



JOURNEY TO HEAR

A SIX WEEK PATH FOR
GROWING IN LISTENING TO GOD
(& OTHER PEOPLE, TOO!)

BY DEBBIE ENTSMINGER

*I love the Lord, for he heard my voice;
he heard my cry for mercy.
Psalm 116:1*

God hears. Part of being created in His image, means He made us so we can hear. We wouldn't be able to do this unless God gave us the ability to. According to Matthew 13:16 being able to hear is a blessing.

Can you imagine not being able to hear at all?

Helen Keller once shared given a choice between being blind or deaf she'd choose being blind. "Blindness separates people from things; deafness separates people from people."

I don't know about blindness, but I can affirm her observations about being deaf. Because of an inability to hear, for 35 years I experienced being separated from people in many ways. Even though the Lord gave me the ability to keep interacting through lip reading, I still struggled to understand every single word. I missed a lot.

But then this year the Lord led me to get cochlear implants and blessed this surgery! At my hearing test this past week I scored 95% (we are still in shock! All the more amazing as one year ago I scored zero on the same test!). I am hearing things I've never heard before. Best of all I'm amazed at the impact on my relationships now I can hear what people are saying!

But getting cochlear implants differed from being fitted for glasses, where you put them on and see 20/20. Considerable time needed to be invest-

ed in listening rehabilitation to grow this God-given ability to hear. I'm discovering this isn't only true for me...

People with normal hearing often don't hear well. Listening is a physical ability but also a skill to develop. As the ability to listen is developed, this can impact your life and the lives of those around you in a significant way! But if not developed, people sure can miss out, or worse, be "like a noisy gong or clanging cymbal." (1 Corinthians 13: 1)

When hearing comes naturally, the ability to hear can be taken for granted. People think either you can hear or you can't. But I'm find there's a lot more to hearing than I ever imagined, especially regarding listening! This is a skill everyone, not only the hard of hearing or deaf, can grow in. There are vast relational riches for those willing to put forth the effort.

This booklet is designed to help you grow in listening to God and other people, too! Containing lessons I've learned about listening from being deaf and then receiving cochlear implants, this booklet features daily portions of Scripture to focus on and space to record your thoughts using the following format:

LOOK: After reading each day's passage, select one verse to write down and focus on.

LISTEN: Next, take time to write whatever thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse. Don't forget to do this with Jesus! If you have questions, ask Him, then write what comes to mind. We grow best in listening by listening.

LIVE IT OUT: Then, after dialoging with the Lord about the verse you selected, don't forget to ask Him what He wants you to do in response to what you've processed with Him and write this down. This may be as simple as thanking Him or agreeing with Him when you realize you've blown it. Then be sure to do whatever He lays on your heart. This is where life change happens!

I never imagined the Bible had so much to say about listening! Or how much my life could change once I took time to find out!

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 1

LOOK: Read Genesis 1. Now read John 1:1-3, 14 and consider... what role did listening play in Creation? After reading these passages select one verse to focus on and write below.

LISTEN: What stands out to you about this verse? Record your thoughts below.

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn about listening from this? How do you sense the Lord wants you to respond to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

When I first saw an otolaryngologist about getting cochlear implants I asked if they'd help me hear better. He replied, "Of course! You aren't hearing anything now! You will hear birds sing, dogs bark, doorbells ring as soon as the processor is activated."

But then he explained there was no way to tell in advance if I'd regain voice recognition. The ability to understand what people say depends on if the auditory nerve still functions and how the brain responds to interpreting new stimuli. Before surgery there is no way to evaluate this.

There's a big difference between hearing and listening!

"Listening is the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages in the communication process.

Listening is key to all effective communication. Without the ability to listen effectively, messages are easily misunderstood. As a result, communication breaks down and the sender of the message can easily become frustrated or irritated.

Listening is Not the Same as Hearing

Hearing refers to the sounds that enter your ears. It is a physical process that, provided you do not have any hearing problems, happens automatically.

Listening, however, requires more than that: It requires focus and concentrated effort, both mental and sometimes physical as well.

Listening means paying attention not only to the story, but how it is told, the use of language and voice, and how the other person uses his or her body. In other words, it means being aware of both verbal and non-verbal messages. Your ability to listen effectively depends on the degree to which you perceive and understand these messages.

Listening is not a passive process. In fact, the listener can, and should, be at least as engaged in the process as the speaker. The phrase 'active listening' is used to describe this process of being fully involved."

<https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/listening->

How does it feel to be an active listener and to be listened to? How does this relate to your relationship with the Lord?

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 2

LOOK: Read Isaiah 55:1-3. Write below the verse that stands out to you:

LISTEN: What stands out to you about this verse? Record your thoughts below. Then consider, Biblical Hebrew has no punctuation, so repetition is one means utilized to emphasize forceful words. What thoughts come to mind as you consider the passage in light of this?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

“How do you do it? I turn the volume off on the TV and I can barely understand anything!”

I am often asked this by people trying to figure out how a deaf person can interact with hearing people. In truth, only 30% of English is visibly discernible through the shapes lips make so there isn't much “reading” in lip reading! Imagine combining a verbal crossword puzzle with charades and a heaping dose of educated guessing! My brain worked overtime processing clues to figure out the 70% missing.

What a blessing the vast majority of communication is non-verbal! While no formula can apply to every person and every situation, researchers estimate up to 90% of communication occurs through visual cues! Even a deaf person can pick up on this. Listening involves more than hearing words. Understanding this provided powerful tools to help fill in the gaps I missed.

Those with healthy ears also benefit from remembering communication happens in more ways than one. A wise and skilled listener will remember this and be on the lookout for more than verbal cues.

Three key things helping me “hear” are context, clusters and congruence.

Context includes the environment the communication is taking place in, as well as words coming before and those following after as well as the history between people, and the different roles of people.

Clusters means you are taking everything together as a whole and not letting one clue be a determining factor. For example, if someone's arms are crossed they may be resistant to what's being discussed, but if their teeth are chattering and their body shaking, there's a good chance they are cold!

To determine congruence I consider, do the words I “hear” match the tone and body language? I often have a difficult time with jokes because of this. What makes jokes funny is the punchline often doesn't “fit.”

Do you expect God to communicate in only one way?

Are you taking time to discern the context when you read God's Word? What comes right before and right after? How does this fit in with what the Bible reveals about your relationship to God? How might what you're reading coincide with the role He's given you? So many mistakes are made in listening to God because people forget to do this!

How does what you're hearing fit in with everything else in God's Word?

And don't forget when you are in the middle of the story, zoom out to consider: Is what you think you're hearing congruent with the character of

God? What else might influence the tone you're hearing accompany His words?

I'll never forget leading a group of women as we read through the Bible in a year. Non-Christian friends joined us in the middle of Leviticus and came to know Jesus! Without a doubt, all Scripture is beneficial! God can use anything! But even so, when we started the New Testament, I heaved a huge sigh of relief... until our first discussion when a friend declared, "I don't like Jesus!" She heard everything He said in an accusative tone! Can you think of anyone who would appreciate that? Would Jesus, who says, "I have not come to judge..." speak in a condemning way?

When you can't "hear" the tone, our mind seeks to fill in the gaps. Good listening requires we zoom out and consider this!

How do you "hear" God's voice? What tone do you imagine him using when He speaks?

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 3

LOOK: Read 1 Kings 19:1-18. Record below one verse standing out to you.

LISTEN: If you don't rush through this passage there is powerful treasure about listening to be observed. What things are similar? What things are different? How does the context shift each time the Lord speaks to Elijah?

LIVE IT OUT: How does this passage relate to your life? How do you sense the Lord wants you to respond?

What can you learn about listening to God from this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

What do the sun, a hand, an accent and a medical mask have in common? For those who are hearing impaired all four can obstruct hearing.

For years I had to make certain when I faced someone the sun didn't glare behind them. Backlighting makes it difficult to read someone's lips. The shine from bright lights exhausts the brain. Imagine driving on a dark night when the cars heading toward you have their brights on. I often asked people to switch seats with me to avoid such glare!

And many people talk with their hands in front of their mouths... especially when eating! People are afraid there may be fragments of food floating about, so create a barrier.

I always tell people if you want to tell secrets and not have me hear, cover your lips. This works 100%!

Medical masks do the same.

And accents impact more than the sounds of words; with accents mouth shapes are different, too. Did you know American lips are more horizontal while the lips of Brits are much more vertical in speech? And Chinese speakers use few facial muscles at all. Can that ever throw deaf people for a loop!

What a gift when people realize this and make accommodations.

In the parable of the sower Jesus reveals what can get in the way of us hearing spiritually.

Awareness is the first step towards overcoming!

What gets in the way of you hearing?

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 4

LOOK: Read Luke 8:4-18. Record below the one verse that stands out to you:

LISTEN: What stands out to you about this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: Where are the seeds of God's Word landing in your life?
How is the soil in your heart impacting your ability to hear?

How can understanding this help you become a better listener?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

People often ask, “How much can you hear? How much do you miss?” In truth, I have no idea! Even going to different audiologists can influence the results represented on the audiogram. I do know my hearing has declined about 10% every four years. This has not followed a normal pattern.

People tend to lose high frequencies first. And on their audiogram (the paper where the audiologist marks on a graph the sounds you can still hear) there’s usually a gentle slope downward.

This was never true for me. My hearing loss is more like a cliff. Whatever I still hear, I hear normal, while the losses are total. Because of this, hearing aides have never helped me. There is nothing to amplify and they get in the way of the normal hearing remaining.

Ten years after my hearing loss was diagnosed, one of my mom’s friends bought me a pair of hearing aids. Her kindness was so appreciated! Because they cost so much I tried to make them work, but soon found I heard worse than before!

In my graduate school classes, with the hearing aids on, the air conditioner drowned out the voice of my instructor.

Whenever we went out to eat, the clanging of dishes, and murmurs of people conversing throughout the room drowned out the sound of my husband’s voice.

Technically they did help me hear better. But they didn’t help me hear what was important. In fact, those hearing aids made it harder to hear what I needed to! I soon gave up using them.

Do you ever find yourself listening to the wrong things and what you really need to hear is being drowned out? How does this impact your life and relationships?

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 5

LOOK: Read Genesis 3. What role did listening play in the Fall? What role did failing to listen play? Do you see in this passage anything getting in the way of listening? Select one verse to focus on and record below:

LISTEN: What do you learn about God from this?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

For me, the hardest part of being deaf isn't the inability to hear, but brain fatigue. Seven times more effort is required to understand what someone is saying through lip reading than with normal hearing. A one hour meeting for someone who hears normally is like a seven hour meeting for me. An all day meeting for someone with healthy hearing is like sitting through a week of meetings (or 56 hours of nonstop meetings) for me.

Contrary to popular belief, the brain is not an inexhaustible resource. Brains have limits. When these are exceeded, the result is painful.

If I listen too much one day, not only does my head hurt but the next day I struggle to function!

Even worse, people with severe hearing loss experience a 50% greater likelihood of developing dementia because of overusing their brain. It is so important to live within one's limits!

For the past nine years I sought to pace myself. This pacing kept reducing as my hearing decreased. When all medically measurable residual hearing ceased to exist I could listen an average of two hours a day. When this was exceeded, like each time I went to campus to meet with students, I needed to compensate by spending the next day in almost complete silence. This became a way of life. But it wasn't easy.

A year and a half ago my mother in law moved in with us. After a full day of interacting I'd come home depleted. Now with my husband, he never minds quiet, so I'm not exhausted being with him! But other people often struggle to understand this unseen effect of brain fatigue. So I explained when I avoid interaction I'm not mad or being anti-social, I simply can't relate when my brain is exhausted. But silent withdrawal is still awkward.

Sometimes I remained in my bedroom the whole day, unable to muster the energy for simple interactions in case she came into the kitchen. Home didn't feel like home.

Then I learned a year and a half ago if I exercise thirty minutes a day in my target heart rate range the toxins building up in my brain can be eliminated!

However, I don't have the talent of discipline. Nike's "Just Do It" doesn't do it for me! Even considering this could reduce the likelihood of me getting dementia didn't get me out the door. I cried out to the Lord for help! What could I do?

Then one day I received a postcard from a customer service representative at REI. When I moved to Colorado in 2013 I had no idea how to handle the white stuff! This Florida girl was out of her element. The staff at my local REI helped me learn what to wear so I didn't freeze - and you have to know I'm someone who has to be outside every single day so I needed good gear to do this, even when the temperatures dropped below zero and snowed! I also didn't have a car so biked everywhere. I needed a lot of gear and help to adjust to this new climate and in the process became well acquainted with the staff at REI!

A year and a half after I moved back to Florida I received a Friends and Family coupon for 25% off from Joan, the head of customer service at REI's Colorado Springs store! What a surprise! She remembered me and took the time to find my new address? I went to the Lord and asked if he wanted me to get something. He led me to purchase a bike computer.

Now I don't have the talent of discipline but I do of developer - which means I experience great joy seeing signs of growth in people as well as in myself! Receiving feedback from a bike computer, highlighting improvements, not only spurred me on to do better, it got me out the door every single day! I loved being alerted to measurable signs of improvement!

Best of all this helped take care of my brain fatigue! The research is true! Aerobic exercise got rid of those toxins so I could listen longer and last!

I still had limits to how much I could listen each day, but this increased my capacity. I am still in awe something seemingly unrelated helped me listen better.

I find this is often true with the women I meet with. I can't begin to count the number of times people have shared how they struggle getting regular time with the Lord and the culprit is not getting to bed on time the night before.

What changes could you make to better cultivate a lifestyle of listening?

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 6

LOOK: Read Psalm 1. What verse stands out to you in this passage? Write the verse below:

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

People often comment, “I can’t believe how well you cope with hearing loss. It’s beautiful to see how you embrace your handicap and don’t let it hold you back.”

I try to be authentic, sharing the hard in my life, but being deaf is a silent handicap. People struggle to comprehend what life is like without hearing. Sometimes people forget I have a handicap.

Who can imagine the pain of isolation as my family gathers for dinner and I can’t follow the conversation or the car rides or group conversations where I’m lost and left out, or how many mornings I wake feeling depleted due to brain fatigue so I can barely scrape myself off the floor to do anything.

I must keep running to Jesus to process. There are deep struggles to keep accepting as my hearing worsens and I have new consequences to deal with and new challenges to adapt to. People don’t hear how many times I cry out in frustration, “I can’t do this anymore!” I use to think if I had faith this would be easy. Now I’m seeing faith is wrestling and persevering in wrestling. The alternative isn’t skating through, but giving up!

One morning at 3 am I couldn’t sleep. By this point I’d moved all my art supplies into the laundry room in our basement. I went in there and painted a piece of paper black. When you are struggling inside but not sure why, painting a whole page black can provide emotional release. As I did, I poured out my heart and hurts to the Lord. What a broken, fallen world this is!

Next, I grabbed the red, considering how Jesus’ blood covers our sin and all the pain, brokenness and messes of life. As I did I noticed red over black makes a deep rich brown, resembling mud! Then, I sensed the Lord leading me to pick up green paint.

I had no idea what to do with the green, so began making wispy marks around the page. They looked like grass! And I sensed the Lord saying, “*You may feel a mess now, but you have no idea what I’m at work growing in the midst of this! In everything give thanks!*” Peace returned. I went back to sleep.

I discovered art journaling to be an incredible way of listening to the Lord, processing the hard of life with Him.

What might it look like for you to creatively and actively listen to God?

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 7

LOOK: Read Jeremiah 33:3. Then write this verse below.

LISTEN: As you consider this verse, what stands out to you?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

Deaf and dumb. People who can't hear or talk use to be called this. When Helen Keller began college one newspaper titled the article, "Deaf, Dumb and Blind Girl attends Radcliffe." While dumb can mean mute, many times people assume you are dumb (as in stupid, not having anything of value to contribute) unless they hear you speak.

Case in point... I will never forget when we lived in Tallahassee. I asked our pastor if there was some way I could help him and he invited me to come to his wife's group for young moms. She was hosting a dinner and wanted us to answer questions after.

As I waited in line to get food, no one said anything to me, so I struck up a conversation with a young mom. After she learned I'd recently moved to Tallahassee, she asked, "Have you been having a hard time finding friends?"

But after the pastor called me up front to help answer questions, young moms ran up, "I wish I could sit at your feet and learn!" The same women paid me no attention before.

It's easy to see someone who is handicapped or looks different from us, or different from what we're expecting and assume there's nothing of value to learn from listening to them.

What's sadder is the pressure we can feel to say things to impress people so they will value us and want to talk with us.

I love how my mentor shares, "I can read any book and find Christ in it!" But I also find, if I'm willing to listen, I can talk to any believer and find Christ in her!

What might happen when we interact with people, hear someone speak, or read a book, if we listen to hear what the Lord wants to say to us through them?

What thoughts come to mind as you consider God delights to choose and use the weak?

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 8

LOOK: Read Numbers 22:21-35. Record below the verse standing out to you.

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this passage about listening?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

As my hearing deteriorated I reached a point where I could no longer regulate the volume of my voice. Thinking I was talking quietly, I'd be surprised when people near me in a cafe moved to another table. It doesn't help I tend to get a bit excited about most things!

So my husband started giving me visual feedback clamping his fingers together as a sign whenever I needed to be quieter... which turned out to be most of the time. This irritated the stew out of me! It felt like being told to shut up! For someone with an exuberant personality this hurt.

I'd be in the middle of sharing new treasure from my day and he'd start making these hand signals! Was he even listening?! I wasn't fond of this interruption!

But what else could he do? Did I want to be a loud deaf person? Of course not! But it didn't only hurt when he told me I needed to get quieter. I also wasn't partial to feedback from anyone.

Then I began to work through Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen's book, Thanks for the Feedback. What a help this book is! (There is also an incredible Bible study accompanying this which I highly recommend called Thank God for the Feedback.)

This book helped me unpack my internal reactions, helping me better understand why I was hurt, so I could learn to accept Jim's feedback. I still don't like being told to lower my voice, but I'm learning to be much more thankful for this help.

I've found, people who aren't good listeners also struggle to regulate their voice. This not only concerns volume, but also content and frequency! In many cases this failure is a total blindspot. Unless people around them care enough to speak into their lives and give them feedback, braving negative reactions, they can end up pushing people away and missing out relationally without realizing it.

Have you ever asked for feedback regarding listening (or your lack of listening)? If so, what happened?

There are a lot of verses in the Bible that address this such as: Proverbs 9:8-9, Proverbs 15:31, Proverbs 19:25, Proverbs 19:27, Jeremiah 10:24... Why do you think this is mentioned so much in the Bible? What can you learn about listening from this?

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 9

LOOK: Read Proverbs 19:20, 25,27. Select one verse and write it below.

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT:

JOURNEY TO HEAR

One thing about my being deaf I'm convinced Jim loved occurred whenever he'd say something and I'd react. He'd exclaim, "Wait! What did you think I said?" And then revise his words!

Though in truth many times I did hear wrong.

I'll never forget one time eating dinner with friends inside a noisy brewery while watching our children play nearby. I thought they asked, "Do you want more kids?" and I replied, "We've been praying about that."

The conversation halted. Awkwardness set in. Then I looked at my husband. His body was shaking in laughter, "Oh honey! What did you think they said? They asked if you wanted more dessert!"

Can it ever help to keep a sense of humor!

Realizing I can hear wrong forces me to slow down my reactions. I need to first verify what I hear.

Now the Lord's restored my hearing, I find this still important to do. Even when I hear someone's words, this doesn't mean I've heard what they've said! Taking time to verify, by repeating back what's said to me, can make such a difference before reacting.

And yes, this can give people an opportunity to revise what they say, but I know many times I wish for opportunities to revise!

How can realizing you may hear wrong help you become a better listener?

It can be so easy to misinterpret or add to what people are saying, to go from observation (what people actually say) to interpretation (what I think they're saying) and get it wrong. Wise is the person who takes time to verify!

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 10

LOOK: Read Proverbs 18:13 and write this verse below:

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this passage to help you grow in better listening to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

We often don't recognize blessings until we don't have them! Did this ever happen on my trip to India.

After I moved to Bradenton I started a learning community for women in ministry. When one participant asked if her friend could FaceTime in with us from overseas, I wasn't sure how it would work, but was willing to try. For the first two years of our group I never heard a single word this woman said, but her friend repeated all she shared so I could hear!

After being trained to coach people through their StrengthsFinder results, I offered to coach the women in this group. The friend from India "just happened" to be visiting Florida, so I coached her, too. As I finished helping her identify the unique talents the Lord's given her, she exclaimed, "This could make such a difference if our team could do this!" A few months later she asked, "Would you be willing to come to India and coach us there?"

I said, "Sure!" thankful her best friend, also a certified coach by this time, would be there, too!

When we arrived in New York City we met up with this friend and another woman on her team. What a gift to travel with them to India and not have to find our way on our own. Though I soon discovered I couldn't understand a word the other woman said. She was Dutch, spoke five languages and her English came with a heavy accent.

Imagine my dismay when we arrived and I discovered she was my first client to coach... for six hours! You better believe I wrestled through the night. How could I do this? The other coach's schedule was packed so she was unavailable to help me.

But God poured on the grace miraculously enabling me to coach her!

Checking my schedule for the next day my first client was the head of this team. I couldn't understand him either. Not even while coaching him.

Thankfully the other coach was available to help me. He received great coaching as we both worked together. But I struggled to understand each word. How would I ever facilitate the team discussion scheduled to happen during the next three days?

I wrestled with the Lord, "Why did you bring me half way across the world to do something I can't do?"

Now my friend did not have much experience with StrengthsFinders and hoped I'd do all the coaching. But she soon realized there was no way I could facilitate the whole team interacting with each other. Thankfully, the Lord

gave her the gift of serving. She loves to help. And because I so needed help, we worked out a plan. I explained each team activity, then she facilitated. And wow! As she did, we both realized God abundantly gifted her to do this! She is amazing! She does far better coaching teams than I ever can!

The team benefited, but I also saw my friend blossom right before my eyes. By the final day she did the devotional sharing exactly what the team needed to hear. I was in awe!

If I was able to hear, she would've sat back more than happy to let me do all the coaching, but because I couldn't, she grew as a laborer and did God's kingdom ever advance. God has purpose for the things I can't hear.

What an amazing God we serve!

Have you ever wanted to hear something from God or someone else and not been able to? What thoughts come to mind considering God has purpose even for the things you don't hear?

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 11

LOOK: Read Matthew 13:10-17. Record below the verse that stands out to you.

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

A few years after I discovered my hearing loss to be progressive, one of my student assistants came into my office exclaiming, “*Deb! You’ve got to come outside! It’s Spring! The warblers are back!*” When I went outside, I wondered. “*What are you talking about?*”

She turned to me, “*You can’t hear them? They’re all over the place! Oh Deb, It’s so beautiful!*”

As I returned to my desk, a deep sense of sadness descended as I realized I was missing something beautiful. As I sat down at my desk, a poem came to mind. I didn’t have to rhyme anything, these words simply came:

*I’m going deaf
But I’ve never heard better
The silence clarifies
The sound of His voice
As the world’s noises fade
His spirit within me
Gets louder each day
I can’t help but rejoice!*

I sensed the Lord laying on my heart, “This hearing loss is a gift, to draw you closer to myself. It will not get in the way of anything I have for you to do. Trust me. Rest in me.”

When people first started talking to me about cochlear implants I wondered what I’d be saying to the Lord if I pursued getting them after I sensed

He'd given me this deafness as a gift to hear Him better. What would I be saying to Him if I sought to medically reverse this?

If Jacob was alive today would He get hip replacement surgery?

For years I didn't pursue cochlear implants because while I heard from the Lord on so many different issues, on this one I sensed nothing.

I expected to finish my days quietly writing or maybe learning sign language and getting involved in deaf ministry. But every time I tried moving in either of these directions the Lord kept closing the door and instead kept opening doors for me to coach more - something requiring intense listening!

As I zoomed out and looked at my story I realized if God keeps leading me in this direction I need to do something!

Now there is a coherence to all good stories. God is a master author. When I zoomed out I wondered if I should at least check into cochlear implants. So I made an appointment with an otolaryngologist specializing in this operation but I was scared. I did not want to do something the Lord didn't want me doing!

The night before my appointment we hosted a group of leaders from our church and when I shared with a friend my concern, she stated, "Well, maybe when you're there, God will give you peace." What a thought! I'd forgotten Isaiah 30:21.

Sure enough the next morning I "just happened" to be reading a blog encouraging pastors to purchase Bible study software, highlighting what a difference the right tools can make. And I wondered if the Lord wanted me considering cochlear implants as tools?

As I raced out the door for my appointment I grabbed the stack of my pre-work paperwork for the doctor visit. On top I saw a newsletter from a friend headlined, "What a difference the right tools can make!"

Tears welled in my eyes. By the time I reached the doctor's office I felt peace the Lord wanted me moving forward!

Sometimes we don't "hear" until we're moving forward. This requires a different kind of faith, trusting the Lord will direct us as we go.

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 12

LOOK: Read Isaiah 30:18-21 and write below the one verse you sense the Lord wants you to focus on.

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

August 11, 1990 was supposed to be Andrew's due date only he wasn't born on man's due date but on God's, five days later. Your timing is perfect for everything, Lord. Rest in the Lord, Deb.

Today is August 11, 2017, the day I'm supposed to find out if I can get cochlear implants. As I start my day in God's Word Mark 5:34 catches my attention:

“And he said to her, “Daughter your faith has made you well, go in peace and be healed of your disease.”

What an incredible verse to jump off the page today! (Note: I read straight through the Bible each year and this is where I happen to be not something I selected!)

Her faith, Jesus said, made her well, but he didn't stop there. If he had, a case could be made linking faith with physical healing, but Jesus makes three statements:

- 1. Your faith has made you well*
- 2. Go in peace*
- 3. and be healed of your disease.*

I love this!

I wonder was my handicap only for a time or for all time? I feel like I'll find out today, though I expect it will be a first step. And it could be like this woman's first step...

“...who had suffered much under many physicians and had spent all that she had and was no better but rather grew worse!” Mark 5:26

I hope my story doesn't go like this! But if it does, God has purpose and will be glorified either way.

I could be opening a can of worms if infection sets in. Contact lenses never worked for me! I don't do well with medical things!

But if this is a necessary step in the story, either finding out I can't or going forward and having trouble, should I not be willing to receive all you send my way trusting my story is a good story I'll be so thankful for later on!

I do feel like I've reached bottom hearing wise, maybe I haven't, but there's the sense I've dared bravely. But now I feel like I'm reaching the end of my resourcefulness.

And life either needs to take a quieter turn or something needs to change.

The butterfly seems a fitting metaphor. I feel I'm on the brink of a whole new chapter. Not sure what the chapter will be, but God promises He knows the plans He has for me. Thank you for this promise and for reminding me.

"Talitha Cumi" Little girl, come. Enter the adventure with me. You don't know what awaits but I do. I am in control and I am good. I love you. I care for you. Whatever lies ahead I am here.

Talitha Cumi - I do feel like a little girl and I thank you, Lord, you aren't healing me and releasing me, but this is an invitation to come to you.

In Arlene Romoff's book Listening Closely she shared how after getting cochlear implants she could think more, with more energy and more time to think. How would I invest having more of these treasures? Only you know Lord if I will invest them well or not.

After spending this time with the Lord in His Word I decided to art journal what stood out to me. Oh how I love the way He meets me each time I do this!

What a difference it makes when we're scared, in the midst of a tough time, if we come to Jesus and listen to Him. In this next Bible story consider, what can you learn from Jesus about listening>. What impact did it have on the lives of those who listened? How might the story have been different if they'd listened to someone other than Jesus? At the end of your time take a moment to sketch a quick picture illustrating what stood out to you.

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 13

LOOK: Read John 10:3-4 and write what ever portion of this passage stands out to you.

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this about listening?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

A large, empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for a student to write their response to the question above it.

JOURNEY TO HEAR

I awoke at 4:30 am, unable to sleep, knowing today I'd learn if I could get cochlear implants.

So after spending time with the Lord, camping out in His promises and art journaling, at 11:30 am I decided to lay down for a short nap

. I didn't think I'd slept. Last I remember, I was struggling to nap, so I began praising God through the alphabet, making it to "H" praising God for being holy when I opened my eyes and discovered the clock read 2:15 pm! My doctor's appointment began at 2:20! I hadn't showered or dressed!

I think I set a new record getting ready! Good thing I have curly hair! Even though my hair stuck out all over the place, after a quick wetting, I was ready to go. As I jumped in the car I texted Jim, "I'm on my way! Be there in 15 minutes! I fell asleep for three hours!"

He texted back "at the light!" We were both running late. Thankfully, the doctor was running late, too! What a blessing!

As we walked into the examination room I fought back tears. I don't think I realize how much I want this. Which is so crazy since cochlear implants weren't on my radar a couple months ago.

The doctor pulls out my records and looks through them. The silence feels heavy. Then he looks up. "Your CAT scan: good news. Your balance test: good news. Your hearing test: bad news. You don't have any! I can definitely approve you for a cochlear implant!"

Relief floods every part of me. We tell him we want to proceed with the surgery. Of course now I have a ton of questions.

How long will the surgery take? About two hours. What does surgery entail? He walks me over to the poster on the back of his door. He will cut through two layers behind my ear. Will he shave off part of my skull for the implant? No, I will have a bit of a bump. How far will he drill into my skull. He laughs. "I've never measured." He thinks about 2 inches. He will insert the thin wires attached to the implant using a firm sleeve, which when retracted enables the wires containing the electrodes to coil inside the cochlea. He walks over to his computer which features my recent CAT scan and points out where everything will take place.

Will I be knocked out? Yes, with general anesthesia. He says I will come to consciousness soon after surgery. He can talk with me but I won't remember anything.

I ask if Jim can be present otherwise how will I hear when they all are wearing masks before I'm knocked out and after. He says they will not wear the masks except when I'm knocked out. When I ask who will be in the room for the surgery. He says he will have a fellow assisting him as well as the anesthesiologist and nurses. I ask is it better to go with a lighter battery to start with...

I have so many questions but he says he needs to go as there are other patients to see. I am going to need to do major research to get answers. I'm not sure I'll see him again until surgery. So crazy!

Jim is quiet on the way home. Apparently the doctor said if I'd done this sooner, regaining voice recognition would be more likely, as the auditory nerve can die if not stimulated. The old, "If you don't use it, you lose it." The doctor said he doesn't want to wait until we hear back from the insurance company to schedule this, as the sooner surgery occurs, the better. I need to get this surgery done as soon as possible!

"Oh Father, this is crazy! I can't even begin to imagine how life changing this is going to be. The timing is amazing. September 5 is when I can get the second shot, then a week later is the Oasis women's retreat. If it takes 8 weeks to get the insurance to approve that would be October 12 right after the Paterson training. But I need to be ready for possibly four weeks of silence. So what do I do, Lord? I won't know about scheduling for a week. Thank you for this opportunity. It's a gift. If I get one and it doesn't help at all then I suppose..."

I am in shock!

As you read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 consider what do you learn about God from this? How does this impact your view of time? How does this relate to listening?

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 14

LOOK: Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 and write below the verse that stands out to you.

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

I've lost my voice recognition... even with Jim and I am dreading doing things with people. I have adapted and tried so hard to continue in the hearing world but now my hearing loss has reached the point where I'm barely able to function. Thank you Lord for what I've been able to do. It's been a fascinating ride.

But even coaching a friend this week, she said it was hard to see how much I'm struggling to hear. And the more I learn about cochlear implants the more I realize they will help me hear noise but unless you do a miracle, Lord, voice recognition will blur.

“I want you to trust me in your time of trouble
so I can rescue you and you can give me glory.”

Psalm 50:15

Oh Deb, don't be down. God has a plan for this and a purpose for whatever happens. He will work out the timing of all of this. Lord, I believe, please help my unbelief. I ask in Jesus' name.

“She has done what she could,
she has anointed my body beforehand for burial.” Mark 14:8

Just do what you can, Deb. This woman couldn't stop the hard - it was costly to do what she did but she still did what she could.

At USF go and do what you can. When you interact with people go and do what you can and trust this will be a beautiful thing for Jesus.

Last year as I headed to campus I wondered how God could ever use me and that was with better hearing than now! The first student I met on campus became hearing impaired a few years ago. She shared she's struggling because her hearing is getting progressively worse. What if my going was to encourage her she's not the only one?

Go and do what you can. That's all I can do... and this is something.

The five loaves and two fishes seemed insignificant when needing to feed 5000, but Jesus multiplied them and all were fed.

Do what you can and trust God.

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 15

LOOK: Read Jeremiah 29:11-13 and record below the verse standing out to you.

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

Months ago, before I realized how much my hearing was declining, I agreed to speak at a women's retreat. If I was asked today, would I still say yes?

After the women sang for a half hour, my friend called me up to the front to introduce me. Standing right next to her I couldn't understand a word she said. After she finished praying I asked the women if she explained I'm

deaf. She hadn't. So I started my time sharing about becoming deaf and what I would need them to do to help me "hear."

"You may feel like you're back in kindergarten but I will need you to raise your hand when you want to answer a question or ask one. I need to be able to know where to look before you start speaking" And I warned them I need to come close to read their lips and told them to extend their arm to make me keep my distance if they weren't comfortable with me being close. I also shared certain voices are easier to hear so asked them to not be offended if I turn to someone next to them and ask her to repeat what was said. *"Please don't interpret this as rejection. I want to hear what's being said."*

You better believe I get a workout at retreats as I end up running all over the room to get close enough to hear what people are saying. Being deaf, you'd think I'd stand in one place and talk the whole time, but the Lord created me to love interaction and be curious, so I ask lots of questions. You would not believe the miles I clock on my Fitbit!

During the first break. I met an accountant who shared her dream job would be to write. When I asked what she likes to write, she shared she's currently writing a nonfiction book for Christian women. Now you have to know I don't catch everything people say. For me, the goal of lip reading is to figure out the context and catch the gist of what someone is saying.

As we continued to converse I asked the topic of the book. An uncomfortable silence ensued. My heart dropped into my stomach. I'd said something wrong, which meant I heard something wrong, but I had no idea what. One of my friends, standing with us, shared, "She didn't catch the last part of what you said." Earlier this woman shared she was writing a nonfiction book for Christian women on being single! I was so excited when I figured out nonfiction for Christian women I didn't catch the last part. Whoops!

Thankfully there were no further mishaps - at least I wasn't aware of any.

I do wonder how much I miss! My mentor, Jean Fleming shares this is part of my message. People see me up there, messing up, making mistakes and are encouraged they don't have to get everything right or have it all together to do what God wants them to do.

I'll never forget towards the end of giving a four hour workshop for new staff while quoting a verse I've known for years, I went blank and couldn't remember the next part. A young staff woman helped me finish quoting this. When my brain gets exhausted sometimes I forget and sometimes I mix up words. I never quite know what's going to come out.

But again Jean affirms, God's strength is made evident in my weakness. She shared, "People need to see speakers who struggle and don't always get everything right. This encourages them to step up to the plate when Jesus calls them out of their comfort zone, too."

Pretty crazy to think the message isn't only the words we say but also the context in which the message is delivered.

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 16

LOOK: Read Romans 10:14-15 and write below the portion of this passage standing out to you.

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

In the middle of September I'm asked to coach Navigator staff women on the West coast through their Top Five StrengthsFinder results. One woman asks if I will coach her through her full 34 results which requires six hours of coaching!

To do this I use a combination of FaceTime on my laptop with about eight books stacked behind and my iPad on top. Through my iPad I'm able to use the Caption Call service which captions what they are saying. This requires the other person to have two devices - one to FaceTime on, the other to call me via Caption Call. This setup is a helpful combination as I'm able to look at the women while reading what they are saying... when it works!

I've used this set up three times before but often there's too much background noise for Caption Call to caption much. The AVA app works better, however, to "hear" anything FaceTiming I have to use Bose's SoundSport headphones plugged into my MacBook. The moment they are plugged in AVA can't "hear" the conversation to caption and there's nothing I can get for the computer to enable the speaker to keep working when the headphones are plugged in.

Once when coaching a woman difficult to understand, I unplugged the headphones and solely relied on AVA. That didn't last long! The hearing tests may say I'm not hearing anything, but there is a difference when I use headphones. Without them, there is total silence.

We soon realize Caption Call won't work. However, the FaceTime connection is great and this woman articulates well. I can understand her through FaceTime! I am so excited!

Of course I can't resist an experiment so at one point I pull the Bose headphones out... total silence! I plug them back in and comprehension returns so I am still hearing something!

And I wonder... I've been praying, asking the Lord to keep my spiral ganglion neurons alive so I can regain voice recognition. I guess I expected he'd answer with a miracle to make this happen, either raising those neurons from the dead or doing something supernatural to sustain them.

Instead, what I find is my schedule leading up to the Cochlear implant surgery is now packed with listening activities! As I seek to fit things in before the unknown, following surgery, occurs, I am listening more than ever daily! My spiral ganglion neurons are getting a workout! God is answering my prayers!

Because this woman is also fitting coaching in last minute we're having to work around her schedule, too. We meet for an hour, break for a lunch meeting she has, then come back together an hour later for more coaching.

This time she is in a different place and there's not a good connection. FaceTime keeps freezing but at least Caption Call is working... somewhat! Somehow we end up not being able to FaceTime at all. With only Caption Call I can't tell if she's not talking or if the captioner isn't catching what she's saying! After a long pause with nothing coming up, I share I can't tell if she's speaking or not. She sighs, explaining she shared a lot.

Most Caption Call captioners, if they don't catch something, will insert an explanation "background noise too loud." But this captioner typed nothing. Was the captioner zoning out? I look at the clock. There is still a half hour of coaching to go. This is not working at all! I feel so handicapped.

Thankfully this woman shares a lot my same talents so I begin to tell her stories of what I'm learning about the role my talents are playing in my life, both the blessings when used well as well as weaknesses when overused.

I can't coach normally when technology fails, but God is enabling me to still provide benefit through the examples I'm sharing which I never would've shared if the technology worked. When coaching you are supposed to speak 20% of the time! But as I'm sharing more, the Lord uses the time.

After I finish this hour long coaching/sharing session, I heave a sigh of relief. When technology works I can almost forget I'm handicapped. But when it doesn't, the weight of my disability rests heavy on my heart.

My hearing loss impacted our coaching session. We weren't able to make much headway helping her identify her unique talents. But I sense the Lord wanted a different agenda which surfaced because the technology didn't work. Once again I'm amazed at how He is at work in everything!

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 17

LOOK: Read Isaiah 55:10-11 and write below the portion from this passage standing out to you.

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

As my pre-op appointment approaches, I also have to decide which ear to have implanted. Even though medically I scored zero for hearing in both, my left ear still hears a bit more than my right. So if I go with the right ear, my worst ear, I won't lose the little residual hearing I still rely on in my left ear. But the doctor says the auditory nerve is less likely to be responsive in my worst ear. This decreases the likelihood of regaining voice recognition.

But if I do my better ear first and regain voice recognition and hear too well the insurance company might not approve me getting a second processor! It is highly recommended to get two. I feel overwhelmed and clueless!

I also have to make a final decision about which cochlear implant to go with. There are three cochlear implant companies and they have different models. Different people love each of them!

A representative from one cochlear implant company sends an email asking if I made my decision, inviting me to ask any questions I have. I decide to take her up on her offer and write to her. I receive a response right away, my email went into her spam folder!

Now another company, Cochlear America, also sends an email, an invitation to come to a coffee chat in Augusta, Georgia. An eight hour drive does not excite me. After traveling so much this month, there is no way I'm getting in the car for a long drive anywhere!

But that email did start me wondering if I might find something closer. Searching online I discover a calendar of events on Cochlear America's website. Turns out they have events in Florida! The next event in Tampa is November 13th. The day of my surgery!

I email the contact person, explaining my surgery is scheduled for the day of the event but share my desire to meet someone who has a Nucleus 7, as this is the processor I am leaning towards getting.

She emails right back and puts me in touch with a gentleman who received the Nucleus 7 last month! Turns out Richard lives a half hour south of me and is willing to meet me at a nearby Starbucks. He emails me a copy of his story,

He too had scarlet fever at the age of 5 then developed a progressive hearing loss. Deaf by the age of 30, he found creative ways to keep functioning in the hearing world for the next 35 years as a businessman. Two years ago he received bilateral cochlear implants - the Nucleus 6. He upgraded to the Nucleus 7 last month. He's one of the first, as this processor came out last month!

The first thing catching my attention as I read his story: though he was deaf 35 years, he now has nearly 100% voice recognition! His spiral ganglion neurons hung in there!

But here's the crazy thing, right before reading his story I found a cochlear implant textbook for audiology students online. The author of this textbook thinks it's not common for the auditory nerves to die and they don't die as quickly as I thought!

But another fact in Richard's story captured my attention: He received two cochlear implants at the same time! My doctor never offered this as an option.

When we met, Richard told me about a doctor in Tampa, Dr. Bartels, who did his surgery and went to bat for him with the insurance company and got them to approve two! Since my hearing loss is comparable to his, it seems I should be able to get two, too.

He also gave me the name of his audiologist, Dr. Victoria Moore, who he highly recommends, and when I contacted her she said she'd be glad to text Dr. Bartels and see if he'd see me. Last year Dr. Bartels was voted the best Otolaryngologist in Tampa - an honor he's received a number of times. He was also listed as an excellent cochlear implant surgeon in an article Jim found online. How long can it take to get an appointment with someone like him?

Since we weren't certain if this would pan out or not, Jim and I decided to go to my scheduled pre-op appointment. When we arrived we learned we wouldn't be seeing the doctor but the Fellow who'd be operating with him.

When researching for a surgeon to insert my implant it never dawned on me my surgeon might not do the surgery.

But we were impressed with the Fellow. True, it's a bit scary knowing he'd be the one to drill two inches into my head, navigating between facial nerves and he's only been in this fellowship four months. And they'd be doing two surgeries at once so the main surgeon wouldn't be present while he is doing this. Thankfully, my doctor would be the one doing the most delicate part of the surgery, inserting the electrodes into the cochlea.

The cochlea is smaller than a pea, so this requires a special technique so the electrodes aren't kinked or the cochlear wall damaged.

This is not a routine surgery anyone can do. It is advised to only go to a surgeon who does at least 50 of these a year, with at least half of them using the cochlear implant you've chosen, because technique is so critical.

I researched before this meeting, so came prepared with a number of questions. As the Fellow answered each one, Jim felt confident with him assisting. I was still trying to wrap my brain around the fact someone new to this surgery would be drilling into my head!

The next day I received an email from the recommended audiologist stating she'd be glad to take me on. What a blessing! I didn't feel confident about the one at my doctor's office. And they play such a key role in this process. However, when I checked online with my insurance company I discovered she is not in our network. I went out to walk and cried.

Heading out the door, I grabbed my Bible and prayed through Psalm 1:

Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers
But his delight is in the law of the Lord
And on His law he meditates day and night.
He is like a tree planted by streams of water
That yields its fruit in its season
and its leaf does not wither.
in all that he does he prospers

Suddenly it hit me, when I had a critical decision to make, I stopped spending deep time in God's Word so I'd have more time to research, read medical textbooks and search through articles online! I cut myself off from the very One, I need to prosper in this decision. Research isn't wrong, but when not done in response to the Lord's leading, I am trying to save myself, rather than relying on the Lord! No wonder I felt such turmoil inside!

A sweet time of repentance followed.

And when Jim came home, he said I can still go to the recommended audiologist! I am so thankful!

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 18

LOOK: Read James 1:5-8 and write below the portion from this passage standing out to you:

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

Two days later the Lord brought into my life someone who knows a ton about cochlear implants and she affirmed my surgeon is a good one and also pointed out sometimes Fellows do a better job due to their recent training so they tend to be extra careful. But she also said if I wanted to explore the possibility of getting simultaneous bilateral cochlear implants (in both ears at once) she would text Dr. Bartels who is known for doing this and goes the extra distance to encourage insurance companies to give approval.

Having bilateral implants makes a huge difference! And this would mean getting two for the price of one! And only having to undergo one surgery once, be intubated once, and recover once! So when she offered to text him to see if he'd meet with me, I said, "Sure." Though I knew a miracle was needed to get in to see him in time as he's a gifted surgeon.

I went from meeting with her, to a full day at USF meeting with staff and students. I put in 8 hours on campus while I'm there, so by the time I came to my last one on one my brain was fried.

Rare do I meet with anyone and not have planned what we're going to do, but it was a rough week and I'd already prepared to meet with four other people. As I sat down to meet with the last student I cried out to the Lord, "Oh please, would you show me what you want me to do with her today?" As we prayed, the Lord gave the idea to ask her to write out any questions she had about discipleship.

Did she ever take off writing! Her first question was, "What should I do when someone I'm meeting with won't pray out loud?"

Now this student recently began discipling a younger student who is struggling with this. When I asked the Lord for wisdom in responding, I sensed Him leading me to take her to Matthew 18:19-20 where the Lord says, "Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." After sharing while we can pray on our own to God about anything, we discussed how according to this verse there is something special when we pray together. This is a promise from God and is one reason the enemy often tries to incite fear so people won't be willing to pray with others!

To help this student learn how to help her friend, I showed her a simple way of introducing someone to pray aloud.

We started with a sheet featuring 100 Descriptions of God, each selecting five to focus on, then we wrote out simple prayers, then spent time praying together, beginning with praising God for who He is and in light of God's character sharing the concerns on our hearts. Of course on my heart was the upcoming cochlear implant surgery and also the hope of getting an appointment with this new doctor and the Lord working out the details if it'd be good.

At 6:30 pm as I walked to my car, I pulled out my phone to let Jim know I was about to drive home and I saw this text:

"Ok, take a deep breath... Do you think you can make a trip up here tomorrow to see Dr. Bartels? He is willing to fit you in." And she forwarded me his message: "Yes! I will make special arrangements to see her! I can fit her in next week or if she has her records I can see her tomorrow."

Can you believe Dr. Bartels offered to make special arrangements to see me! I texted the student I'd just prayed with and she was amazed how fast God answered our prayers! He provided the perfect illustration for what we'd discussed!

Incredibly, I already had all my records. My new cochlear implant friend Richard, the week prior, encouraged me to ask for them at my pre-op appointment (*"No matter what you do, it's always good to have copies of your medical records and by law they are yours for the asking!"*)

And when I asked for my records at the front desk the day of my pre-op appointment, they gave them to me right at the end of my appointment, though they explained usually it takes a few days to get them copied! If I'd had to wait, it would've been too late! But because I had everything needed, Dr. Bartels said to come to his office at 7:30 the next morning!

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 19

LOOK: Read Matthew 18:19-20 and write below the portion from this passage standing out to you:

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

Less than twelve hours later, Jim and I drove to Tampa to see Dr. Bartels.

In my quiet time earlier I read about Paul sharing with the Ephesian elders, "in every city... afflictions await me." What a verse to start the day!

When we left few cars were on the road, but by the time we hit downtown Tampa it was 7 am and traffic abounded. As we neared our destination the verse from my quiet time came to mind and I prayed, "Lord, one affliction that could keep me from getting to my appointment would be a traffic accident. Would you please protect us from that?"

Suddenly the car in front of us slams on its breaks. Jim barely stops in time. We both hold our breath, waiting for the car behind to plow into us...but it didn't! This was so close, a policeman, one car ahead, only missed getting squashed by sharply veering off the side of the road! Can you believe this happened right after I prayed? Was Jesus ever behind that timing!

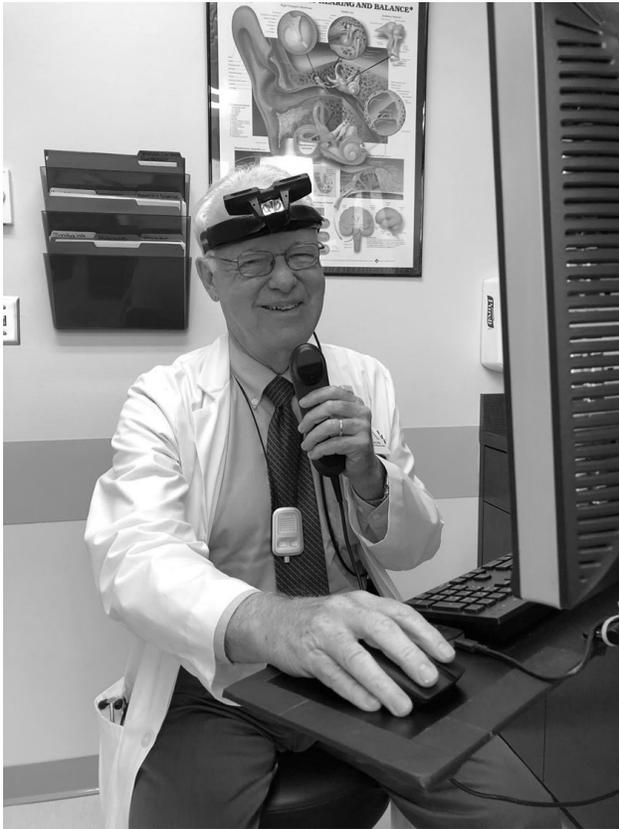
Now the doctor's office is at Tampa General Hospital. It was no small feat finding it. But when we did, check out what greeted us:



When I saw the verse on the wall It took everything I had to hold the tears back. Next thing I knew Dr. Bartels was standing behind the counter, talking to one of the women at the front desk. He looked at me asking, "Deb Entsminger?" When I nodded yes, he told the woman, "See you take care of her" and told me, "I'll see you soon!" As she sat down, the woman said, "He never comes out here! You must be someone special!"

It gets wilder. As I head into the examination room, he said, "I read your blog and I like it." (Now I need to say I didn't hear him say this, Jim shared this with me after! I miss so much! But how crazy is that? If you google my name the first thing coming up is my blog *The Heart of Discipling Women*. And I haven't posted anything there for over a year!)

Right away I'm amazed at the difference in being his patient. He sits right in front of me (at the last appointment, before the Fellow came in, I told Jim how hard it is to be in an examination chair that doesn't move and the doctor always sits so far from you as he asks you questions and writes at a side counter! This makes reading lips difficult). I was so blessed by Dr. Bartels proximity!



And whenever he speaks to me, Dr. Bartels uses a microphone transcribing what he says. I can't begin to tell you what a gift this is! Not only because I "hear" so much more, but it means so much to be with someone who knows how to interact with deaf people and is willing to go the extra mile to do this! In all my years visiting otolaryngologists I've never had anyone provide care like this.

Well, long story short, I went to see him about getting simultaneous bilateral cochlear implants. Turns out I am not getting those, but God has other purposes for this visit!

Dr. Bartels is the first doctor to ever diagnose my hearing loss. He thinks I have Bing-Siebenmann cochlear dysplasia so there may not be a lot of

spiral ganglion neurons remaining especially in the high frequencies, so the implant will need to be inserted deeper into the cochlea which creates a greater risk of dizziness, so he recommended we do one first, let me recover, and then do the second later.

This doctor is recommended in the article Jim found as having the necessary gentle touch, which is extra important with a deep insertion.

The amazing thing is knowing what's caused my hearing loss and the extra technique and care required to address the complications of this, may help me hear better!

Also, Dr. Bartels answered my questions with patience. Hearing him share about the possibility of dizziness threw me for a loop. How would my life be impacted if vertigo happens? Can I keep doing what I do if this happens?

For 35 years I've accepted the reality of going deaf, it's a part of life as I know it, and now I'm accepting the reality of all sorts of hard that may accompany having cochlear implants (e.g., having to deal with so much technology, losing residual hearing, having to live with metal in my head, keeping track of processors and accessories when I'm so organizationally challenged...) but I hadn't processed through the possibility of ending up with chronic dizziness, perhaps unable to drive or bike!

When we surrender to the Lord, we surrender all we are and have. It's one big yes, followed by a lot of little yeses. I'm often telling students to be prepared, you surrender to Him as Lord as a student, but once you have an income, there's more money to surrender, once you gain possessions there are those to surrender, once you get married, there's your spouse to surrender and when you have children, this becomes a huge area to surrender, so you can trust God with them! And as you age or if complications arise, there's often your health to surrender, letting God write your story however He sees best. As new areas come into focus, there's the wrestling to trust God with them and learn to rest in Him. And the Lord seems committed to taking us beyond our comfort zone!

Hearing about dizziness took me into unprocessed territory! And yes, I've now spent time with the Lord surrendering this possibility to His sovereign plan! But in the middle of the struggle it's not always easy.

Now at this point we had a choice to make. We could stay with my current doctor since he is a good surgeon too or choose to go with Dr. Bartels, which would mean waiting (the crazy thing is he could've done the surgery at the beginning of December but I can't fly for 3-4 weeks after and I have a flight in December and in early January, so my schedule proved the challenge we had to work around) But here's where it really gets crazy...

After we moved to Florida I developed an infection on the back of my neck. I've tried everything I can think of to get rid of this, but the humidity combined with sweating while being active hasn't helped. I asked the first surgeon about this during the summer when it was on my neck and he wasn't concerned but now it has spread into my scalp and is pretty extensive. Turns out this infection has to be taken care of before surgery — so if I proceed with surgery November 13th as planned, the surgeon will be cutting through infected tissue! So we made the decision to wait and go with the new doctor.

- He diagnosed my hearing loss
- He knows the special technique needed for people with my rare disorder
- With him I can use an excellent audiologist who comes highly recommended

- My scalp needs time to heal. Dr. Bartels said I should have this treated at least two weeks prior my to pre-op appointment (I started treatment the same day! But that still won't give time for this to heal before my original surgery date)
- In Sarasota I get one external processor, but in Tampa I am given two — one to serve as a backup (considering they cost \$12,000 each this is huge! But more important, if something in the device fails I will be unable to hear. Imagine if something “failed” the day I’m giving a workshop? Having a back-up can make a huge difference!)
- Most of all, as I zoom out and look at the story God is writing I see His fingerprints all over this. It does seem the Lord’s led us to Dr. Bartels.

"In every city... afflictions await..." I don't expect this to be easy. The Lord in His sovereign wisdom may allow dizziness, infection, or something harder, like not regaining any voice recognition. And in His eternal purposes it will be good. I do believe this.

But best of all, having confidence in my doctor is such a gift, knowing he is not only skilled in what he does, but cares deeply about his patients, and especially knowing he loves Jesus, makes a big difference moving forward! I am so thankful for how the Lord’s orchestrated these past few weeks!

So Dr. Bartels will be doing my surgery which is rescheduled for January 23, 2018.

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 20

LOOK: Read Isaiah 50:4-5 and write below the portion from this passage standing out to you:

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

Please know if someone deaf is reading your lips, they are working hard to do this. Many deaf people won't. Others are unable to do so. It is exhausting for the brain. Be lavish in mercy! Keep a good sense of humor! You can be sure they aren't going to get everything right. So why try?

One key word: connection. God made us to long for this. Communication is a key way connection occurs.

During our time in Mexico at Christmas, as we biked through town, I enjoyed calling out, "Feliz Navidad!" to each person we passed. Everyone lit up and waved back, returning the greeting. I felt such a part of the community.

The next day I didn't think I should keep saying Merry Christmas since Christmas was over and as my Spanish is a bit limited, I called out, "Good Morning!" Almost no one responded. I couldn't believe the difference!

Then my husband said, "They don't understand English. Say, Buenos Dias!" Sure enough, as soon as I started saying greeting people in Spanish they lit right up! I didn't have to say much (and I must say my husband laughed as my accent is so bad) but they loved my attempted greeting in their language.

Communication and connection are intertwined in a beautiful way. This is one of the tragedies of being deaf. It's so easy to be in a group and never make connection at all. One person shared, it's like living in a glass bottle where the rest of the world is on the outside.

One friend in our party had fun journaling about our adventures and each person's response to them. When she got to me, I saw she wrote, "And Deb was oblivious."

In truth, this is a fairly accurate assessment of me when I'm in the midst of large group conversation. I may try to follow some content for a short bit, but soon this becomes impossible. In cars when I'm in the back seat, I can't tell at all if people in the front are talking since there is no way to see their lips. So I'm often looking out the window, enjoying the scenery or reading a book.

In this case our taxi driver shared an amazing story of being ambushed by the Mexican Mafia, shot five times and left for dead. When he pulled open his shirt to reveal scars from the bullet wounds, I asked, "Was that from a dog bite?"

Oblivious? Yep.

What makes me sad is thinking people can mistake my actions for disinterest. I don't think you could find a person more eager to connect and hear. But when you realize it's impossible...?!

One night we ate diner in an amazing outdoor restaurant! This place oozed ambiance, lit by small candles scattered on the table. My husband turned on his cell phone flash light to read the menu. Want to guess how much a deaf person can hear in a situation like this? It made for an adventurous night eating! I couldn't see what I put in my mouth or hear anyone's descriptions. Good thing I'm not a picky eater!

How much effort do you put into trying to hear?

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 21

LOOK: Read Hebrews 3:7-8 and record below the portion from this passage standing out to you.

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

As I returned home one day from walking and praying, a young neighbor ran up to me, “Would you read us a book?” At least I think that’s what she asked! She’s five, with a dramatic flare, and though her high pitched voice isn’t one I can understand, she has learned pantomime can help me understand what she’s saying. The opening and closing of her palms was the giveaway!

When I said yes, her two sisters joined in cheering! They know right where the shelf of kids books is in my house and they each raced to pick one.

After reading through the first chapter of one and the first few pages of another, they asked me something. I couldn’t understand a word. Even after Polly, the oldest, repeated the request I couldn’t figure it out. And this time Phoebe’s attempts to pantomime didn’t do the trick. With no adults around to ask, what do you do?

I ran into the art room, grabbed markers and papers. “Let’s see if you can draw me a picture of what you’re saying to help me figure it out!” Eagerly all three began their creations.

Phoebe began drawing what looked like three heads. “Are those antennas?” She started laughing, “No!” They sure looked like antennas to me! Though I couldn’t figure out why there’d be three of them...?

This time when she pantomimed, I guessed, “Crowns?” They get so excited when I guess right! And then it hit me, “Are those the wise men out front?” They’d helped me take them out of boxes and set them up in our front yard at the beginning of December, and their parents were currently outside taking down their Christmas lights, “You want to help me take down the three wise men?”

All three heads bobbed! Only now they wanted to wait until after completing their pictures!

As Polly put the finishing touches on hers she wrote, "We love you!" In her picture the three wise men became four and she drew initials designating Polly, Phoebe, Paige, and a D for Deb!

Am I ever thankful I've not let my inability to understand children's voices keep me from interacting! And the crazy thing is we ended up having so much more fun because I couldn't hear!

Are there any obstacles keeping you from interacting with and listening to others?

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 22

LOOK: Read Proverbs 1:5 and write this verse below:

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR



How blessed I am to have Jim as a nurse! He takes the best care of me! The main thing that can cancel surgery is if I eat or drink anything eight hours before my surgery. Now part of being a strategic thinker – my mind is rarely on details so I do a lot of life on auto pilot (which is a fancy way of saying without thinking!).

This is such a gift when I'm preparing for workshops or conferences. I love thinking about the various topics the Lord brings my way, growing in my understanding of them and coming up with creative ways to communicate what's impacting my life! Right now I am having the best time ever preparing to give two workshops on Community next weekend, to speak at UCF's Nav Night on New Life in Christ the week after and to give a prayer retreat at IU next month. As I go throughout my day all sorts of thoughts and prayers regarding these are percolating through my brain... but I'm not thinking about details taking place before me.

In fact, I struggle to think about routine details! So I was concerned I might drink something before we left the house to head to the surgery center. When I shared my concern with Jim the night before, what did he do?

He created signs and put them all over the house! I felt so loved! And when he woke me up at 6:30 am yesterday morning the first thing he did was point to the sign inside our bedroom door. And yes there was a sign over every faucet in the house as well as on the refrigerator. After 31 years of marriage he knows me well.



As we drove out of the neighborhood, Jim asked me, “You did bring your driver’s license and your insurance card, right?” Um, no! I wasn’t driving and I knew I couldn’t bring a purse into surgery with me! So we turned back to get them. What a blessing he asked when he did!

Half way to the surgery center I realized, “I didn’t bring the paperwork from the insurance company authorizing the surgery!” Jim replied, “I’ve got it.” Then a worse thought came, “I forgot to bring the pain medication they said I need to bring!” Jim replied, “I have that, too.”

What would I do without him?!

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 23

LOOK: Read 1 John 3:18 and write this verse below:

LISTEN: How can listening well relate to loving well?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

Heading out the door to the surgery center, I grabbed some of my bookmarks. One featured the promises of God, another praying through the Gospel, then there was one featuring verses on daring bravely and one more on giving thanks! Did these ever prove to be the best way to prepare for surgery!

I originally planned to do Bible study. We arrived two hours ahead of time and with all that time... nope! Interruptions to take blood pressure, pulse, inserting an IV, taping something in different places on my chest for them to monitor my heart were frequent. The bookmarks worked great because I could go from verse to verse praying, then stop when they needed me to, and then resume. When the anesthesiologist came in to introduce himself he asked to see my bookmarks and looked at them for a bit, then said, "Think about those when I'm putting you out!" Then he let me pray with him!

Best of all after the initial flurry of activity they let Jim join me, which was a huge blessing as surgery was delayed over an hour!

When Dr. Bartels came in I asked him how many surgeries he was doing that day and he said five! This is what he normally does! He has performed over 3000 of these surgeries and does them on a regular basis. I feel so blessed the Lord opened the door for me to have my surgery done by him!

After Jim left I was even more thankful to have my verses on the bookmarks to pray through as it sank in, this is really happening! There is nothing like praying through God's Word to calm one's heart.

My biggest concern was how I'd react to being intubated, and to the anesthesia and how I'd do not being able to read lips when everyone wore face masks. This is a major deaf problem! Thankfully, the anesthesiologist walked me through the procedure he would follow telling me to close my eyes when the face mask came toward me, then he would tap me on the shoulder so I'd know to open my eyes and then signal by putting his palms together against the side of his head as if he was going to sleep to signal the start of the anesthesia through the IV and I was to close my eyes and keep "thinking of those verses."

It's a crazy feeling entering the surgery room where there's this skinny table in the middle you get transferred onto and all this equipment around, along with huge bright lights above you. Thankfully the nurses were incredibly kind (another huge answer to prayer!).

After they put their face masks on, I said, "Just so you know I won't understand a word you say when those are on and one of the nurses pulled hers

down and said, “We know. We deal with a lot of deaf people here!” Best of all she kept taking her face mask off to talk with me.

“You know I had a friend who underwent cochlear implant surgery this past year and the difference it’s making in her life is amazing.” It was such a treat to get to dialogue with her through the transition into surgery and feel like we connected as people, and she wasn’t just doing a job. I love when there is care in health care!

When the other nurse brought the mask to my face, my heart skipped a beat so I began singing Psalm 119 in my head. There is such value in memorizing long portions of scripture using music, even if you’re singing to yourself silently! And true to his word, the anesthesiologist did every single thing as he instructed me beforehand which was such a help!

When you’re deaf you spend much of your life on high alert, always looking for clues so you don’t miss things. When someone prepares me step by step so I can know what’s coming, this enables me to relax.

But the best help of all was listening to myself review verses in my head. Peace flooded my heart and in no time at all I was out!

Can you think of a time when listening to God’s Word as you reviewed it to yourself brought peace in the midst of scary situations?

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 24

LOOK: Read Psalm 119:165 and write this verse below:

LISTEN: What is the relationship between listening well and peace?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

The next thing I know the nurse is tapping me on the shoulder to wake up and when I open my eyes Jim is right beside me! Oh how I love him! It was so wonderful to wake up and see him!

He said Dr. Bartels met him in the waiting room and said the surgery had gone very well. There was no problem inserting the electrodes in the extra 4 mm and when they took an X-ray everything was right where it needed to be.



It took me awhile to fully waken but as soon as I was alert we were able to go. They'd already explained to Jim all we needed to know about my after care, gave me cranberry juice and rolled me out the door while Jim got the car.

The nurse told me it is beneficial after surgery to walk and be up and about as much as possible. People heal quicker the sooner normal activities are resumed so right after we pulled in the driveway I asked Jim to walk with me around our cul-de-sac. And here's the best part: There was no dizziness! I can't begin to tell you how thankful I am! This is one of my favorite answers to prayer!

And I've had no nausea! Turns out nausea comes if you take the narcotics! Before my surgery they asked me to take one Gabapentin pill and two Tylenol. But since then I've only needed Ibuprofen. There's barely any pain at all!

I even ate pork chops for dinner a friend brought over! Speaking of which, I can't believe all the love coming my way, from people texting and emailing to say they are praying, to posting on Facebook, too!



Right after I walked in the door I saw a package from Amazon and opened to find a sweet surprise from my friend Sherry Graf!

Of course I played with this sign before I did anything! Then our next door neighbor brought me a huge bouquet of flowers from our cul-de-sac and her son painted me a picture and her daughter brought me the sweetest card! I went to sleep with the biggest smile on my face?!

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 25

LOOK: Read James 5:13-18 and write below the portion of this passage standing out to you.

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What difference can listening to the needs of others make in their life? What difference can this make in your life?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

As my activation day approaches I realize there are three possible outcomes: 1. I'll be able to hear right away and understand words (this is what you see in the YouTube videos where people are crying because it's so wonderful!) 2. I'll hear sound but not be able to understand voices or 3. I won't hear any sound at first (some people only "hear" vibrations).

The blessing of the first scenario, where you start understanding words right away, is all interactions become listening rehabilitation. The hard part about the latter two scenarios is you have to spend time listening when sounds aren't recognizable, trusting there really is value in doing this.

As my activation day approached I knew I did not want to be videotaped. I was on pins and needles. I did not need the added pressure of people watching to see how I'd respond.

Thankfully, first thing that morning my friend Richard, who is bilateral (having cochlear implants in both ears), emailed at his activation he didn't hear

words at first, just crazy sounds, but the longer he listened he found he was able to distinguish words and then understand speech!

Having heard Richard's story so helped my heart when at first all I heard were bells and whistles! I can never thank the Lord enough for having him email me before my activation! His words helped put me in a growth mindset: "So this is where we start, but as I listen it can get better."

Sure enough by the end of my audiology appointment two hours later those bells and whistles began to take shape... as words! Yes, my husband sounded like a robot! But I understood him! And the more I listened, the more my ability to hear and the quality of what I heard improved! It was (and continues to be) simply amazing!

People often say to me, I want to hear from the Lord like you do. I think sometimes they want me to give them a formula, "Just do this and this and this and you too can hear from God..." as in right away! But I find listening is a skill which develops over time.

What thoughts come to mind when you consider hearing is a gift, but listening is an ability you grow?

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 26

LOOK: Read Matthew 25:14-30. What verse do you sense the Lord wants you to focus on? Record this below.

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What new thoughts come to mind about learning to listen from this?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

At my next appointment my audiologist, Dr. Vicky Moore, shared with me what happened at my activation from her perspective.

Now Cochlear America is the company who manufactures my processor. One of their representatives asked if she could be present at my activation. Katie Figueroa is also an audiologist and played a key role helping me receive a cochlear implant. When we first met she was surprised I was still interacting so much with no hearing, relying on lip reading and she said she'd like to be present when I was activated. I was glad to have her there.

After I arrived and settled in, my audiologist unpacked my external processor, connected it to her computer and then placed the processor on my head. Katie sat on a nearby couch watching.

Dr. Moore explained she was first going to conduct a test to see how my auditory nerve responded.

I sat there in total silence. This is my usual experience with audiologists so I didn't think anything of this.

But Dr. Moore explained later, "I don't think you saw it but at that point I looked back at Katie and we both feared the worst. Your auditory nerve was completely unresponsive."

She went on to explain, "When I was in graduate school twelve years ago they said people like you, whose auditory nerve was unresponsive, never would be able to hear. We were both shocked when I started to send sounds, you began hearing them! We've no idea how you're hearing, but you are doing great!"

I am so thankful to be living this miracle!

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 27

LOOK: Read Mark 7:31-37. Select one verse to focus on then record it below:

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

On my first flight after my cochlear implant processor was activated the funniest thing happened...

To help my brain adjust to this new way of hearing, when I'm not speaking with people, I'm listening to the audio Bible app on my phone. After pre-boarding and heading to the back of the plane I start listening to the gospel of Luke.

When the plane begins backing up I remember I need to switch the settings on my phone to airplane mode. The moment I do, I no longer heard the Bible streaming. I figure it must not work in airplane mode.

But then I begin to hear something faint and soon realize it's the Bible still being read. I listen hard and am so excited to discover though it's faint I can still understand some of the words. "This reminds me of watching the Olympics with Jim!" We don't have a cochlear implant streamer for the TV, so I can hear the TV but it is faint.

Then I realize, I only hear things like this when everyone else can hear them!

I tap a woman sitting near me on the shoulder and point to my phone. "Can you hear this?" Everyone in the back of the plane starts nodding! Yikes! The gospel of Luke has been blaring out my phone!

I quickly reply, "I am so sorry! I am deaf and didn't realize my phone was making noise you can hear!"

The woman in front of me turns around and says, "It's ok, honey. It accomplished its purpose. Everyone is much calmer now!"

God sure can communicate in the craziest of ways!

Have you ever experienced the Lord speaking to you, or through you, in a creative way?

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 28

LOOK: Read Psalm 50 and write below the verse standing out to you.

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

A week after activation I was meeting with a friend in a cafe when music started streaming into my head! I was so surprised! I thought I must be picking up on someone's computer!

But then she asked me to hum what I heard and she said, “That sounds like the music in the cafe.” Shortly after, the music stopped.

When I met with my audiologist the next week she was puzzled. “The N7s are new.. maybe there’s a glitch or something...?” Right after meeting with her I attended our local Cochlear America lunch and in the middle of a presentation, the same music started streaming for another short spurt. So now I know it’s not the cafe, but...?

A week later I’m heading home from Tampa and traffic on the highway is bumper to bumper so I decide to take side roads I haven’t travelled before. As I’m holding my phone a random call comes in from Miami which I answer, figuring even if it’s a phone solicitor I’ll get practice hearing on the phone.

The call must be a mistake as the person hangs up.

Then it hits me, before answering I heard the same music!

It was the default ringtone on my iPhone which I’ve never heard, never known was on there, since I’ve been deaf for years! Mystery solved!

Have you ever heard something you can’t identify? This happens to me all the time!

One day I sat at our kitchen table and heard a beep. First I ran to the refrigerator because the door beeps when not closed. It wasn’t that. Then I thought, “It must be the laundry machine.” But it wasn’t that! I even went into the living room to flick the fan switch on and off.

I finally gave up and walked back to the kitchen table. As I passed by the dishwasher I discovered where the beep came from! I never knew dishwashers beeped when done!

There is a huge difference between hearing and understanding!

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 29

LOOK: Read Proverbs 2:1-8. Record below the verse you sense the Lord wants you to focus on.

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What difference can it make in your listening to remember there is a difference between hearing and understanding?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

After getting cochlear implants my issues with brain fatigue disappeared! It was simply amazing! I stopped spending whole days in my bedroom recovering. I could now enjoy interacting with my family when at home.

One other huge blessing, I could now hear on the phone! Right after my first implant was activated I came home and my husband said, "Go in the other room and let me call you. Let's see if you can hear."

The first words I ever heard over the phone were, "I love you!" The next were, "I can't believe you are hearing me!!!"

This was such a huge game changer for us! When I traveled to Indiana University the next week to do a prayer retreat for students there, I stayed at a cabin in the woods. FaceTime would not have worked as the connections weren't good. But we talked on the phone every night for at least a half hour! Something we haven't done for 20 years!

Also, I'm enjoying a greater capacity for getting time with people. After moving back to Florida there were so many friends I hadn't seen because all of my hearing time needed to be set apart for ministry. There wasn't extra beyond this.

But here's the crazy thing, after years of living a limited listening lifestyle I have to keep reminding myself, you can call! You can get together! You can interact more with the neighbors!

Now I need to listen as much as I can! The first year after being implanted is one of the most important for retraining the brain to hear. The more I listen, the more I get better at listening!

Now my processor came able to interface with an app on my iPhone enabling me to measure Time in Speech. This feedback provides incredible help. I was surprised to realize how easily I could go through a day without hearing much. I've lived this way for years! Now I need to be intentional to think, "Hey, I'm cooking, I can listen to a podcast" or pick up the phone and call someone to talk. I always drove the hour to USF in silence but now I can listen to the audio Bible! It makes the drive more enjoyable! But I have to be intentional to remember to start something aural going!

At first, it required a ton of effort to ensure I listened at least four hours a day! When I visited my audiologist I asked her if this amount of rehab was enough and she exclaimed, "Deb, you are doing great! Many of my older patients struggle to get in one hour a day!"

No wonder it can take a long time to learn to listen!

But this makes me wonder... is there a certain level of listening spiritually I'm use to?

There is nothing quite like listening to grow your ability to listen! But if spiritual listening is like physical listening, I never will grow my amount of listening "naturally." I find it takes an incredible amount of intentionality to grow the time I spend listening to God.

What might it look like to be more intentional to increase how much you listen spiritually?

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 30

LOOK: Read Genesis 6:9-22. How were others impacted because Noah listened to God? Select one verse to focus on and write it below:

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

Read 2 Peter 2:5. What consequence occurred due to people not listening?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

After I started listening to the Bible on my commute to and from Tampa I was amazed how time flew by so much faster! Sometimes, though, I couldn't get the audio Bible to stream or one chapter streamed, then turned off. For someone wanting to grow her listening ability this was incredibly frustrating.

One day when the audio Bible wouldn't work no matter what I tried, I turned the radio on, willing to listen to anything so I could get in more practice. Since I was already on the interstate I wasn't able to fiddle much with the dial. Besides I had no idea what radio stations were available or where they were located. I never listened to the radio before! So I turned to the first station coming in and found National Public Radio.

Now when I listen to the audio Bible I am hearing one narrator, who elucidates well. But on NPR there are all sorts of different people being interviewed. This provided a challenging workout for my brain. Especially when people spoke with heavy accents, it could be difficult to figure out what they were saying. But this proved a fun challenge. I never knew what I would or wouldn't hear next.

I'm convinced this helped me grow my listening skills more than anything else! It's one thing to listen to the same voice over and over; a whole other to encounter a variety of voices chiming in! Best of all, the longer I listened to interviews on the radio, the more I began to understand.

I was reminded of this today when I heard one of my favorite authors, Skye Jethani, being interviewed. He shared,

“We tend to fall into silos, echo chambers, where we only hear the voices that reaffirm what we already think and we rarely hear thoughtful voices from those whom we may disagree with so one of the things I've had to do and it's not always easy, is be very, very intentional about seeking out voices I disagree with to learn from, to read their stuff, to not just rely on what comes down through my FaceBook feed or through my twitter feed but go hunting intentionally for those voices. Otherwise we just lose perspective.

I may not change my mind on a view but I may change the way I talk about it so that I'm able to engage a broader audience. One of the books I recommend is The Righteous Mind by Jonathan Haidt and he talks about why really good people disagree about things like politics and religion and lose the ability to hear from one another. The internet is not helping us on that front because it does silo us, so we have to be much, much more intentional seeking out civil, thoughtful, intelligent voices on the other side that we may profoundly disagree with. But we will learn not only how to articu-

late their side of the argument, we learn how to better communicate our own side, too.”

- Paterson Podcast, September 14, 2018

It seems we have a major hearing problem in our country today! And I’m not talking about deafness! But especially on political and social issues there is a polarization killing dialogue.

I wonder what would happen if Christians started following Skye Jethani’s advice and sought to listen, not only to people who say what we already know, believe or agree with, but who speak from different perspectives.

I can’t wait to see how the Lord might use this to help me “hear” better!

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 31

LOOK: Read Proverbs 18:17 and write this verse below.

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

New neighbors moved in across the street from us. Thanks to my cochlear implant I heard the details of her daughter's birth story! What a story!

Ashley shared she was told she'd never have children, then two days after her mother died she discovered she was pregnant! She was so excited! Her dad is a doctor so half way through her pregnancy she underwent every test possible, then learned her baby was severely handicapped. They didn't know if the baby had a brain! So the birth was induced to insure she'd be in a sterile environment, but when they tried to give her an epidural something went wrong so they had to knock her out and perform an emergency c-section. Can you believe her daughter came out in excellent condition with no handicap at all!

This past week her daughter turned two and as a birthday gift it was on my heart to create a children's book called Layla the Loved featuring her daughter's birth story. I had so much fun writing this as a rhyme, then painting each page!

The doctors all said,
"No mommy you'll be."
But they didn't know
That God had planned me!

I'm Layla the Loved!
A miracle kid
Whose presence brings joy
That's unexpected!

My mommy was sad
When her mother died
But then she found out
That I was inside!

I'm Layla the Loved!
I made mommy smile
The moment she heard
That I'd be her child!

Her belly grew big
As I kicked and grew
God made me special
My mom and dad knew.

But then doctors warned
That something was wrong.
My mom and dad cried...
Till I came along!

I'm Layla the Loved!
God made me just right!
Surprising them all!
My dad held me tight

For I was the first
Babe held in his arms
Immediately
He was fully charmed!

I'm Layla the Loved!
To everyone near
I bring thanks and joy
Just by being here!

When I went to the party yesterday the first person I met introduced herself as Ashley's mother! Wait! What?

Twice Ashley told me she found out she was pregnant two weeks after her mother died! Inside I was scrambling trying to figure out what the relationship was! Was this Chaz's mom calling herself Ashley's mom? Or had Ashley's dad remarried?

But then she said she moved to Florida when Ashley was two weeks old?!

Finally I asked, "Ashley mentioned she found out she was pregnant with Layla two weeks after a family member died, is that true?"

Her mother nodded, "Yes, two weeks after her brother died..."

Whoops! My hearing, though incredibly improved, still isn't 100%!

Fortunately, no one opened the gift yet! After Ashley's mom left, I took Ashley aside and explained I'd created a special gift for her but needed to go change one page and would bring it right back. I wanted to say something as it might look strange if someone saw me leaving the party taking my gift home with me! Thankfully, it was easy to replace "mother" with "brother!"

When I returned, Ashley wanted to read the book immediately. Tears filled her eyes as she read the story. “I am so going to treasure this!” How I love it when the Lord enables me to create something bringing a reminder of His care and kindness and help into people’s lives. Was I ever thankful this story had a happy ending!

But still I was perplexed. When I met with my audiologist the next week I shared this story and stated, “Twice I clearly heard her say, ‘mother!’” How could I get it wrong twice?

Dr. Moore replied, “That’s why we teach people not to repeat things the same way twice. Once your brain thinks it’s heard something It will continue to hear what it thought it heard. Don’t repeat. Instead, re-state the information in a different way.”

I’ve heard and learned a lot of listening tips over the years:

- Gain Attention: Use the person's name to get their attention or gently tap them on the shoulder. (Do not bop them on the head! Yes, this happened once!)
- Face the Person: Speak at a close distance and look at the person.
- Do not put your hands in front of your face
- Move to an area with good lighting so your face can be clearly seen.
- Converse away from background noise
- Speak clearly in a normal tone of voice. Speech clarity is more important than how loud you speak.
- Use pauses rather than slow speech to give the person time to process speech.

But “rephrase rather than repeat” was a new one for me! And I wonder... how many times do I continue to hear wrong because I think I already heard right?!

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 32

LOOK: Read 1 Corinthians 8:2 and write this verse below.

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

Jim and I went out to eat at our favorite Indian restaurant with friends last night. About a half hour into the meal the all too familiar double beep went off in my head. This alerts me my battery is about to die. After this warning, I usually have twenty minutes until my battery is dead and our food had not yet arrived. This is my second time this week it's died on me when eating out and I didn't bring an extra battery with me. At least the first time it happened at the end of the meal so I didn't miss too much, but all too soon I was plunged back into silence and struggling to understand solely through lip reading. It served as an incredible reminder what a gift it is to be hearing again. The difference is astounding!

When my battery dies I now wonder how I ever functioned as long and as much as I did relying solely on lip reading! No wonder my brain became fatigued! I never realized how many blanks I had to fill in!

Jim was incredibly gracious saying he realized I was still learning a new way of life. After forty years wearing glasses I'm still not good at keeping track of them!

But it was a sobering reminder, this isn't only about me hearing but has a huge impact on him, too. Especially as he was sharing deeply about things happening at work. When my processor went silent, I simply couldn't participate in the conversation the way I did when my processor worked.

This served as a powerful reminder, this isn't only about hearing but also about relationships and learning a whole new way of living.

And did this ever motivate me to remember to change my batteries before leaving home!

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 33

LOOK: Read James 1:19 and write this verse below.

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

When I experienced no complications after my first surgery my doctor wanted to go ahead and do the second surgery, but I wasn't so sure. On the Cochlear Town USA group I'd heard stories from a number of people who experienced no complications with their first implant but then were hit with dizziness and vertigo after the second one. For some, these problems continued for years.

And this concern wasn't only based on anecdotal experiences. There is a higher risk for complications with the second surgery. The inner ear isn't only involved in hearing. It is also responsible for balance. When the first ear is implanted, having 22 electrodes threaded in may throw off your balance, but it helps there's still another ear to compensate. With the second surgery there's no other ear to help.

When I learned my CI coach Richard sometimes struggles with dizziness, I was scared.

I was already hearing well - I scored 76% correct on my first hearing test two months after getting my first cochlear implant. My audiologist was amazed! Did I need to get the other ear implanted? What if I ended up with vertigo for the rest of my life?!

But one key thing caught my attention. The precious family of believers at First Baptist Church of Boca Grande generously gave so I could get two processors! Now many people had encouraged me to create a Go Fund Me page, but I didn't want to ask anyone to give to me getting cochlear implants when I didn't know how it would turn out - what if my ability to comprehend speech became worse? But when they gave without ever being asked, specifically stating their gift was for this, I was spurred on to consider, was this the Lord's leading?

Also, my doctor is 68 years old. He is an amazing surgeon! And what a difference it makes with this procedure to have someone as gifted as him cutting me open and inserting the implant. Also, my first implant required a deeper insertion which would need to be matched as closely as possible. It was definitely advantageous to have the same surgeon do this.

But I wasn't sure if the Lord was clearly leading one way or another.

So at my three month check-up, which was when my doctor said we'd talk about doing the next ear, I can't begin to tell you how nervous I was going into that appointment. I was so thankful to have Jim with me.

As we waited to see the doctor I pulled out my Bible and the Lord reminded me of Psalm 35:27b "The LORD be exalted, who delights in the well-being of his servant." And he reminded me, He only allows affliction when it will result in a greater good.

Then I sensed him asking, "What are you afraid of, Deb?" And I replied, "Becoming more handicapped and not being able to keep sharing Jesus with people" (because dizziness could hinder me from driving and traveling, even biking!). And He gently reminded me, "Your handicap being deaf hasn't kept you from doing anything I want you to, has it? Do you think another handicap will?"

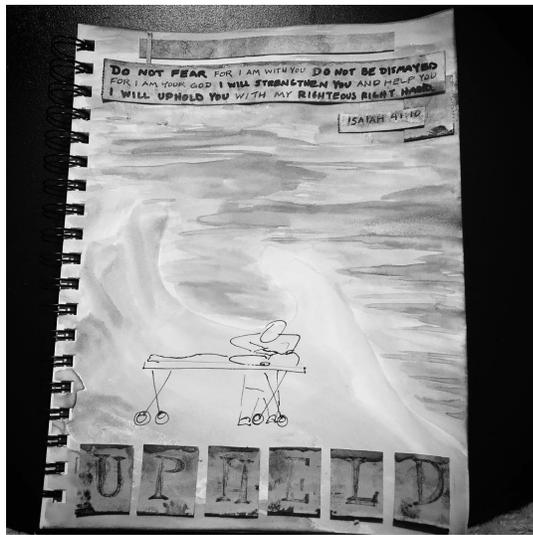
Would you believe by the time I entered the examination room there was total peace in my heart!

The night before surgery I woke at 3 am to eat a final meal before the pre-surgery fast began. While up I decided to spend time with Jesus and ended up art journaling. I was still concerned about dizziness as a complication. God

didn't promise there'd be no complications, only they wouldn't get in the way of me doing anything He wanted me to.

Would you believe the Lord laid Isaiah 41:10 on my heart and gave me a picture of His hand holding the doctor as he operated on me. One word jumped out of Isaiah 41:10 and captured my attention, "Upheld."

Truly, "Great peace have those who love your law and nothing can make them stumble!" Psalm 119:165



LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 34

LOOK: Read Deuteronomy 32:1-47. Record below the verse below standing out to you.

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

For years, people tried to convince me to get cochlear implants, “Why won’t you do something that could help you hear?”

Now you have to understand, I am an innovator. I love trying new things! And I’m especially all about anything to help maximize life! One of my core motivations is to experience the ideal!

But with cochlear implants, I was not about to move forward unless I sensed the Lord wanted me to. Most people don’t realize they aren’t like glasses. You aren’t guaranteed good results.

In fact, there is a list of possible complications a mile long. Plus, you risk losing all residual hearing. Some people hear worse after this surgery.

Though I barely had any hearing left, I could still “hear” praise songs on YouTube I already knew, as long as they had the lyrics on them. Music is such a vital part of my worshipping, indeed my life!

When the Lord led me to get the first surgery, one big consolation was knowing my worst ear was getting implanted, so my better ear could still enjoy music. But going bilateral would mean losing this ability in my left ear too.

When the Lord laid it on my heart to move forward with a second cochlear implant, I reasoned, “This will help me interact more with people, the gospel is worth it. I will have all eternity to enjoy music in heaven!”

But still the last time I played my guitar before my second surgery I cried. Later, I posted on FaceBook: *“I just realized tomorrow will be my last day hearing unaided. I’m not freaking out but it is a bit of a freaky thought. While I’ll hopefully hear much better with two cochlear implants, when they aren’t on or working, both ears will be totally deaf. I’m reading through the Psalms at night and just read Psalm 19:1-4.*

The heavens are telling of the glory of God;
And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.
Day to day pours forth speech,
And night to night reveals knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words;
Their voice is not heard.
Their line has gone out through all the earth,
And their utterances to the end of the world.

Such a great reminder I’m not losing the only way to hear! No matter what, I will never not be able to hear what God wants me to hear!”

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 35

LOOK: Read Psalm 19:1-4 and write below the verse you sense the Lord wants you to focus on.

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

Because my surgeon diagnosed my hearing loss as being caused by Bing Siebenmann Dysplasia he recommended I only have one ear implanted at a time. He explained he was going to have to insert the implant 4 mm deeper into my cochlea which could result in problems with dizziness. So even though both my ears qualified for cochlear implants, he recommended we only do one ear at a time and see how I handled it.

Before my first surgery I was given instructions for what I could and couldn't do to prevent infection and protect against complications. I am not exactly gifted with details so I carefully read and re-read those instructions, creating charts to help me remember to follow each instruction to the letter. Did it ever help to compile checklists which we carefully followed. Everything went great! I was blessed with an amazing recovery! No dizziness, nausea or much pain at all! I only took ibuprofen after coming home from the surgery center and was outside walking a mile the next day.

At my post op appointment the doctor said, "I'll see you again in three months so we can talk about doing the other ear."

Sure enough five months later it was time for my second surgery to get my left ear implanted. This time at my pre-op appointment they gave me the same sheets of paper with all the instructions for what I could and couldn't do. But here's the difference: I didn't make a checklist this time. I'd recently done this. I thought I knew what to do, especially as the nurse went over every single instruction with me before I saw the doctor.

Once again my surgery went incredibly well. No dizziness, nausea, or pain, only mild discomfort requiring a bit of ibuprofen. I was out walking two miles the day after surgery, bouncing back quicker than before!

Now I remembered not being allowed to lift more than 10 pounds for six weeks after surgery and 30 pounds for twelve weeks. So I was careful to monitor what I carried. After Jim went back to work we enjoyed some lovely cool days, which don't occur often during summer in Florida and I was getting a bit antsy while recovering. There are challenges to feeling good post surgery!

Before my surgery, we began raking up all the mulch in our landscaping and transporting this to the back of our yard so we could put down a weed barrier and rubber mulch to keep weeds at bay. But we hadn't finished yet. I thought, "If I keep the piles small, put them on a tarp then haul those small loads to the back I should be fine." But each load seemed to get a little bigger...

When Jim arrived home he gasped, "What is that?!" and pointed at my latest pile. I explained my strategy and he said, "Deb, That's not ten pounds! That has to be at least thirty!" Good thing he came home when he did!

As I was driving home from the grocery store the next day I noticed a recurrent sound. At first I thought I must've run over something and my car was dragging it. It seemed as if each time the tires went around I'd hear this bump. I opened my car door to see if there was something on the wheel, but there wasn't. Then I wondered if maybe one of the cars by me was playing music with a lot of base, but as I kept driving and the cars around me changed, the sound continued.

Then I wondered if something was wrong with my car's engine. But when I stopped to get the mail and turned the car off the sound continued.

When I arrived home and Jim came out to help me with the groceries, I opened my mouth to speak and my voice began making all sorts of pops and whistles and it sounded like I was hearing myself through a microphone... this was through my newly implanted ear which has no external processor on it yet! I shouldn't be hearing anything! What was going on?!

I emailed my audiologist and my doctor in a panic! I can't begin to tell you how scary this was! Thankfully it went away the next day. But then it came back for a brief time... a number of times!

Now up to this point post surgery I needed to roll a cotton ball in vaseline and plug up my newly implanted ear so water wouldn't get in. Can you imagine slathering grease on one side of your head before washing your hair then trying to get it off after?

I was instructed to do this for two weeks. I hated this, so was I ever excited when I hit the two week mark! I was so ready to wash my hair without any cotton ball or vaseline!

But Jim wanted to double check the instructions to make sure it was ok. When he did, he discovered I wasn't supposed to stop doing this until after seeing the doctor. And then he continued reading through the rest of the instructions and realized I wasn't supposed to be lifting anything, not a single pound, for the first two weeks!

Whoops! I sure remembered wrong! Even ten pounds was lifting too much! I can't begin to describe the look which flashed across my doctor's face when I told him what I'd done. I am blessed I didn't permanently injure myself!

And did I ever learn a huge lesson: if I think I already know what I need to know, I don't listen well! And can that ever prove costly!

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 36

LOOK: Read Mark 4:24 and write this verse below:

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

"And.... activation!!!!

Nothing like diving back into crazy listening! No looney tunes or C3PO this time - more like Thomas the Tank Engine! Big time whistles like those from a train flooded my ear! Seriously, each time I cough or sneeze it sounds like a train is coming!

I was still leaning forward lip reading when I was activated the first time but right from the start at my second activation, I was amazed at how my comprehension improved! By the end of this activation appointment Jim asked, "Can you understand me if you don't look at me?" So I looked away and clearly heard him say, "Where would you like to go for dinner?" Best date invite ever!

I was even able to talk with my parents on the phone last night just hearing through my newly activated left ear!

Now I'm sitting here listening to Amy Grant's album Never Alone and blown away by how much I'm hearing and understanding! Music is starting to sound better! It wasn't like this at all when I was first activated in my right ear! (and this is with only my new left processor on! I'm supposed to only use the new processor as much as possible for the next few weeks so my left ear can catch up to my right ear's ability to comprehend)."

This is what I shared on FaceBook the day of my second activation. Shortly after posting this, I received a friend request from a woman who'd also had her second CI activation the same week. She too took off like a Kentucky Derby Horse, so excited at all she was hearing!

The difference: her audiologist didn't have her only use the second processor for a month. She wasn't given any restrictions at all. At first it seemed she was light years ahead of me getting to listen with two processors. She was listening to musicals and sounding like she was having so much fun! At times I

was tempted to put the old one on to see what it'd be like. But I trust my audiologist, so I waited.

Soon I began to notice my new friend complaining of horrendous headaches. It was simply too much too soon, and her brain was overwhelmed. She recently posted even now, six months later, she doesn't hear very well out of her second ear. It helped her first ear hear better but on its own, her newly implanted ear isn't hearing very well.

Then last month I made a new friend who recently moved to town who also received her second implant about the same time I did and she shared she's not hearing very well in her second ear either. Turns out her audiologist never told her to spend the first month letting the newly implanted ear do all the listening. After she met with my audiologist she took a month to do this, and want to guess whose second ear is now up to par?

It seems crazy that to hear better you need to limit your hearing for a while, but I'm discovering this is true for hearing in general. At Christmas when I reflected on the past year, I realized I wasn't listening to the Lord as much. From Zooming to Audiobooks, being able to hear opened new opportunities for listening. Sounds began flooding my brain, consuming more time. Technology available 24/7 resulted in a huge impact. If I woke up in the middle of the night I could take in a podcast where formerly I use to enjoy sweet time with Jesus. When the new year began, I knew something needed to change.

As I met with friends to discuss and pray through the coming year, one shared how the Lord laid it on her heart to start fasting one day a week, investing time in prayer. Another shared how she often skipped meals so fasting from food wasn't what she needed to do, but she expected fasting from TV would help. As I listened, I realized I too needed to fast - not from food or TV but from my iPhone and laptop from 9pm at night until 9 am after I finished walking and praying the next morning.

What a difference this is making in my life!

Is there any way you sense the Lord leading you to limit your "hearing" so you can hear better?

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 37

LOOK: Read Philippians 3:8-10 and write this verse below:

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

My audiologist was so excited when the results came back I was already hearing 95% correct! She asked, "Want to take the test with noise? We don't usually do that until after people have been implanted for a year, but you're doing so well! It'd be neat to see how you hear with that in the background." I was game.

Now you have to remember for the past 34 years I haven't heard much during hearing tests so I honestly had no idea what to expect! By noise did she mean the roaring of traffic? Or a cacophony of sounds?

Imagine my surprise when a bunch of people's voices and conversations came flooding into the sound booth. It was like sitting in a busy restaurant with people talking all around you. Then one by one the sentences started streaming through. And yes, my comprehension took a drastic dip!

But I still scored 75%! When we emerged from the testing area my audiologist told her assistant, “She’s hearing better than we are!”

Noise, outside distractions, make a huge difference in the comprehension even of people who hear normal. But interestingly enough, when taking this hearing test, I found my greatest challenge wasn’t external from the flood of people’s voices, but internal. As I was nailing each sentence my mind began to race, “I can’t wait to get home and tell Jim! No one is going to believe this!” And before I knew it, I’d missed part of the next sentence!

Distractions aren’t only a challenge when listening to people. I find I can struggle with my mind wandering during my times with the Lord, too. This is why I often find my best times listening to Him happen when I’m doing something physically active, walking, kayaking, biking. In fact, my husband suggested we come up with a name for this when I’m cycling: “thinkcling” which comes in handy when he wonders why I’m going especially slow! (Fun Fact: The idea for this booklet came while thinkcling and yes, I set a new personal record for longest time biking to breakfast! ;o)

What distracts you when you’re listening to God as well as to other people?

What can help you overcome those distractions so you can listen better?

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 38

LOOK: Read Psalm 46:10 and write the verse below:

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

One of my favorite things to do is camp. But my husband hates camping. So each year I fly to Colorado to enjoy a camping trip in the mountains with a friend.

Twice we've camped at Twin Lakes which is a huge lake at the base of the largest mountain in Colorado. And Mount Massive is only one of many mountains surrounding those lakes. The beauty is simply breathtaking!

There's only one problem. A major road runs right by the lake providing a main route for getting to Aspen, Colorado, a popular vacation destination.

So here we are camping in a serene setting, and all night long traffic noisily speeds by. My friend hasn't slept well either time we've camped there.

But me? I sleep great! I wouldn't know there was traffic if she hadn't told me. There are definite advantages to being deaf!

On this last camping trip I could hear! So I did hear the traffic whizzing by... until I turned off my processors! I don't sleep with them on so it was a silent night.

Being able to hear again, I've discovered the world is a noisy place!

So while I do keep my processors on most of the day, there are times, especially when I'm enjoying time with Jesus, it can be a gift to turn them off. It's amazing how not hearing what's around me, can help me better hear Him!

It's funny, I was so afraid of losing my residual hearing, but now it's such a blessing to turn my processor off! I can concentrate so much better. Am I ever thanking the Lord for this gift!

In truth, if I wasn't deaf, I'd consider purchasing a Bose noise-canceling headset to be an incredible investment in my walk with God!

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 39

LOOK: Read Lamentations 3:22-26 and write below the verse standing out to you.

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

Last night my neighbor invited me to go swimming. For most people That's simply a matter of checking their schedule. For me, this involved diving into a whole new adventure. Now if we were only swimming laps, all I'd need to do is show up. But this was an invitation to join her and another friend for more of a social workout (my favorite kind!), where it'd help to hear.

Thankfully my new cochlear implants came with an aqua kit, think waterproof swimsuit for a processor! But I've never used this before...

First, I had to figure out how to put it together, then figure out how to get the disposable batteries in there. Thankfully, my husband helped after I put them in backwards!

Once I started following the directions in the manual everything was soon ready to go!

Now I'd purchased a special swim cap designed for people with cochlear implants and put that on this morning. It didn't fit. It was a bit lopsided leaving me looking like a pirate, only this was much bigger than an eye patch.

Thankfully, my regular speedo swim cap worked. I was about to pull out of the driveway when I heard a series of beeps signaling my processor died! I couldn't hear anything!

I took my processor off, pressed the button and the light turned green but soon resorted to a blinking yellow light... Every. Single. Time. And yes I tried a number of times to get it to start working. These are brand new batteries that worked fine at first!

Thankfully, there's a Facebook group called CochlearTown USA and I did a quick search and discovered I'm not supposed to use disposable batteries but a \$250 rechargeable one! Apparently disposable batteries need oxygen to work and inside the waterproof casing they don't get enough so soon stop working.

Am I ever thankful this happened before I left the house!

So I quickly changed out the disposable batteries and inserted a rechargeable one, then carefully resealed the waterproof covering and was on my way!

How awesome to be able to hear, interact, enjoy being with friends as we swam!

I needed to put my goggles on to protect my eyes from both the chlorine and the sun. That's a lot of objects pressing on my head in close proximity. After about 25 laps my outer ear was sore.

I finally had to take the processor off, but thankfully I can still read lips so was still able to interact with my friend... some. She needed to get my attention and we needed to stop and face each other whenever we wanted to talk.

But exercising with friends is so much more fun than exercising alone. It can be a lot of work for me to prepare to hear now that I can hear. But is it ever worth it!

What comes to mind when you think about preparing to hear?

I recently read Billy Graham's autobiography, Just As I Am and when he was first describing meeting Ruth he shared she would spend Saturday nights spending time in the Word preparing her heart to hear from the Lord the next day.

How many times do I rush into church, thankful if we made it on time, let alone having invested time preparing my heart to hear from the Lord? I wonder how much I may be missing by not taking time to prepare?

One of my favorite songs from Sovereign Grace music is Show Us Christ. What a difference it makes when I make this my prayer, asking the Lord to let me see Jesus in His Word and hear all He wants me to.

This isn't a new concept or one starting with Ruth Bell Graham. I love how we see Elisha doing this very thing in 2 Kings 3:13-15. If Elisha needed to prepare his heart to hear from the Lord, how much more do we?

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 40

LOOK: Read 2 Kings 3:13-15. Record below the verse standing out to you.

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can help you prepare your heart to hear from the Lord?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

One of the things I most feared before getting cochlear implants was the loss of my residual hearing. Ironically, this loss now one of my favorite blessings! When I'm flying if there is a screaming baby on the plane, want to guess who turns her processors off and enjoys a peaceful flight? If I'm savoring time with the Lord and the coffee shop I'm in gets busy, with one quick click to each of my processors I am submerged into total silence. It is wonderful!

Now I don't do this a lot. It's important I invest the majority of my time listening, but when enjoying time with the Lord I love being able to shut the world out. This really highlights what a gift it was all those years when I couldn't hear.

True my deafness separated me from people and I missed much in conversations, but it also created more space in my life to listen to the Lord. Now I find I need to fight off so many distractions!

Though I will say there was one time when silence really scared me. One morning while traveling for work I put my processors on in the morning... and heard nothing! First I checked to make certain the batteries were charged and working. They were! I turned the processors off then put them back on

again... still nothing! My heart began to pound and I chided myself for not bringing my back up processors with me!

Had my internal devices failed? But how two could fail at the same time? I texted my husband, "My processors aren't working. I'm trying not to freak!" You better believe I was praying!

Then I checked to see if I'd put them each on the correct ear... bingo! Who knew they wouldn't work at all if they weren't on the specific ear they were created for! I heaved a sigh of relief. But it did get me thinking...

In a broken, fallen world things don't always go as planned. I live each day aware my internal device could fail or infection could set in or a medical problem necessitate they be explanted. It makes me extra thankful every single day I can hear!

As Job says, "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

There is a fascinating movie featuring Robin Williams entitled Awakenings. It's the true story of a doctor who discovered a new drug enabled people, who were catatonic as the result of an encephalitis epidemic, to regain the ability to be revived, interact, think and communicate clearly, radically changing their lives!

But then they began to lose the ability. Was this a total loss? Or worse an intense heartache causing extra pain? At the end of the movie Dr. Sayer states, "What we do know is that, as the chemical window closed, another awakening took place; That the human spirit is more powerful than any drug and *that* is what needs to be nourished: with work, play, friendship, family. These are the things that matter. This is what we'd forgotten: the simplest things."

The Lord had a purpose for me being deaf for 36 years. He has a purpose for me hearing now. And if He ever sees fit to allow me to return to a world of silence, He will have a purpose then, too. I find so much peace realizing this!

And the crazy thing is now I can hear, I see more clearly than ever before, despite the struggle and isolation, there were advantages to not being able to hear. So I'd probably handle being plunged back into deafness better now than if I'd progressively lost it all.

Do you remember the poem the Lord gave me near the start of this journey?

*I'm going deaf
But I've never heard better...*

I realized after getting my second cochlear implant these lines are truer now than ever before!

Without a doubt, the Lord writes the best stories!

And the journey continues...

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 41

LOOK: Read Proverbs 1:20-33. Record below the verse you sense the Lord wants you to focus on.

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?

JOURNEY TO HEAR

“Results Not Typical.” This phrase is usually found in the fine print at the bottom of weight loss ads. But I believe it’s also appropriate to mention here.

When I was first considering getting cochlear implants I was told by my doctor if I regained voice recognition I could expect to regain anywhere from 20-80% after a year of diligent rehabilitation. My right ear after six months and my left ear after six weeks, already being at 95%, is astounding everyone!

The prayers of righteous people are powerful and effective! And so many people have prayed!

I was prepared to let God write my story however He best saw fit, even if that included a worst case scenario: vertigo, nausea, meningitis... Instead, I’ve been amazed every step of the way!

As it says in Luke 12:48 “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.” I have been given a gift to carefully steward. How will I use my new hearing? Will I employ this gift in ways that draw me closer to the Lord? Or be pulled away, as listening to other things drown out His voice?

My results may not be typical for people getting cochlear implants, but it’s also important to point out, I am still handicapped. Yes, the technology making it possible for me to hear is incredible! However, this still barely approximates the majesty and breadth of a real ear’s functions in limited ways.

Do you realize what a marvel, what an utter miracle your ears are? If you can hear, you too are blessed and have received an incredible gift to steward. What will you do with this powerful ability? Will you utilize this gift to draw closer to the One who so wonderfully hand fashioned you? Or not?

I use to wonder how the wisest man on earth could end his days so poorly, at a distance from God. Then one day while doing Bible study I looked at Solomon’s request in Hebrew.

When God gives Solomon the ultimate opportunity, “Ask for whatever you want,” Solomon requests an understanding heart (8085) and this greatly pleased the Lord. Then in 1 Kings 3:11 God tells him he will give him a wise (2450) and understanding (995) heart. Now you don’t have to know Hebrew to

realize there are two different words represented here (note the different numbers referencing them!)

8085 *shama* literally means “to hear” intelligently (often with implication of attention, obedience)

2450 *chakam* literally means wise (intelligent, skillful or artful)

995 *biyn* - to separate mentally or distinguish (understand)

Solomon is asking God to give him a heart that hears (listens to and obeys Him); instead God gives him the wisdom he wants.

When I want to hear from God is it because I want to make right choices so I can succeed? Or do I want to hear God simply because of who He is? God never forces Himself on us! He gave Solomon what he really wanted: the ability to rule well. But God isn't going to give you a heart that makes you hear him, that makes you obey Him. That's a relational choice He leaves up to you!

Whenever I coach people through their StrengthsFinder results one of the first things I want them to understand is the assessment is misnamed. It really should be called TalentFinders because what it does is help you identify the talents the Lord has uniquely given you.

Talent is about potential. You need to add knowledge, skills and experience before a talent becomes a strength. Not surprisingly some talents are more developed than others. In fact, sometimes talents are so underdeveloped people struggle to recognize they have them!

Hearing is similar. The ability to hear is a gift from the Lord. A gift with great potential! But it needs to be developed to be used at a level where it is beneficial and life giving.

Time spent listening to Jesus, growing in His grace, getting to know Him is the best use of our hearing and the best protection for our hearts from getting sidetracked and ending life poorly like Solomon!

The Father longs for this time! He's done everything He can to make it possible! He's even made Himself available 24/7!

God has created you with an incredible ability to hear, both Him and others.

How's your hearing?

LEARNING TO LISTEN: DAY 42

LOOK: Read Revelation 3:14-22. Write below one verse standing out to you.

LISTEN: What thoughts come to mind as you consider this verse?

LIVE IT OUT: What can you learn from this so you can grow in learning to listen to God and to other people?

What do you sense the Lord wants you to do in response to this?



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