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Have you ever wondered if God is listening to you? Maybe you've wondered about God when a crisis hits your life: the doctor tells you about the cancer growing inside your body and your mind grows numb as you hear all the possible treatment options. You pray for quick healing or hope for a wrong diagnosis, but the fact of long term treatments becomes a reality. You pray, "Why me, God, why did I get this disease?"



Maybe you've wondered if God heard your prayer when your boss says he needs to let you go due to the downturn of the economy and his inability to afford you. You pray for a new job, but the wait turns into weeks and months and you wonder how you will pay your bills. You pray, "How long will this last God? Are you listening to me, God? This is not what I want for my life. When will this waiting end?"



Those who lived during the time of the Babylonian exile 2500 years ago wondered a similar question: "Why us, God, why have we been carried away from our homes into a strange land? How long will this last, God? Are you listening to us?" After years of war, in 587 B.C.E., the Babylonia king



Nebuchadnezzar ransacked Jerusalem and the temple and began exporting people to Babylon to live in exile, and God's people began to wonder what had happened, why such terrible things had occurred.

In the midst of this crisis, the prophet Jeremiah brought words of hope to the people. He suggested they build homes in this strange land of Babylon, plant gardens and eat their produce, get married and have children and grandchildren. In addition, Jeremiah suggested they get along with the people who captured them and even pray for them.

Some have suggested that two thousand years later Martin Luther, the one who sparked the Protestant Reformation, said a similar thing, "If I knew that tomorrow was the end of the world, I would plant an apple tree today!"¹ In other words, make the best of the situation where you find yourself. Even if things look really bad, live fully trusting in God's hope for the future.



There must have been some other people during Jeremiah's day, however, suggesting different ideas, for Jeremiah warned the people to not listen to other voices that spread lies. Maybe



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these other voices offered the glimmer of a quick solution, or they suggested that people fight back or try to escape and return back home, but only Jeremiah brought God's words, "Only after you have been here seventy years will you be able to return home."

"When you call on me, when you come and pray to me, I'll listen. When you come looking for me, you'll find me. Yes, when you get serious about finding me and want it more than anything else, I'll make sure you won't be disappointed...I'll turn things around for you...You can count on it."²

I imagine these were difficult words to hear, especially for those who knew they would not live long enough to return home after seventy years. Some may have also found it difficult to listen to the advice to pray for the government of those who carried them away from their homes.

Sometimes what God suggests is not always easy to hear. Sometimes it's even hard to hear what our friends or family members tell us, as was the case with

a man [who] was perplexed by his wife's refusal to admit her hearing problem. Speaking with his doctor one day, he exclaimed, "How can I get my wife to admit that she is hard of hearing?"



"I'll tell you what you need to do," his doctor replied. "When you arrive home this evening, peek your head through the door and ask, 'Honey, what's for dinner tonight?' If she doesn't answer, go into the living room and say, 'Honey, what's for dinner?' If she still does not answer, walk into the kitchen and ask, 'Honey, what's for dinner?' If she still does not hear you, then walk right up behind her and speak directly in her ear: 'Honey, what's for dinner?' Then you will be able to convince her of her need for a hearing exam."

"Great!" the man responded. "I think it will work!" That evening the man arrived home from work. Just as he had been instructed, he opened the front door and called out: "Honey, what's for dinner tonight?" He listened carefully, but there was no reply. He walked into the living room and repeated, "Honey, what's for dinner?" He still received no answer. He then walked into the

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kitchen and asked, “Honey, what’s for dinner?” Still there was no answer. The man walked right up behind his wife and spoke directly into her ear: “Honey, what’s for dinner?”

At this the wife turned around and resolutely replied: “For the fourth time, I said we are having spaghetti!”³



We may not always hear one another clearly, and that can be frustrating, but God promises to always hear us. We may not get what we want when we ask, and we may have to endure years of patience, but God is always listening to us, even when we mourn with sadness, even when our lives are filled with pain.

Sometimes it’s hard for us to hear those in pain, for the weight of their sorrow may feel overwhelming, making it difficult for our ears to hear their trauma, as was the case with a student of Disciples teacher Fred Craddock who told about a woman who came to him in tears. The student earlier



saw a friend of hers sitting reading something. [The student] said [to Fred], “I was busy getting some money out of my purse to get a pop out

of the machine. I just said to my friend over there, ‘Well how are you doing?’”

[The student] continued, “I found out later [my friend’s] response was, ‘I just got a letter from my mother. She has a malignancy, and I think I’m going to have to go home to help her.’”

In tears the student said to [Fred], “I didn’t hear her. I just went on and got my drink, came back out, and said, ‘Well, what have you got planned for the weekend?’ Didn’t hear a thing.”⁴

Sometimes we have a hard time hearing one another. We may get disappointed that those closest to us don’t hear what we said, or if they hear, they don’t understand. Jeremiah reminds us that God never stops listening. God always understands what we say, even when we speak softly in the silence of prayer. Even when it seems to take forever to get a response for our lives to turn around, God is still listening, helping us endure the wait.



As we approach the season of Advent, we begin another journey of waiting. We wait for Christmas, for the birth of Jesus, and although we know Jesus



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is already present in the world, we relive the waiting for his birth, striving to remain patient for that special day. Children find it difficult to wait for Santa to arrive, for presents to appear under the tree. Youth find it difficult to wait for the end of the semester and midterm exams to be over, while also waiting for two weeks of vacation. Many will begin waiting for warmer weather as snow begins to accumulate in our driveways and streets. Some will begin waiting for test results from medical exams, while others will wait to find employment.

And some will wait to be heard, longing to be noticed, hoping for someone to hear their voice.

- Immigrants who have lived here for many years and have raised their children long to be heard that they love this country and want to remain.

- Muslims who worship the same God as Christians and Jews long to be heard that they love and desire peace just as much as everyone else.
- Wives and husbands and children who have gotten too busy long for other members of their family to slow down and hear them.
- Those living in the streets long for others to hear their stories about how they became homeless.

Sometimes we may forget to stop and listen, but Jeremiah reminds us that God never stops listening, for God told the exiles thousands of years ago and us today: “When you search for me, you will find me. When you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you.”



¹ <http://www.luther.de/en/baeume.html>

² Jeremiah 29:29:12-14, The Message Bible.

³ Hodgins, Michael. *1001 More Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations*

for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers (Kindle Locations 1810-1823). # 220, Zondervan. Kindle Edition

⁴ Fred Craddock, *Craddock Stories*, p. 26-7.