
Someone Is Listening

On Monday, I had a flat tire on each of my vehicles. My wife couldn't go to work until her car was fixed, and I borrowed a friend's car for a few hours until I could get my tire repaired. Thankfully we have repair shops in town, and everything worked out well.

A few hours later, I was checking my emails, and I noticed that one of the emails was an advertisement for an air compressor specifically designed to inflate tires. How did they know that I had a flat tire? I don't know how technology works, but I did use my phone, and I mentioned that I had a flat tire to someone else. I'm guessing that somehow that somewhere along the line, the words, "flat tire," were heard by a computer which fed the information to into the "system," and the company that sells air compressors somehow had access to my email and sent me the advertisement. Either that or the advertisement for an air compressor was completely random, and the company happened to send me the advertisement just when I needed it. It may have been random, but I suspect that it was not. I suspect that there are computers listening to our conversations and picking up key words and phrases which are then sent on to businesses who see an opportunity to make a sale.

We have a lot of discussions about privacy and the like, and for many the idea that someone (or most probably, something) is listening to us can be a little frightening. After all, we don't want everyone knowing our business. Personally, however, I am not particularly disturbed by the whole thing because I am one of more than 8 billion people who inhabit this planet, and I am a fairly insignificant person, in fact, and I don't feel targeted. True, nefarious people, governments or companies could use information they collect to harm me, but I don't think I am worth anyone's while to specifically single me out. Still, the fact that a company was trying to sell me an air compressor just when I might have needed it was a little unnerving.

But at least someone was listening. Someone was concerned about my plight. Two flat tires in one morning (one of the coldest mornings of the winter, thus far) isn't pleasant, and someone wanted to help. (Again, they wanted to help for their own profit, but at least they were listening.) Someone heard about my need, and they wanted to do something about it. Someone was listening.

Listening is important. Until about 25 years ago, cargo ships had radio officers. The radio officer was responsible for all communication to and from the ship, and before modern technology was made available, his job required significant training. With the advent of satellite phones and the like the radio officer is no longer required, and the position has been eliminated from most cargo ships. But when they were still required, the radio officer had his own room, the radio room, and in the radio room there was a clock, and that clock had four shaded areas, each 3 minutes apiece. Beginning at each quarter hour, for three minutes the radio officer was required to maintain radio silence and tune their own radio to a set frequency. During those three minutes, he was to listen so that if there was a ship in peril, he would hear distress calls. If the radio officer heard a distress call, he could inform the captain who would then set out to rescue the crew. When a ship was in distress, the crew could be comforted with the fact that someone was listening to their call for help.

It is good to know when someone is listening. This past Sunday, after the service (I was preaching in another church) a local chaplain spoke about her work as she visited several nursing homes. She said that a big part of her job was listening. One of the biggest challenges for elderly people, she said, was that they were lonely, and they felt that no one was interested in engaging them in real conversation. Most of the conversations an elderly person may have make them feel like they are talked at rather than talked with, and they felt that no one was listening. This chaplain explained how she had to learn how to listen, and listening sometimes takes a great deal of effort. Truly listening, hearing what someone else has to say did not come easily for her. It doesn't come easily for a lot of people.

But it is good feeling when someone truly listens to us. When someone listens, we feel as if we belong, as if we have significance, as if we matter. Most of us probably need to learn to listen more and listen better.

But we have a God who does listen. God doesn't snatch random parts of a conversation and offer us a quick fix. (I didn't need an air compressor; I needed a better pair of gloves as I took the tire off the vehicle.) God doesn't just listen for three minutes every quarter hour. God doesn't even have to work at listening as most of us do. God simply listens, and he knows what is going on in our lives, and he also knows what we need. God is always listening, and we can be sure that he actually hears us not only when we pray but always.

We don't have the right to privacy when it comes to God. God hears everything, not only the things we say, but also the things we think. God is listening to us, and he responds to us and provides us with what we need. And he knows what it is that we truly need, and he will provide for us because he has committed himself to doing so.

God is listening, and that is a good thing. He listens because he loves us, even when we aren't speaking to him. He listens to our lives, and he responds in a way that is right and good. At least someone is listening.

Pastor Gary