

LIVING
IT OUT



**DAILY
BIBLE
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

The Beauty in the Pause

November 12, 2018

Two weekends ago, CedarCreek's interns (myself included) went on a 24-hour sabbatical, during which we fasted from food, technology, and conversation. Personally, it was fantastic to set aside some of the distractions—the texts, the emails, the to-do list, the guilt of not being busy, the *noise*—to be still and listen.

During last weekend's service, Dr. Calvin Sweeney, pastor of The Tabernacle Toledo church, defined noise as "anything that interferes with the accurate transmission of a message between a sender and receiver" or "anything that interferes with our ability to build powerful relationships and connections." Even during Jesus's time, the world was full of noise, as we see in Luke 10:38-41:

As Jesus and the disciples continued on their way to Jerusalem, they came to a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed them into her home. Her sister, Mary, sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what he taught. However, Martha was distracted by the big dinner she was preparing. She came to Jesus and said, "Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me." However, the Lord said to her, "My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details!"

If Martha could be distracted from Jesus without a phone constantly buzzing in her pocket and with Jesus *physically in the house with her*, how much easier must it be to get distracted from him today? However, when I got away from the noise for 24-hours, God made me aware of things in my life, both negative and positive, that I had been too distracted to notice before. Not only that—those 24-hours were fun. They were fulfilling! They were peaceful.

John 14:27

"I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid."

The beauty of the pause is hearing the voice of the one who gives us peace. We won't find peace in our day-to-day tasks. We also can't keep waiting for our lives to become peaceful so that we can pause to listen for God because our peace *comes from God*. As Dr. Sweeney said, "It is the peace of God that allows us to deal with the pace of life." We can be still and know that God is God *because* he is God.

Dr. Sweeney also said that how well we listen affects how well we live. We can't listen passively, but must be intentional about listening. That means listening expectantly, quietly, obediently, and constantly.

We must listen, knowing that God still speaks.

Over the next few days, we are going to look at some of the ways God speaks to us: through Bible reading, prayer, Scripture memorization, and other believers. For most of us, it's hard to set aside distractions for one hour (let alone twenty-four). However, I hope you'll take this as an invitation to open up a little space in your schedule where you can listen, allowing God to speak into your life.

Questions:

What are some examples of noise in your life?

Dr. Sweeney gave four types of noise (internal, external, emotional, and cultural). Which type do you feel you struggle with most?

Do you feel you're being intentional about listening to God?

Of the four ways, God speaks to us that we'll be discussing (prayer, Bible reading, Scripture memorization, and other believers), through which do you find you hear God most? Which is the most difficult?

Next Steps:

Make a list of the "noises" in your life that you feel are most distracting. Then, plan at least an hour sometime in the next week during which you can set those things aside and listen for God. I also recommend setting aside technology and getting away from people or tasks that might distract you. Try finding a space where you feel relaxed. You can read your Bible, journal, or even go for a walk—try to get away from any possible distractions.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for being a God who speaks to us even today. Thank you for the peace you give us. Please help us to make time for you in our hectic schedules. Teach us to set aside distractions and listen intentionally for you. May your will be done in us and through us. Amen.

This post was written by Payton Lechner, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.

Are Your Prayers a One Way Conversation?

November 13, 2018

Among the most infuriating conditions, we experience as humans is the vast extent to which our minds, stuck on "play," wander throughout the course of any given day. Even when we seek to escape in our thoughts, we are reminded how difficult it can be to **pause and engage with focus**.

How often, when reading a book, for example, have you arrived at the bottom of the page and realized you couldn't recall what you had just "read"? Your eyes were trained on the words before you, but somewhere along the way, your mind left the page. Comedian Steven Wright captured the essence of this phenomenon when he joked, "I was trying to daydream, but my mind kept wandering."

In the second installment of the *Pause* series, guest speaker Dr. Calvin Sweeney, pastor of The Tabernacle Toledo church, shared several ways God speaks to us when we pause to create space for his voice. Today, *LivingItOut* examines how God speaks to us **through prayer**.

Prayer provides both a framework and an atmosphere for purposefully quieting our minds. However, even in prayer, we can find it difficult to truly pause. In the opening chapter of his book, *Before Amen*, author Max Lucado shares a relatable confession. "I doze off when I pray," he writes. "My thoughts zig, then zag, then zig again. Distractions swarm like gnats on a summer night. When I pray, I think of a thousand things I need to do. I forget the one thing I set out to do: pray."

Lucado, however, follows this confession with a definition of prayer that holds the key to hearing God's voice. "Prayer," he says, "is simply a heartfelt conversation between God and his child."

When we view prayer through this lens—like a conversation with God—we begin to engage and appreciate the value of the moment. For me, prayer provides fertile ground for peace, perspective, and connection. Though it may at times feel like I am doing all of the talking, **prayer is by its very nature, more dialogue than monologue**.

I've never actually heard the voice of God, but just like I can feel an unseen wind; I feel his presence. When I pause to pray and listen, I feel his comfort and his urgings, and I regain the awareness of my place as his child in his kingdom.

In his book *How to Listen to God*, Dr. Charles Stanley writes, “To have God speak to the heart is a majestic experience, an experience that people may miss if they monopolize the conversation and never pause to hear God's responses.”

As Dr. Sweeney noted, “the beauty of the pause is hearing the voice of the one who gives us peace.”

Questions:

Do you find it difficult to pause and focus your mind, even in prayer?

Is your prayer experience more monologue than dialogue? If so, how would viewing prayer as a conversation with God help to create space for his voice?

Next Steps:

Before praying today, pause to consider your prayer mindset. Think about the “majestic experience” that Dr. Stanley referenced and how you can be more intentional in providing space to listen and appreciating prayer as a conversation with God.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, I am forever grateful for your voice in my life. Please help me to remember and appreciate that my time with you is a shared experience and to invest the same care in listening to your voice as I do in speaking with mine. It is in your holy name I pray, Amen.

This post was written by Todd Romain, a regular contributor, and editor of the LivingItOut Bible Study.

Slow Down Your Horses

November 14, 2018

I think I was born with my gears stuck in fast forward. My brain and my feet are always flying from one thing to the next. Consequently, sitting still long enough to listen and learn has always been very difficult. Doing school work was torture!

Back then, there was no diagnosis for kids like me nor therapies and medications to help me concentrate. There were, however, horseback riding and later, martial arts. These two activities succeeded in slowing down my poor frantic brain enough to allow me to become a ravenous reader, learn some self-control, and learn the power and value of pausing.

After a lifetime of training horses and teaching riding, I learned the importance of self-preservation and how to use hyper-focus. Just try galloping a thousand-pound horse over a fence while thinking about something else. It won't end well. Then, at age 45, I took up martial arts, and I learned about meditation. I don't know what others were doing when we were sitting with our eyes closed, breathing deeply and not moving, but I was thanking God for the lesson of making my mind and body stop long enough to pray and praise Him without interruption. This was when God's pause entered my life.

I became intentional about my time with God. Before that, my Bible reading was hit or miss (mostly miss), and my lifestyle, ungodly choices, and negative consequences reflected that. I was miserable for much of this time and wanted to change. For years, I had heard I should start my day, every day, in God's Word, the Bible. Unfortunately, I had always had an excuse: my kids, my work, I'm too tired, it's too hard, I'd rather watch Jeopardy, etc. However, I was sick and tired of being empty.

2 Timothy 3:16

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.

So, I stopped making excuses and rationalizations. I decided to create a space and a time to close the door on the world. To pause with the sole intention of reading God's love story to us and asking for his Holy Spirit to enlighten me as to what he was saying as it pertained to *my* life. One problem though—my mind still tends to be on fast forward! To this day, I cannot enter a room without

forgetting what I went in there for because I notice at least four other things to do once I'm there. The solution? It's called self-discipline, intentionality, and repetition until you suddenly realize, your time in the Word is a joy.

It took me a while, but day by day, I kept at it. Eventually, it became the highlight of my day as God spoke to me through his Word. That was 18 years ago, and now God is the center of my life, right where he belongs. I went from being empty, to being filled with his Spirit just as God promised through the apostle Paul in Galatians.

Galatians 5:16-24 ESV

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh....²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

And God always keeps his promises. So pause and fill that time with the Word of God. He does not disappoint.

Questions:

How has God recently spoken to you through reading his Word?

If you struggle with reading your Bible, what is keeping you from reading regularly?

Are you ready to take a step and commit to reading the Bible more often?

Next Steps:

Ask God to give you the strength to hand over the areas in your life you are still trying to control to him. Determine to put God at the center of your whole life and start by pausing every day to spend time in his Word. Do it for 30 days straight. Write down what happens.

Prayer:

Father, I am sorry for neglecting my relationship with you. I am sorry for assuming I could call myself your child but never prioritize spending time with you above all else. Lord, please forgive me! Thank you for the indwelling Holy Spirit who is waiting for me to make a conscious effort to put my relationship with you first and who will provide me with all I need to grow closer to you. Please help me hit the pause button on all the noise and distractions in my life

at least once every day. Help me to learn to pause and put you first in all things and all relationships. In the name of my Savior, Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

This post was written by Martha Preckler, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.

Memorize This!

November 15, 2018

When we pause, we have an opportunity to hear his voice. Today we are going to look at how God speaks to us through **scripture memorization**. As children, most of us played at some point "follow the leader." Being a follower was all right, but let's be honest, being a leader was the most fun—you got to create imaginative paths and actions for everyone to copy. Today, we "follow" in 140 character sequences on Twitter. Often without a real relationship to whomever, we are following or knowledge of this leader's "gifts." In real life, real leaders are rare. Often, men and women are elected or appointed to leadership positions but then falter or fail to act. Others abuse their power to satisfy their egos, crushing whoever may get in their way and squandering resources. However, without faithful, ethical, and effective leaders, people wander. Just as the Israelites wandered through the desert for 40 years. Many people think that prosperity and success come from having power, influential personal contacts, and a relentless desire to get ahead. Just think about what goes on in today's social media! However, the strategy for gaining prosperity that God taught Joshua so that he could lead the Israelites is entirely different from how most leaders lead today. God instructed Joshua to be strong and courageous because the task ahead would not be easy. He also taught him to obey God's law by reading and studying the Book of Law—God's Word.

Joshua 1:8

Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do.

I am writing this on election night. Praying that *we the people* will elect strong leaders! I am thinking of my grandchildren and praying that when they grow up, they will have the freedom to choose strong leaders!

In Psalm 1, a man who is blessed by God is described in this way: "But they delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night." (verse 2).

Keeping God's word in our hearts is a deterrent to sin. This alone should inspire us to memorize scripture. However, memorization alone will not prevent us from sin. Instead, we must also put God's word to work in our lives, making it a vital guide for everything we do.

Psalm 119:11

*I have hidden your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.*

Even Jesus had to get away from it all to take time to pause and pray. Sometimes even strong leaders need to pause and listen to God. If this is where you are now, turn off the phone, hit the pause button, and try memorizing this verse:

Psalm 46:10a

Be still, and know that I am God.

Questions:

Have you ever memorized a scripture verse? If not, why? What keeps you from doing so?

Next Steps:

Look for time to memorize scripture:

1. Write your memory verses on 3 x 5 cards.
2. Tape the cards in key places in your home to remind you to memorize and meditate on those verses.
3. Carry the cards with you in your purse or wallet. As you wait for appointments, stand in line, ride the bus, or do similar activities, make the most of your time.
4. Make an audio recording of your verses. Listen to it as you ride to work or travel elsewhere during the day. Listen to recorded scripture as you do other tasks.
5. Be alert to other opportunities to use your time wisely by memorizing scripture.
6. Chose a scripture verse to be your "life verse."

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of your word that you use to speak to me. As I go through my day, and I experience anxiety, stress, anger and other negative thoughts and feelings, help me hear your voice. Bring to mind your Words that I have memorized so I may hear your voice and experience your peace.

This post was written by Pam Haynam, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.

Are You Listening?

November 16, 2018

I am so blessed! I have a God who loves and adores me. He is with me at all times through his Spirit. I have a wonderful, loving, and supportive husband. I have two amazing, funny, and spirited daughters whom I adore. I have friends who are open, honest, truthful, wise, and fun. I consider this whole mixture of people, "My People", as author Shauna Niequist would say. God often speaks to me through *my people*. They hold me accountable, speak truth into my life, pray for me, support me, and give me good advice.

I have been going through a tough time lately. I had an event happen that rocked my world, and God has helped me so much to deal with it. Sometimes, I feel scared and have no idea what to do next. When times are tough, I pause and cry out to God. I have also needed *my people* a lot, for their support and advice. I have learned to listen to their advice, and then, I pause and ask, "Is the advice supported by Scripture? Is following this advice really what is for the best?" I pray to Jesus and ask for his wisdom, and then I pause and listen. The beauty of the pause is that it allows me to hear the voice of the one who gives us peace. When I am filled with anxiety and stressed, I pause again. I have learned when I don't have peace, and I am probably not doing what God wants me to do. I pray about it and wait. I know I am on the right track if I am experiencing his peace no matter what the circumstances are in my life.

James 3:17 NIV

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere.

I love that God speaks to me through other people. Sometimes, it is my family and friends. What cracks me up is when God speaks to me through someone I would never expect. It could be a teacher, a stranger, a preacher, a waitress, a child, or someone I don't care for. A long time ago, God spoke to me through a priest. My mom died tragically when I was sixteen. The next five years were horrendous. I was so hurt, lonely, angry, and anxious. I was so desperate for help that I went and spoke to a Priest. He told me that he could feel my anxiety. That my anxiety was like a person dragging their nails down a chalkboard. He told me, "You can't go this alone, you have to let other people help. God works through other people." I believe God works through others by actions and words.

This was over thirty years ago, and I still remember it like it was yesterday. I have learned to stop, pause, and listen for God's voice. It can be heard through prayer, Scripture memorization, his Word, or someone else. I would bet if you aren't hearing God's voice, it is because you aren't listening. I know I have a terrible time listening when I am overwhelmed, frantic, distracted, or busy. Unfortunately, in our culture, busy is a lifestyle. I believe we are missing God's voice because we are too busy to hear it. Please, pause and listen. I am sure God wants to speak his amazing peace over you.

Questions:

Are you listening for God to speak in your life? What changes can you make in your life so you have time to pause and listen for him to speak? How has God spoken to you recently?

Next Steps:

Think about the ways God has spoken to you in the past. Write some of them down. Focus on what you were doing when you heard his voice. Pray to God and ask for his wisdom. Read the Bible and pray to hear God's voice while you read. Memorize Scripture verses that make you feel that Jesus is talking directly to you. Listen for God to speak to you through others.

Prayer:

God, you are amazing! I am overwhelmed that you love me so much! You, my holy and glorious God, you desire to have an intimate relationship with me. Thank you for speaking to me through prayer, the Bible, memorized Scripture verses, and other people. Please help me always to hear your voice. Help me to pause, listen, and obey. Please help me to have you as my main focus. Help me to grow closer and closer to you. Amen.