



The gospels are filled with the words of Jesus for obvious reasons. He did a lot of preaching and teaching. I think Jesus must also have done a good share of listening. How else could he have developed such a deep sense of empathy for the people he served? Listening is important.

Ten years ago Brandon Stanton published *Humans of New York*, a fascinating collection of photos and stories about, well, people who live in New York City. Now he's published another volume titled simply *Humans*, in which he engages people from all over the world. In the introduction Stanton says this about the evolution of his creative process:

*"I was uncomfortable in the presence of a stranger; afraid of invading their space, not wanting to offend, unsure of boundaries. I spent very little time with each person. I'd ask a few simple questions, then I would write down the first thing that came out of their mouth. But as time went on, the conversations grew longer and longer. My questions became less casual. More searching and intimate. They welcomed the opportunity to share about their lives, even with a stranger. **Many were honored that someone cared enough to listen.** Often I'd spend hours with someone I'd just met, huddled on the edge of a busy sidewalk, examining the events of their lives, trying to understand where they came from. Sometimes people shared secrets about their lives that they'd never told another person."*

I am intrigued with the power of listening. One thing I've discovered is that I learn more by listening than by speaking, something I wish I had learned when I was much younger and had a propensity for blurting out whatever ignorant or foolish thought was on my mind. That didn't always work out very well. Listening causes me to see things from a perspective I hadn't previously considered. It helps me to see the other as a human being, a child of God, rather than an object representing an opposing viewpoint. Listening has the power to unite, to create unlikely alliances, to educate, to bring about empathy and understanding, to challenge our thinking. Those can be precious gifts, especially in a time of such deep division and conflict.

A lot of people make New Year's resolutions. That's not for me, but I am going to enter 2021 with a renewed commitment to listen more, to others and to God. That will require me to slow down a bit, and to give more credence to being still than to keeping busy. In biblical terms, more Mary and less Martha. I'm going to have to be intentional about it, and I'll need some reminders along the way. It will take discipline. But if being more like Jesus is a beneficial goal then it will be worth it.

How valuable is listening to you? How can you make more time to listen, particularly to those with whom you may disagree? And, most importantly, how can you create space in your life to listen more to God? I invite you to begin this new year by listening for the voice of God, and by listening more to the people in your life.

One caveat: I may use more of the stories from *Humans* in future devotions. Some of them are fascinating and profound.

In Christ,
Pastor Chuck

Let us pray. Good and gracious God, you are always listening to us. Help us to listen more to you, and to others. And may our listening be empowered by your Spirit, so that we may grow closer to understanding your will for us, and for all creation. Amen.