging our recommended resources can be a spiritual exercise. Additionally, engaging the *reflection questions* with a friend can also be one. You still need to read the list of questions yourself and do your own spiritual discernment work with them. But after that, you can also create your own additional spiritual exercise by inviting someone close to you to read over the list and *tell you which question they think is "your question."* It's one thing for you to decide which of the questions you need to wrestle with; it's quite another to have *another person* tell you which one you need to wrestle with!

Whether they pick the same question as you did or an entirely different one, you will surely get some insights.

Your Question

Don't treat these questions like "homework" or try to answer every single one. Instead, make time to meditate on the list and then pick the one question that speaks to you most. The goal is to figure out which question is "yours." Which question captures the call of your inner voice? Which one contains "your work"?

Often it helps to read the list to a friend or loved one and ask them which question they think is the question you need to wrestle with!

1. Who listened to you when you most needed it? Who first gave you the gift of deep listening?
2. How has your listening needed to change as you've grown older?
3. Have you forgiven yourself for failing to listen?
4. Ok, you've been listening. Is it now time to talk?
5. Are you having trouble hearing beyond the voice of your wounds?
6. Instead of arguing with them, what if next time you asked "[Will you tell me your story](#)? I'd love to know how you came to this point of view."
7. What if listening is actually an act of love?
8. What if prayer is really about listening until you hear a voice that says "[You are beloved](#)"?
9. Do you remember what it was like to listen to the soft breathing of your child as they slept?
10. What gets in your way the most: The noise of the world? The noise of your worries? The noise of our wounds?
11. They say if we listen deeply to our anger we will discover [fear or sadness underneath](#) it. What is your anger trying to say to you?
12. What if your [boredom](#) is really your inner voice warning you that something is wrong?
13. Are you still struggling with that old voice in your head that says "You are meant to be [seen not heard](#)"?
14. **What's your question?** Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to hear it. Or maybe the question or call you need to hear is waiting in one of the quotes listed below. Consider looking there!

Companion Pieces

Recommended Resources for Personal Exploration & Reflection

The following resources are not required reading. We will not analyze these pieces in our group. Instead they are here to companion you on your journey this month, get you thinking and open you up to new ways of thinking about what it means to be part of a people of Deep Listening.

Word Roots & Definitions

“Listen” first appeared in Old English as “hlysnan” or “lyсна,” drawn from the Indo-European root “klu,” which denoted the general idea of “hearing.” (It’s also the root of our English “loud.”)

[-source](#)

Its root is the source also of Sanskrit srnoti "hears," srosati "hears, obeys;"

[-source](#)

“Silent” and “listen” are anagrams. They have all the same letters in a different order!

Wise Words

The first duty of love is to listen.

Paul Tillich

Forget everything you've ever done.
Make no comparisons. Simply listen.
Listen with your eyes, as if the story
you are hearing is happening right now.
Listen without blinking, as if a move
might frighten the truth away forever...
Your whole life might depend on what you hear.

[Joyce Sutphen](#)

Wisdom is the reward you get for a lifetime of
listening when you'd have preferred to talk.

Doug Larson

Caring people “listen to” while opportunists “listen
for.”

Alan Robert Neal

To listen is very hard, because it asks of us so much interior stability that we no longer need to prove ourselves by speeches, arguments, statements, or declarations. True listeners no longer have an inner need to make their presence known. They are free to receive, to welcome, to accept.

[Henri Nouwen](#)

One of my patients told me that when she tried to tell her story people often interrupted her to tell her that they once had something just like that happen to them. Subtly her pain became a story about themselves. Eventually she stopped talking to most people. It was just too lonely.”

[Rachel Naomi Remen](#)

Perhaps we should sit in the dark...

In the dark we could not see who speaks
and only the words
would say what they say...

[Marge Percy](#)

There is a quality of listening that is possible among a circle of human beings, who by their attentiveness to one another create a space in which each person is able to give voice to the truth of his or her life.

There is the miracle of authentic narrative, made possible by listening that holds still long enough to let our truth be told.

Rebecca Parker

Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person they are almost indistinguishable.

David Augsburger

Our listening creates sanctuary for the homeless parts within the other person.

Rachel Naomi Remen

When someone deeply listens to you it is like holding out a dented cup you've had since childhood and watching it fill up with cold, fresh water.

John Fox

Hear the biography, not the ideology... When someone has a point of view we find difficult to understand, disagreeable, or even offensive, we must look to the set of circumstances that person has experienced that resulted in that point of view. Get their story, their biography, and you'll open up the real possibility of an understanding that transcends disagreement... When you find yourself in disagreement, just ask one question: "Will you tell me your story? I'd love to know how you came to this point of view."

[Benjamin Mathes](#)

The less blame and criticism in our words, the easier it will be for others to hear us. When someone trusts that we're actually interested in understanding them... they can stop defending themselves and just hear what we're saying.

[Oren Jay Sofer](#)

Listening is something that changes the person who is speaking. It can be an encouragement. It can be that this openness can resonate in others, so that it is a shared openness. So in a way the person speaking is also listening to something that is larger than both of us who are speaking. That is, we're in the embrace of this other that we don't remember. That we're not sensitive to and don't realize that we're a part of—a collective group.

Barry Svigals,

He is the lead architect of the new Sandy Hook Elementary School, talking about how listening was an important part of the process of designing the new school in the wake of the tragedy.

We don't just listen for clarity and guidance, we listen to become larger.

Those voices calling us home are our home.

We don't have conversations, we are our conversations.

We must remember friends:

Who we listen to is who we become.

Rev. Scott Tayler

The real "work" of prayer is to become silent and listen to the voice that says good things about me... Why is it so important that you are with God and God alone on the mountain top? It's important because it's the place in which you can listen to the voice of the One who calls you the beloved. To pray is to listen to the One who calls you my beloved daughter, my beloved son, my beloved child. To pray is to let that voice speak to the center of your being, to your guts, and let that voice resound in your whole being.

Henri Nouwen

A person's calling. It is the work that they are called to in this world, the thing that they are summoned to spend their life doing. We can speak of a person choosing their vocation, but perhaps it is at least as accurate to speak of a vocation choosing the person, of a call being given and a person hearing it, or not hearing it. And maybe that is the place to start: the business of listening and hearing. A person's life is full of all sorts of voices calling them in all sorts of directions. Some of them are voices from inside and some of them are voices from outside. The more alive and alert we are, the more clamorous our lives are. Which do we listen to? What kind of voice do we listen for?

[Frederick Buechner](#)

Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am.

Parker Palmer

I sometimes wake in the early morning & listen to the soft breathing of my children & I think to myself; this is one thing I will never regret & I carry that quiet with me all day long.

[Brian Andreas](#)

Race and racism is a reality that so many of us grow up learning to just deal with. But if we ever hope to move past it, it can't just be on people of color to deal with it. It's up to all of us – Black, white, everyone – no matter how well-meaning we think we might be, to do the honest, uncomfortable work of rooting it out. It starts with self-examination and listening to those whose lives are different from our own. It ends with justice, compassion, and empathy that manifests in our lives and on our streets.

Michelle Obama

In the year that King Uzziah died, or in the year that John F. Kennedy died, or in the year that somebody you loved died, you go into the temple if that is your taste, or you hide your face in the little padded temple of your hands, and a voice says, "Whom shall I send into the pain of a world where people die?" and if you are not careful, you may find yourself answering, "Send me." You may hear the voice say, "Go." Just go.

[Frederick Buechner](#)

Listening to both sides of a story will convince you that there is more to a story than both sides.

Frank Tyger

Where words fail, music speaks.

Hans Christian Andersen

The older I grow, the more I listen to people who don't talk much.

Germain G. Glidden

The soul has been given its own ears to hear things the mind does not understand.

Rumi

Music

We create two different playlists for each of our monthly themes: one in Spotify and another in YouTube. We organize these lists as a journey of sorts. So consider listening from beginning to end and using the lists as musical meditations. Follow the links below to connect with this month's "threshold songs."

Click [here](#) for the Spotify playlist on [Deep Listening](#).

Click [here](#) for all [Spotify playlists](#).

Click [here](#) for the YouTube playlist on [Deep Listening](#).

Click [here](#) for all the [YouTube playlists](#).

Videos & Podcasts

Being A Good Listener

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BdbiZcNBXg&feature=emb_logo

A Decade Of Watching Black People Die - Code Switch

<https://www.npr.org/2020/06/02/868025780/code-switch-a-decade-of-watching-black-people-die>

On being able to hear today's violence against Black American as nothing new.

Dr. Robin DiAngelo Discusses 'White Fragility'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45ey4jgoxeU&feature=youtu.be>

On the difficulty white people have talking about and listening conversations about racism.

Blackbird by The Beatles sung in Mi'kmaq - Emma Stevens

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99-LoEkAA3w&feature=emb_logo

On hearing Blackbird anew.

Article about the song:

<https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2019/05/22/blackbird-mikmaq-indigenous-language>

I Listen to Color

https://www.ted.com/talks/neil_harbisson_i_listen_to_color?referrer=playlist-listen_up

Neil Harbisson's "eyeborg" allows him to hear colors, even those beyond the range of sight.

Witnessing and Listening to Difference: Atheists, Christians, Jews, and Muslims...

On Rights:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9l0Lba-WUcU>

On Beliefs:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNxsSV96JQY>

Articles

Neuroscience Says Listening to This Song Reduces Anxiety by Up to 65 Percent

<https://medium.com/inc./neuroscience-says-listening-to-this-song-reduces-anxiety-by-up-to-65-percent-d69ae1343a27>

Why Listening to Sad Music Makes You Feel Better

<https://elemental.medium.com/why-listening-to-sad-music-makes-you-feel-better-46e9eb7d82a1>

Listening as Editing

<https://www.theschooloflife.com/thebookoflife/17689-2/>

"The good editor-listener will in the end be responsible for a lot of changes in a conversation. Were it to be transcribed and manually edited, there would be red pencil marks everywhere across the text. But the result of such interventions is never a sense of violation, rather an impression of having been – through another's deft work – brought closer to one's real intentions. An ideal editor-listener helps us to be more ourselves than we know how to be by ourselves..."

Learning to Listen to One's Own Boredom

<https://www.theschooloflife.com/thebookoflife/listening-to-own-boredom/>

"Most of us are fatefully too proficient at bearing our own boredom. Along the way, we forget that boredom has many important things to teach us. It is, at its best, a confused, inarticulate, but genuine signal from a deep part of our minds that something is very wrong..."

Conversation Guide - On what to say when you hear white people denying the reality of what's going on

Part 1:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CA6A3Usl5c4/>

Part 2:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CBAXPQ6IGAS/>

Anti-Racism Work Goes Trendy; Stay Focused

<https://blackgirlinmaine.com/racial-and-cultural/anti-racism-work-goes-trendy-stay-focused/>

On listening to concerns about "performative change"

The Intersectionality Wars

<https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/5/20/18542843/intersectionality-conservatism-law-race-gender-discrimination>

On listening to the wisdom of the "intersectionality framework"

How to Talk Someone Out of Bigotry

<https://www.vox.com/2020/1/29/21065620/brookman-kalla-deep-canvassing>

On a growing body of research that indicates that it is much easier to change a prejudiced person's mind by offering them listening and giving them your empathy than trying to activate their shame.

Books

White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism

Robin DiAngelo

"I wish everyone could read this. It's validation and comfort for people of color who have tried to explain things to "white folks," and a challenge to "white folks" to acknowledge their privilege and fragility, and do something about it..." - review

Me and White Supremacy

Layla F. Saad

On moving beyond listening and learning into action

Callings: Finding and Following an Authentic Life

Gregg Michael Levoy

Reviews:

<https://www.gregglevoy.com/callings/reviews.html>

Movies

[Dear White People](#)

[Lost in Translation](#)

[Dead Poets Society](#)

[Whale Rider](#)

[Inside Out](#)

On the importance of your emotions listening to each other, with emphasis on listening to [the voice of sadness](#) rather than pushing it down.

[Arrival](#)

[Babal](#)



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SHARING CIRCLE

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