

## Listening



The following principles are derived from the ancient Rule of Benedict of Nursia who lived in the fifth century and left behind a great deal of wisdom.

Listening is a vital part of spirituality – listening to the Scriptures, guidance of the wise, fellow humans, and the world around us. In other words, spiritual life is achieved by listening to all of life and learning to respond to each of life's dimensions wholly and with integrity.

*Scripture*, according to Benedict, is the voice of Christ, a divine medicine, and a weapon against evil forces. If read regularly, ideally daily, it keeps us focused on the purpose of life and shows us how men and women of God dealt with the challenges in their lives. Prayer – speaking and listening to God through the Scriptures – helps us to see and hear the world in the right perspective. Prayer, however, can become hollow if not accompanied by active concern for others.

*Other people* can be a way that God speaks to us, therefore listening to others promotes growth and is an important aspect of loving one another. By listening, we become sensitive to people's needs and are able to assist. Listening to the wise gives us guidance for our journey and may spare us unnecessary hurts. Learning to listen to the truths of those around us – trying to hear more clearly the whisper of God in the gentle breezes of life – should be accompanied by a willingness to change ourselves and our world. If that happens, gradually we'll see our life changing from dry and independent to compassionate and meaningful.

*Circumstances of our lives* teach us to face our own life patterns and enable us to change those habits that no longer work for us. Without listening, we just drift through life. Being attuned to what goes on in and around us enables living our life in stereo. Most of us tend to listen selectively. If we are to become whole, we need to learn to listen on every level of life.

Many of us are at least partially deaf and don't know what real listening involves. It requires an open heart, willingness to hear the opinions of others and, upon careful reflection, act on their sound advice - in short, willingness to be corrected, to change, and to grow. This is because truth is a mosaic of the face of God and God's voice can come from the least expected places. Life is a learning process, but learning through listening is often overlooked in the western world which focuses on academic achievement and credits received. Important to pursue is the discovery of truth, the cultivation of beauty, and the recognition of the real lessons taught by life. This itself is a lifelong process.

**Reference:** Joan Chittister, **Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today** (HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), chapter 2.

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