

## Can You Hear Me Now?

This devotional thought is from OSWM, A Watchman serving behind the walls of a west coast state prison.

I am a quiet person by nature. I prefer a still starry night or peaceful meadow to the commotion of a big city or roars of a sports stadium. My vocation both required and helped me be an able listener, which matched my personality. As a believer in Christ and a Watchman, I have worked to prioritize listening to the "still small voice" of God (1 Kings 19:12b). This has proved to be a great challenge during my incarceration.

The ambient noise at a prison is a constant, chaotic, high decibel. It is like several full orchestras playing different symphonies all at the same time and always at full volume.

The ever-present safety concerns prompt the wise to resist the temptation to tune-out the riotous assault on your senses, but rather, to *tune-in*. In prison, discerning the subtle variations in the crashing waves of sound can save you from harm. Assaults are common, and most are, if I may follow the orchestra analogy, preceded by variations in the background noise.

Most often, these variations are minor – like the difference between an oboe and a cello. Nevertheless, failing to listen – failing to hear important but subtle cues and warnings can have profound consequences. The same is true in the Spirit.

And so, I have learned to be creative about finding places and moments conducive to hearing from God. I stumbled onto an unlikely sanctuary yesterday, known as the "Little Yard." The area is a 200' by 75' rectangle enclosed by the 80-foot tall walls East and West of the cell blocks.

The cell blocks are old, made of brick, and four stories high. Old style grids of 120 small 10-inch by 12-inch windows cover the higher portion of the walls. The glass in the windows is brown with grime, mostly broken and non-functional as the windows' interior side has long since been boarded up or covered with cement.

The bricks are chipped and worn like the stones on the "wailing wall" – the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Being discolored and non-uniform in shape, they somehow complement the multitude of broken windows they frame and give the impression of a ghost town.

There is no grass or flowers in the Little Yard. Birds do not congregate on the numerous ledges and eaves. It appears that hope has fled this place. Bleached portions of cement and faint stains on the ground and walls evidence past aggressions. Like an old cemetery on a foggy evening, the Little Yard can cast an eerie pall.

I stepped into the forlorn Little Yard early in the morning. I hoped the early hour and 31-degree temperature would bode in my favor; I wanted solitude. I had borrowed a sweatshirt from an inmate as I, being new to the facility, had not yet been approved a coat, cap, or standard clothing. The sky was blue, the air was crisp, and the Little Yard was deserted. I smiled.

It was not the prettiest of places, but it was quiet, and I knew God would meet me there. I sang praise songs and hymns. I prayed for friends and family. I asked for God's blessing and protection on the I Am A Watchman ministry. And I *listened*.

Many verses came to mind. They assured me of God's presence, His love, and His plan for the future. It was not a "Burning Bush" moment, but it was beautiful.

The hymns testified *about* God, and the praise songs carried my heart's message *to* God. Together, they entwined with the hopes and promises of His Word. I left the Little Yard encouraged – renewed and revived – ready to meet the day, "*Thy will be done*" on my lips.

Watchmen, Satan is an expert at creating confusion and distractions. He does not want you to seek God, to *listen* to God, to praise God, or to renew your spirit in God. Knowing this should prompt us to be creative and intentional about finding locations and time conducive for true quiet moments with God.

Don't think it's impossible. Don't be too quick to discount possibilities – I found a peaceful place in a prison and was blessed.

The stress, distractions, and chaos of life will intensify as the Day of the return of the Lord approaches. Just as it is critically important for players to *listen* to the coach calling out key plays in the fourth quarter of an epic football game, believers must listen to the instructions and warnings of the Master at this critical point in history.

If we fail to *listen*, we will fail in our mission. I am not suggesting that believers without regular "quiet times" with God will miss the Rapture, but what about those to whom we fail to witness because we missed God's prompt?

What if we miss the words of encouragement that can save us from despair and inactivity? Consider the disappointment Watchmen and others will experience at the Bema Seat Judgement (2 Cor. 5:10) if we fail to listen to the quietly spoken counsel, directives, and warnings of God.

Most Watchmen are familiar with the directive to be ready for the Lord's return (Matt 24:44). We generally associate *readiness* with "watching and waiting" (Matt 25:1-13). Let me suggest we view *listening* as equally important as "watching and waiting."

All three actions – watching, waiting, and listening - are required to be ready. Paul writes, "*live lives worthy of our calling*" (Col. 1:10).