

God's plan for our shared life.

"What does God want me to do with my life?" is a big question many of us ask at some point in our lives. Often when we are younger and dreaming about the future we want to know how God is directing us.....we want to get it right and not miss out on God's celestial plan for us.

When working with young adults who might be especially angsty about their future, I often say, "It is easy to know what God wants you to do." The answer is to work to love God with everything you have got, and love people as much as you love yourself. They often looked at me with a mix of relief and consternation. While I think God might have preferences from time to time and indeed God directs our paths, I believe God cares less about what we do in the grand scheme of things and more about how we go about it day to day.

This does not let us off the hook when it comes to listening for God's voice. How we live in the moments of our lives can be shaped by our practiced listening both individually and corporately. The ability to love our neighbor as ourselves comes from that attentiveness.

There are a number of us that have had the experience of God's obvious movement over a group of listeners, though I fear we have lost our Quaker understanding of corporate listening. Do we believe that a group of us seeking and listening together can come to some agreement about what God is calling us to do, how to use the resources God entrusts to us, and how we will treat one another? Can/will we bend to God's voice? I think we can, but we are out of practice, dulling our ability to listen well.

Some of our ability to hear together comes from our practice of listening individually. If we don't practice that skill when we are alone, then it seems unlikely that we will be very attuned when more distractions abound. Silence is not the only place we can hear God speak. I became aware several years ago that God often speaks to me through others. There are times that big changes in my life like job changes or moves to other continents began with some simple words from someone I trusted.

You might benefit from reading scripture, taking on the ancient practices of Lectio Divina or the Prayer of Examen. It might be through common spiritual disciplines, like study, fasting, service or solitude. The goal is not the act itself. The goal is to hear God's voice. The discipline helps us do that.

When I think about Western Yearly Meeting, I wonder what might happen, how God might nudge us if we honed our listening skills. if we taught or reminded our one another about the richness of listening corporately or the life of attentiveness to the Spirit that shapes our lives and actions.

Would you consider a challenge? The challenge to pay attention to your listening? Would you think about what works for you and pay attention, maybe even write down what you notice. I commit to take on the adventure of listening more carefully. Would you join me and if you feel so inclined, share with me or others what you are hearing? How has listening impacted your daily life?

Shawn