



## Leadership Letter

*Are you listening with both ears?*

A few months back we had a coaching seminar at our retreat centre and leaders were learning the art of listening and asking questions. They found that listening is a lot harder than they thought it was. We find it a temptation to interrupt the listening in order to share our own ideas, opinions and answers to the one speaking. Over the years I have started to learn how to do this kind of listening. John Maxwell shares, 'Leaders seldom realise how much their listening empowers the other person. Because they are leaders, the sheer act of listening speaks volumes that even a great speech can't communicate.' So listening to others is so important but there's another kind of listening that I want to talk about this month.

**Listening to ourselves.** I hear you saying, "I thought talking to yourself was a sign of madness, so listening to yourself is perhaps one step closer!" Psalm 139:23 says, "Search me, O God, and know my heart, test me and know my anxious thoughts." The scripture suggests that it's hard to listen to ourselves and we actually need help from the Lord to do this. I am not talking about listening to ourselves waffle on about nothing, that's quite easy. No I mean listening to what our body, soul and spirit are saying. Before I say anymore, I confess this may sound very simplistic but we need to talk about it because we often seem to find it hard to be still enough to hear what our body, soul and spirit are saying.

**Body:** A few months ago I was visiting friends in another country and was invited out to a meal. I was starving, having travelled all day and eaten very little but had also just finished three days of juicing. So it wasn't very smart of me to sit down to a big meal. Half way through the meal my stomach was already feeling satisfied but I ploughed on. As I crawled into bed that night, my stomach was saying, "that was too much, too soon!" I complained to myself, "I couldn't leave half of a bought meal and be rude to my friends!" So I suffered for it. The second night my head was hurting. What was my body saying? "You haven't had enough sleep, you have been travelling and burning the candle at both ends, so take it easy." The third night my body was still feeling tired and so I cooked myself a nice meal, ate it slowly and then ran a nice hot bath and headed off to bed early. Guess what my body was saying now? Aaaah!

Sometimes we may hear our body say, "Feed me with a nice juicy steak or a delicious dessert" but it isn't actually our body speaking. We are in fact, what we call, 'hungry above the neck' which means it's an emotional comfort mechanism speaking to us and not a real hunger coming from below the neck - our stomach! So recognise that our soul can speak to us disguised as our body – please don't fall for the trap.

Take a moment to stop reading and sit quietly. Ask your body what it is saying. ....

I live in a villa with three floors and so there are lots of stairs. Some days my phone app tells me that I have climbed thirty flights of stairs. After a while I find that I am pulling on the hand rail on the last flight to get myself upstairs easier and my lungs are gasping for air. A few

minutes later I am still a little out of breath and my body is telling me, "You're not as fit as you think you are." My kids have been good role models in exercise and so I know immediately what the answer is. "Get back into T25" - a 25 minute work out with Shaun T. We all need some kind of exercise, so develop a rhythm that works for you.

Do you ever lay awake listening to your own breathing and thinking about what an amazing piece of machinery this body is? I sometimes systematically go through each part of my body and bless them in the name of Jesus. Our bodies need loving. However don't go overboard and be obsessive about your image, your workouts, your perfectionistic diets, your this and that. It's not about pampering our bodies but simply listening to and taking good care of them.

**Soul:** Stop for a moment. Close your eyes and ask, "Soul what are you saying to me?" The first time I tried this, I sat there with a blank expression thinking - "ugh - nothing!" Sitting for a little while longer revealed a number of emotions. I wasn't sure if I was angry, upset, sad, fearful or what. But I didn't feel good. It takes a while to know what you are feeling when you haven't been used to labelling your emotions.

A journal entry a few days ago shared, "I am feeling a little out of peace with a relational conflict situation I have currently been involved in. It isn't resolved yet and I need to know what to do about it. Lord show me the right process." Last night I felt contentment and satisfaction because it has been a good week with meaningful conversations and interactions with a lot of people. Then this morning I found myself feeling a deep sadness and grief over the plight of refugees in so many countries and so I lifted some prayers to the Lord on their behalf. Our days are full of all kinds of events, challenges, relationships and tasks and each of them brings with them an emotional response. If there are too many challenges our stress levels go up which can cause all kinds of physical and psychological ailments. So we need to listen to our souls before its too late. Don't leave the listening too long and crash and burn as a result. Our souls need taking care of as well.

Take another moment right now and listen again: Ask your soul, "From the ten emotions listed below, which one(s) are you feeling? (of course there are many more.) Then give them to the Lord and allow his peace to fill you.

Contentment, anger, sadness, peace, fear, joy, shame, disappointment, love, weariness ....?"

Going back to Benedict's 'active interior silence' that I wrote about last month – these emotions that rise to the surface as we listen to our souls, are sharing important messages for us. If our soul is out of peace, then it is asking for us to listen in and seek a solution. Perhaps we had a bad attitude in response to someone, received a communication that hurt or disappointed us, didn't follow through on a commitment, felt rushed and tense or experienced any number of issues. Our emotions will speak to us about them if we listen.

We do have to be careful with our souls though, as our emotions can deceive us. The emotion is real but there can be a lie behind the emotion that we are believing. I am not planning on writing about inner healing here but there is obviously a need for us to focus on a healing process if these emotions are displayed in our responses or reactions in our daily life.

Take a moment to bring your emotions and memories to God and allow him to bring truth and the positive emotion of peace back to the soul. We can't solve our problems alone, we have to come to God for help and he is always there to hear our cries and receive our surrender. Transformation doesn't happen overnight as we know and there is a need for patience and for God to keep working on us until that peace that passes understanding wins out.

**Spirit:** Take a moment to sit and ask the question: What's my spirit saying? "I love this meditation, please do some more." "Just a little more time in worship, come on, let yourself go." "I am hungry for some space, I want to breath, I have been too cramped, I would like to grow!" "Not just a quiet time but lots of time." Give your spirit an opportunity of talking into the microphone. I recall how I have often sensed the Holy Spirit encouraging me to pray for people's spirit to expand. Our spirit becomes shrivelled and small without the proper feeding and so its capacity is decreased. We can find that there is little stamina for prayer, worship, meditation and spiritual disciplines of all sorts but as we stimulate our spirits so they grow.

I have heard feedback from LDC staff, who have experienced their spirits being enlarged as they activate and feed them. Many haven't had the experience of praying and prophesying so much in such a short time. During the LDC, staff are on call 24/7 to be engaged with their spirits. We are challenged to pick up what the Father is doing in the classroom, discern the needs in a person's life, listen in for the right application to a teaching, be ready to share from our own experience or in the small group or in the conversation over the table. We grow tired because we aren't used to our spirits doing so much work.

Ignatius came up with a helpful discipline 450 years ago that has been a rhythm of life for countless people since then. He introduced a couple of new words that he used to describe the day. 'Consolation' was a term for the positive emotions, feelings and thoughts of the day gone by. He encouraged us to ask, "When did I experience a sense of God's presence with me? When did I feel I was living the life that God meant for me? What took place that I am thankful for?"

The second word is 'Desolation'. By this he means those times I wasn't functioning at my best. "When did I experience negative emotions? When did I lose a sense of the presence of God? When did I miss him? What experiences did I have where my behaviour was below par?"

He called this exercise 'Examen' and encouraged his followers to take time every evening to look back at the day and label those feelings and experiences. In that way we listen to our spirit, soul and body on a regular basis.

**The most important question:** When we hear what our spirit, soul and body are saying, ask the Lord what he thinks about it. "Lord what are you saying to me in response to the words from my spirit, soul and body?" If we have placed Jesus on the throne of our lives, he has the final word. So Lord, speak to us.

Happy listening with your interior ear,

Until next month

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