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*We could listen . . . if we  
were willing*

We could all listen to God speaking if we really wanted to. What miracles could take place if only we would listen! Learning to listen is part of learning to pray—for only then can we be instructed and *know* we are loved. Only by listening can we be capable of becoming the whole person God intended us to be.

Following the two instances of listening to God mentioned in the last chapter, and after God had taken care of two important areas in my life, I felt quite secure. Early in my second term in China, though, to my dismay I found God had not finished speaking.

I was still a very young missionary and had not yet discovered that prayer is a dialogue between two people who love one another and trust one another. For me, prayer was a monologue, a one-way conversation. I prayed until I finished. Now—I'm never finished! There is a joyous dialogue which goes on forever.

An open ear needs to be kept open. But keeping it open requires both discipline and obedience. Otherwise, do you know what happens? We simply coast along with nothing new, nothing fresh, until God with infinite love and patience succeeds in regaining our attention.

Looking back, I realize my Christian life had increasingly consisted of things I did or did not do, depending upon the theological dictates of our church and beliefs to which it did or did not subscribe. While in no way depreciating the importance of these, it took me years to "separate the wheat from the chaff"—and to discover that Jesus Christ *is* the center of *all* I am, *all* I believe.

Not that Christ had been left out—He hadn't. But I, however unintentionally, had by conformity and identity with fellow-missionaries failed to identify with my Lord.

Our vacation months were spent at the lovely seashore resort of Pei-tai-ho where missionaries of all denominations gathered and where summer conferences were held. At these conferences I viewed with suspicion any ideas coming from unfamiliar sources. Most of my interpretations of God's ways needed the approval of like-minded people from my own mission. So, when the subjects of "listening to God" and "definite guidance" came up, I dismissed them as matters about which I already knew.

However, when the subject of "absolute honesty" in confession arose, I protected myself by taking refuge in the fact that our mission did not go along with such teaching. Except of course for the unconverted! Certainly "confession" was not for the converted dedicated missionaries!

I had failed to take into consideration God and His abiding love and concern for all people, convert-

ed or unconverted! God, however, considered me. Just how, and to what extent He spoke to me, cannot here be fully told. But speak He did, even though I was an unwilling listener, who for almost three years had "heard" nothing.

I'm the kind who must always learn the hard way. And before I learn I hit bottom every time. I now know God's love takes in the "whole picture"—the very essence and core of my total self—and if in the process of listening to Him it is necessary for me to get hurt, it will be a good hurting.

Looking back, I know God was speaking through all that happened: the emergency operation, the serious relapse, the week I hovered between life and death, the three months' convalescence. Flat on my back, I finally said, "All right, Lord, I'll listen. What is it this time?"

The answer was clear—unmistakable. It meant that once again the course of my life was to be changed.

Up to this time I'd been a secretary in the mission office, and not a very satisfied one, either. I longed to work with people—not paper work! Unsuccessfully, I'd tried to "surrender" this desire, and settle down to giving my very best to the work God had, for the time, given me to do.

Now, it was as though the Lord Jesus were saying, "You've been in office work long enough. This period of learning is over. Follow me—into the villages of China—where the people sit in darkness and long for light."

My first objection was "But Lord, they'll kill me." (This was shortly after John and Betty Stam had been killed.) There were other objections: "There's no hot water, no running water, no bathrooms—it's so dirty out there in the villages." With God listen-

ing, my words and thought for my own comfort made me ashamed.

Then, it seemed as though the Lord Jesus said, "Rosalind, I understand. I came to earth because I was sent. It wasn't exactly what I had been used to either . . . and I was killed. Trust Me now. Take up your cross, My child, and follow Me. I was with you when you came here, and I'll be with you there, for I will never leave you."

I did as He asked, and He was with me.

In circumstances which forced me to listen, God had once again demonstrated His communicating love. Though I was an unwilling listener, God waited. The three months I lay flat on my back gave me plenty of time to think and to reflect, to finally recognize and to accept the love of God coming through to me. Love never forces. Nor does love reveal everything all at once. A step at a time God led me, but never faster than I was able to take each step. And always it was His loving encouragement which drew me on.

#### **How does one become willing?**

Not long ago a friend said, "Ros, I need the very material you are working on right now. Need it badly. But my problem is that although I know I need a miracle in my life, I'm not willing to accept changes in my life. How do I get willing?"

How do you become willing? Count on God's love. Believe He really is present and is attempting to communicate with you.

Cooperate with God. Tell Him you are willing to be made willing.

Make an all-out basic commitment to Jesus Christ—a commitment covering everything you know and

believe, and everything you don't know but need to learn.

Trust God's great love for you. Know that He will never take unfair advantage. Admit He needs both your consent and cooperation.

Remind yourself that growth of any sort implies change, and that life is never static. Change must come and is essential not only for your own good but for your development and your progress.

Your mental attitude is half the battle. And you can learn to control your own conscious thoughts.

During the early years I experienced God's guidance, I thought He spoke only when there was something very important at hand. In a vital sense this is true, for *where* we are and *what* we are doing is important to God, who has an over-all plan that fits together. In another sense, each one of us is more important to God as a person than any work we may do for Him. Only when God has our attention, can we also give Him our cooperation.

Here let me emphasize the importance of response in continued communication if it is to be effective. We must not only be willing to be understood, but also to understand. Communication is a two-way street. The more I understand myself, the more you understand me, and the more you understand me, the more you'll understand yourself. In communication with God, we must let Him know we are willing to listen and ready to respond.

#### **God is speaking all the time**

On two occasions in the last few years, I have shared a convention platform with one of God's great men, Dr. Frank Laubach, author of many books, as well as the founder of the World Literacy Move-

ment, Each One Teach One. He makes this statement which I'll never forget:

"God is speaking all the time, all the time, all the time."

When I first heard it, I thought about it all day. If God is speaking all the time, what am I doing all the time?

Through Dr. Frank, modern miracles of faith have taken place. Illiterate peoples all over the world are learning to read, because one man learned to listen to God and to follow through.

I want to be listening all the time, all the time, all the time. I'm really no longer afraid, but I'm willing to listen because I'm absolutely convinced of God's great, never-changing, unconditional love for me, through Jesus Christ.

The little things, the day-by-day things, our comings and goings, our hurts and our disappointments, our friends and loved ones, little children, flowers, trees, what we read, how we spend our money, what we do with our leisure time—through everything God has something to say to us.

Since He's speaking all the time, all the time, all the time, I want to be listening all the time, don't you?

Love and fear do not go together.

"Perfect love casts out fear, for fear has torment."

God is love (not—God has love).

When He gives me Himself, He is giving me Love.

All I have, He has given to me.

When He is with me, within me, I am loved.

Here is the whole answer to unwillingness.



***Review and study questions***

1. Why aren't we willing to hear God speak to us?  
Find as many reasons as possible.
2. What are some of the ways by which God changes our desires so that we are willing? Show how these ways really are part of His love.
3. Discuss: Love is vulnerable.



***Meditation No. 3***

**Read:** Acts 9:1-22

**Subject:** God's Patience.

1. God will not ask of me more than I am able to bear. He knows where I am, and will lead me a step at a time. He will not tell me more than I am able to hear. He is never in a hurry, and I don't need to be, either.
2. This is a good time to face that subject you may have been putting off. In what area is God trying to get your attention? Are you in the place He wants you to be? Fear or rebellion or unwillingness are good indications that there is inner confusion and conflict.
3. Take the first step. Write down what seems to be coming through. If in doubt, don't. Wait. Watch. See how, in love, God begins to prepare you. In His good time the right door will open. Trust Him.

