

Sermon Transcript from 1st June 2025 – Listen Up!

Based on Reading – 1 Kings 19:11-13

Sermon TLDR

Our speaker discusses the **importance of listening attentively to God and others**, highlighting how noise and differing perspectives can hinder understanding. Clare explains three ways of listening: with the **head (facts)**, **heart (emotions and values)**, and **feet (intentions and motivations)**, emphasising the need to listen to the "whole person." Clare then explores a biblical passage where God is found in a **gentle whisper rather than dramatic events**, connecting this to the need for quiet reflection to hear God's voice. Finally, touching on the **historical radical nature of Baptist church meetings** where every member's voice was valued in decision-making, linking this to the idea that **collective, diverse wisdom** is needed to discern God's will, comparing it to the manifold wisdom of God described in Ephesians.

Link to the Start of the Sermon (on YouTube)

<https://youtu.be/weYQgWWP3Hw?t=3043>

Sermon Transcript

So, I thought we would do this activity and you know, I'm now doubting myself, okay? But I I'm sensing that we could be enthusiastic and we will just go with it and if doesn't work out that you will forgive me and I'll know not to try it again.

This is the first time that I've done it in a church service. So, you're probably thinking that's not a great start. But, we're going to give this a go. It's like a listening activity. Okay. And um I think the way that it might work would be if I could have five volunteers. And what's going to happen is that these five volunteers, I'm going to draw something on here and they're not going to see what it is. And then everybody else has to shout and describe it to them and they have to draw what it is that's being described to them. So that's what we're going to do. We'll see how this works. I'm not looking I'm looking out and I'm thinking I don't know. I don't know. But anyway, we'll give this a go.

So can we have five volunteers who are willing to tried the drawing um whilst we're all going to be shouting at them giving them directions as to what to draw. So, who's happy to be a volunteer to be a drawer? Thank you. And we need four more just because you know it's not nice. Thank you. So, I've got another person that's willing. Brilliant. And brilliant. Okay, this will do. [I've] got my bits of paper here. So, there's enough there for you to hopefully lean on. [...] So, I hope everyone else is in good kind of directing voices to tell these wonderful volunteers. [...] Okay. So, I'm going to trust that you won't turn around, you'll just keep your eyes fixed [ahead].

So, what will I draw? So, keep your eyes that way. It's not It's abstract. Just so you know, give you a bit of a clue. Quick and clear really if you think you've drawn something it's not a pretty picture. Okay, so everyone else remaining you need to shout to tell them what they need to be drawing. So if the best voices and describe what you see so that they can draw it. Shout away...

[congregation shouts out instructions to our drawers!]

See how we're getting on...

Brilliant. So, just shout out some of those directions again just um so that they can make sure that they've captured it.

Let's see, that's cool, this is great, thank you.

I think we'll press pause there and can you for wonderful volunteers show us your remarkable drawings. Just stand up. Hold up for us. So, we've got the circle and the line was captured here. We've got a triangle captured there. Triangle captured here.

Oh, and we've got the squiggles coming off. So, this is what was being described to you.

You all got the circle. So, that's a good start, isn't it? Thank you. Whilst you're still there, can I ask you what made it tricky for you to be able to hear or just sort of capture what people were trying to tell you to draw?

Just didn't understand. It was just not clear for you.

What about other people? What made it a bit tricky? Someone said line through the middle.

So he did say line through the middle and then you understood that to be something different from what they were trying to say. Yeah.

What made it hard for you? Different people were saying different things at the same time.

It's always a bit hard is when you're getting different messages there. Anything else you want to say? No. Cool. Thank you. You can sit back down. That's great. Thank you.

You found it easy. Did you? Oh, did you? That always makes it a little bit easier, doesn't it?

Just going to put these back a little bit, otherwise I feel a bit weird, but that's fine. There we go...

The thing is like listening is one of the most key things obviously in terms of actually listening to God's really important but how we listen to one another especially as Baptists and I'm going to say a little bit more about that because it's as we listen together that we hear God maybe a bit more clearly and not just hear the perspective that we bring to a space.

But when we listen there's like loads of things that can get in the way. It could be too noisy. We can get different messages, different perspectives. What we think we've heard isn't actually what the person was saying. So sometimes we really need to take our time to make sure that we have heard accurately and correctly. Now there's three ways in which we talk about how we listen. And that's with and there's an image here.

It's like we listen with our head, we listen with our heart and we listen with our feet.

And by that I mean we listen with our head in that we listen what the facts are and we listen to what the person's saying, the basic facts of what happened, all that sort of information. the technical information, the clarifying information.

We also listen with our heart and that is like what is the emotion that's going on behind what's being said. What are the values that the person's wanting us to kind of capture? What are they actually feeling here? So, we have to kind of really listen in with our hearts as well.

Now, some people find it easier to listen with their head rather than their heart. That's why we need both. We need both those that are quite good at the empathy and good at understanding where the person might be coming from and those are capturing the facts.

And we also listen with our feet. And by that it's understanding what is the intention behind what is being said. What's the motivation behind what's being said?

And by listening with our head, our heart and our feet, we get a chance to listen to the whole person in that way. And that's really wonderful and that's really beautiful. And so as a church that's kind of

discerning [that] you've been listening for quite a few years [and] really have a chance to listen to one another well in that sense of listening to the whole person and what the um motivation behind what someone's sharing, what's their emotion behind what they're sharing, what's the facts behind what they're sharing.

And you're going to be looking at maybe potentially calling a pioneer minister who maybe has a bit more of an emphasis around children's and families ministry. And you really want to be listening to the whole if and when that happens, what that person brings, you want to be able to listening to all of what that person is saying and not just the sort of facts, the heart and the feet.

Does that make sense?

So, listening well, listening to the whole person. And there's so much in the Bible about listening like us listening to God and and the way that Jesus listened to people and listening to his community was absolutely amazing and awesome.

But the passage that I've chosen is from Kings and Paul, have you got someone to read it? Oh, brilliant. So, this passage from 1 Kings 19:11-13. Um, and it's so we've made it together.

[The reading is on screen in two text colours for shared congregation reading]

Okay. So, the yellows and the whites. Wonderful. So, we'll start then. It starts with the white, then go to the yellow, and then the white again. So, start with you.

[The congregation reads 1 Kings 19:11-13, reproduced here for reference from the NLT]

¹¹ "Go out and stand before me on the mountain," the Lord told him. And as Elijah stood there, the Lord passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. ¹² And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

And a voice said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Strong the mountains went out at the entrance. Brilliant. So, that was a beautiful addition [we had] to the reading there. For those of you that didn't hear that, that was a glorious little burp *[from a baby in the congregation]*.

So, in that version, we have God in the gentle breeze. Now, in the Bible, when God shows up, it can often be accompanied by something dramatic. the burning bush, the clouds and thunder on Mount Sinai, the pillar of fire, and the pillar of clouds that guided the Israelites. Loud and noisy, demanding our attention.

But this reading turns it on its head. God wasn't found in the wind or the earthquake or the fire, but in the gentle whisper, or as some translations put it, in the sheer silence.

How many times have we longed for a clear sign from God?

We've wanted him to speak loudly so that we can be certain. We want the dramatic, but maybe we need to be turning down the volume on all that background noise so that we're able to hear the gentle whisper of God.

So, how much easier would it have been instead of all these different noises being said, but somebody was able to come alongside and whisper what the picture looked like, what the instructions were, took their time. Then how easy, much easier it would have been to have heard that.

So, how do we turn down the background noise so that we are able to hear the gentle whisper of God, that gentle breeze?

Now, a couple of weeks ago, it was the Baptist Assembly in the exotic location of West Bromwich, and it was held at Bethel Convention Centre, which is on an industrial estate, and I was running the youth program. And we took the young people on a reflective walk. Now, you might not think that the industrial estate is the best place for a reflective walk and I did have my doubts too, but as we went out we turned left and so it was all of the factories and everything were there and we turned and we went and just one street behind it was residential and we found this park.

It wasn't a very big park probably about actually not much bigger than this space here. And I just invited the young people to be still and to be silent. And it was incredible because as we've been walking, we've been like chatting with each other. There was a lot of traffic. The noise of the traffic. It was kind of quite a busy noisy place. But as soon as we went still and went silent, you really could hear nature. You could hear the birds. You could hear the breeze in the trees, that kind of thing.

And it was like there was this moment of stillness. and silence in what was a really busy concrete kind of place. It was really beautiful and really wonderful and it was the young people I think really caught that sense of actually if they quieten themselves, if they slow down, there is a chance that they might hear something a bit different. The thing with the gentle whisper is that it draws you in.

When God whispers, you have to lean that little bit closer. You really have to be attentive and that means there's a beautiful intimacy and connection that's created. So, in some ways, it requires more effort, more intention on our part. But I love the fact that God can be found in the quietest of sounds, that gentle breeze, those still spaces.

And I just want to ask you, how easy are you finding it to create those moments and those spaces in your own life? How easy are you finding it to turn down the volume so that you have those moments of stillness and silence to hear God's quiet voice.

You've had to do a lot of listening these past two years. Um listening to God, listening to your community and to one another as you discern what sort of minister might be the right shape for Langley Free Church in this next season. And I know that there'll be more meetings and then hopefully there will be a meeting when after a lot of listening you'll take a vote to call your next minister. That is my prayer for you. That is my hope for you.

And I know that some of you are probably wanting that would have wanted that sooner than it has been. But it's wonderful that you've taken your time to listen.

Well, now I just want to delve back into our Baptist history at this point, don't switch off, but it's just to point out something that I'd never really thought too deeply about until a few a few years ago.

Maybe we roll our eyes at the church meeting or we think that maybe East Enders and Coronation Street are much more kind of important or we don't even think that it's really important to be a church member. But do you know how radical the Baptist Church Meeting was back in the day?

It was a London church that first used ballot papers back in 1820. So when you call a minister, I'm sure they be a secret ballot where each church member gets to vote. But that was first used in 1820 and at around that time in our nation there was somebody called Bethan who was urging for universal suffrage so that asking that everybody should get a vote, but it was denied. In 1832 there was a great reform act that changed voting rights from being granted to the richest male landowners which was about 5% of the population increasing it to 10%. So that small increase of actually just making maybe the upper middle class able to vote but not the working class if not women that little change was considered radical.

Whilst back in London Baptist Church every member got a vote. Male, female, young, old. This is 1820. rich and poor. I love this. The servant and the land owner all got one vote. No one voice got the chance to be louder than the others. All were heard. How beautiful and wonderful and truly radical is that?

The belief that every voice should have a chance to speak and to be heard. That every church member is needed in the discernment of listening out for God's voice. For that gentle whisper.

Now, I wasn't going to share this, but as Paul did his bit with the different perspectives, I thought actually this does kind of fit. It's a move away from the King's passage to Ephesians. And it's that continuing that sense of um that all were heard and how beautiful it is that everybody gets a chance to contribute to the discernment of the mind of Christ.

And this is based um from passage Ephesians where it describes the church as the manifold wisdom of God. So wisdom is manifold. It's our variety and differences that captures wisdom's riches. Wisdom is both and the black and white thinkers and all the inbetweeners. Wisdom is colourful, not limited to a spectrum. Wisdom needs the perspective of a child and the insights of the childlike to be seen. Wisdom is diverse, a tapestry that is created by are many different threads. Wisdom has breadth. The narrow and the broad minds adds to its depth. Wisdom is variegated. Space for the head thinkers, the heart feelers and the gut responders. Wisdom is multifarious.

The internal reflectors and the external processors, the cerebral, emotional and semantically inclined, the homemakers, the ivory tower dwellers, the street sleepers, the playground enthusiasts, the office hermits, the reluctant classroom occupiers.

Those with their feet on the ground and those with their heads in the clouds.

The one through to nine, the J and the P, and those that dislike thinking in such binary. Wisdom is manifold. Many old, many young, many black, many brown, many white, many active, many still, many books smart, many street smart.

It takes the many to reflect Christ more clearly. If wisdom was just you, then there'd be no place for me. If wisdom was just me, then there'd be no place for you. But together, Wisdom is manifold is a variety in differences that captures wisdom's riches.

Going back to the passage in Kings, it was in the gentle whisper or perhaps the sheer silence that Elijah heard God ask, "Elijah, what are you doing here?".

I wonder if God was to ask you that question. What might you say? I wish I could say each of your names, but think of your name and imagine if God was to ask, "What are you doing here?" What might your response be? Just have a moment's quiet.

[....]

[Clare now answers a question from the congregation from the personality types that she mentioned ...]

[On personality types] there are the J and the P there's a thing called Myers Briggs which is like a personality kind of understanding. The J type personality likes routine, likes times, is quite organized and that kind of thing. The P type of personality which is mwah is a little bit more I can go with the flow. I don't mind if things change. I'm quite I can flex to it all and everything like that. So it's just saying the difference. So those of you that know Myers Briggs, that's where that comes from.

The one through to nine is from the Enneagram. And that's again just people um are different kind of personality types. And so it's just basically saying all personalities, all types are welcome here. Is that okay?

Suggest references:

- <https://www.myersbriggs.org/>
- <https://personalitypath.com/enneagram/9-personality-types/>