



September Connection Guide

I'm Listening

CROSSWORDS OVERVIEW

This ministry year we want to emphasize these important “CrossWords” in our vocabulary, letting the language and ideas of scripture shape our relationship with God and with others.

We
are
here

Month	Relational Words	Worship Words	Related Psalm
September	I’m listening	Illumination	Psalm 119: 9-11
October	Bless you	Blessing	Psalm 103
November	Thank you	Thanksgiving	Psalm 136
December	Advent		
January	Help	Supplication	Psalm 86
February	I’m Sorry	Confession	Psalm 51
March	Why	Lament	Psalm 13
April	I love you	Praise	Psalm 95
May	What can I do?	Service	Psalm 116

WHAT’S IN THIS GUIDE

In each monthly guide you will find resources that can be used in many ways: personal reflection, small group discussion, or family devotions.

There are four main sections:

- CrossWords in Scripture – Read and respond to biblical texts related to the word of the month
- CrossWords in Our Tradition – Learn more about our Church’s related teaching
- CrossWords in Community – Engage and discuss with a group using prompts and questions
- CrossWords in Action – Put the word into practice with action prompts and adventures for all ages

THIS MONTH – I’M LISTENING

Don Postma, the author of a wonderful devotional book entitled *Space for God*, says, “The Word became flesh and we turned him back into words.” I think what he is recognizing is that we are surrounded by words and noise. We are bombarded with stimuli coming from all sorts of places; even from within ourselves. If this is how it is, then we will have to be intentional about finding space for quiet; for it is in the quiet that God speaks, not in the noise and activity (I Kings 19: 11-12)

In our inmost being, we know this to be true. I once asked high school students what the biggest threat to their faith is. Their reply was *entertainment*. I was very impressed. The teens were keenly aware that they – like many of us – are pulled in many directions *to distraction*. We are easily distracted from that which is most important. Our teens recognized that there may be things that are important and valuable but may not be *vital* for God’s children.

Check yourself today. Can you ride in the car for a while without the radio on? Can you go for a walk without being plugged into some source of noise? Can you wait in a line without taking out your cellphone? What would it take to be still and silent; not necessarily praying to God, but having a time or season of prayer of *listening* to God?

Listening requires peace, quiet, waiting, and patient perseverance. These things are so hard today! God is the One thing in life today who comes at us *slowly*. God’s coming is less rush hour and more hush hour.

~Pastor Marc

CROSSWORDS IN SCRIPTURE

BIBLE READINGS FOR THE MONTH OF SEPTEMBER AND YOUR RESPONSE

Sept	Text	Your one sentence takeaway
1	I Samuel 3:1-10	
2	Proverbs 2:1-5	
3	Psalms 46:8-11	
4	John 16:12-16	
5	Mark 4:1-20	
6	Revelation 3:19,20	
7	Ephesians 1:15-19	
8	Exodus 3:1-6	
9	Psalms 119:9-16	
10	Job 37:1-5	
11	Isaiah 44:1-5	
12	Isaiah 55:1-3	
13	Psalms 85	
14	Psalms 139:1-18	
15	John 14:25-27	
16	Psalms 25	
17	Ephesians 3:14-21	
18	Romans 8:38, 39	
19	Jeremiah 29:11-13	
20	Hebrews 3:1-15 and 4:14-16	
21	Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29	
22	Jeremiah 33:2-3	
23	Luke 10:38-42	
24	Ecclesiastes 5:1-7	
25	James 1:22-25	
26	Proverbs 3:1-12	
27	Matthew 17:1-5	
28	John 10:1-18	
29	Luke 8:16-18	
30	Deuteronomy 6:4-9	

CROSSWORDS IN OUR TRADITION

BELGIC CONFESSION, ARTICLE 2: THE MEANS BY WHICH WE KNOW GOD

We know God by two means:

First, by the creation, preservation, and government
of the universe,
since that universe is before our eyes
like a beautiful book

in which all creatures,
great and small,
are as letters
to make us ponder
the invisible things of God:

God's eternal power and divinity,
as the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20

All these things are enough to convict humans
and to leave them without excuse.

Second, God makes himself known to us more clearly
by his holy and divine Word,
as much as we need in this life,

for God's glory
and for our salvation.

OUR WORLD BELONGS TO GOD – PARAGRAPH 31

God gives this world
many ways to know him.
The creation shows his power and majesty.
He speaks through prophets, poets, and apostles,
and, most eloquently, through the Son.
The Spirit, active from the beginning,
moved human beings to write the Word of God
and opens our hearts to God's voice.



- *When have you seen God most powerfully in nature? What was that experience like? Where you able to share it with others?*
- *In what ways has scripture spoken to you?*

CROSSWORDS IN COMMUNITY

VIDEOS, TEXTS, POEMS, PRAYERS, SONGS, AND DISCUSSION PROMPTS FOR GROUP ENGAGEMENT

LISTENING TO GOD'S WORD

FOREWORD TO SEEKING GOD'S FACE BY EUGENE PETERSON

"All prayer is language - language in conversation, conversation between God and us. The most frequent distortion of prayer takes place when we fail to listen to God's word to us. We do all the talking, demanding that God do all the listening.

Scripture provides the major way in which God speaks to us. Scripture is a huge story with many voices, but the primary voice is God's voice. God has the first word. If we are going to get the story straight, it is important that we let God have the first word, and really listen; I mean really listen. Jesus' story of the soils is a story about prayer. 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear.'

So if listening is required, silence is indispensable.

'But God doesn't answer. Why don't I get any answer?' It is the most frequent complaint regarding prayer. The obvious response is 'Are you listening? Have you spent as much time listening as you have speaking?'

Scripture is not basically a book of information in which we learn about 'the furniture of heaven and the temperature of hell.' It is not for the most part a history book in which we learn all about the cultures of the ancient East. And it certainly is not a science text in which we are instructed in the Second Law of Thermodynamics. It is a conversation between God and God's people—us. God creating us and God saving us, while we are given generous time to speak our belief and doubt, our praise and pain—whatever—and while we take our place in this marvelous story that comes together in the cross and resurrection of Jesus."

- *Have you thought about prayer as a conversation? Why is it easy to prioritize our speech and requests when talking to God?*
- *How might we increase our capacity to listen to God?*
- *In what ways might we expect the wrong things of the Bible?*
- *In what ways have you experienced God speak through his Word?*



TOWARD TRANSFORMATION BY PETER CHOI, CALVIN INSTITUTE OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

"If in listening to God we've merely been looking for more information, we've been missing the whole point. It's not about what you know and how much you know. It's about who you know. It's not merely about information but more about transformation. Listening to God and for God is about having our lives changed by his presence.

When was the last time you set aside an entire evening and said to God, 'I'm listening?' Is it because we don't trust God to speak to us? Is it because we're afraid of what we might hear?

When we begin listening to God, the Bible teaches us He will always move us beyond knowledge toward transformation. He knows who we are, he knows how we live, He knows where we get stuck, and yet He wants to speak to us. My prayer for you and challenge to you is to tell God this week, really tell Him, 'I'm listening,' and then sit back, quiet your heart and your mouth, and do just that. Listen to Him."

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE VIDEO SERIES BY TIM MACKIE AND JON COLLINS

Link - bibleproject.com/explore/how-to-read-the-bible/

While the Bible is one unified story, it cannot all be read in the same way. The How to Read the Bible series walks through each literary style found in the Bible, and how each uniquely contributes to the overall whole.

SLOWING DOWN TO LISTEN

THE DIN UNDOES US, PRAYER BY WALTER BRUEGGEMANN

“Our lives are occupied territory...
occupied by a cacophony of voices,
and the din undoes us.
In the daytime we have no time to listen,
beset as we are by the anxiety and goals
and assignments and work,
and in the night the voices are so confusing
we can hardly sort out what could possibly be your voice
from the voice of our mothers and our fathers
and our best friends and our pet projects,
because they all sound so much like you.

We are people over whom that word shema has been written.
We are listeners, but we do not listen well.
So we bid you, by the time the sun goes down today or by the time the sun comes up tomorrow,
by night or by day,
that you will speak in ways that we can hear
out beyond ourselves.

It is your speech to us that carries us where we have never been,
and it is your speech to us that is our only hope.
So give us ears. Amen.”

from the book Awed to Heaven, Rooted in Earth

- *In what ways is listening to God difficult?*
- *What strategies might we use to overcome distractions in our lives?*
- *What might be the benefits of taking time to listen to God’s voice?*



ADDING TO THE NOISE – SWITCHFOOT

[Link -youtu.be/U9eiHUPbtJE](https://youtu.be/U9eiHUPbtJE)

One, two
What's it gonna take to slow us down
To let the silence spin us around?
What's it gonna take to drop this town?
We've been spinning at the speed of sound

Stepping out of those convenience stores
What could we want but more, more, more?
Form the third world to the corporate core
We are the symphony of modern humanity, yeah

If we're adding to the noise
Turn off this song
If we're adding to the noise
Turn off your stereo, radio, video...

I don't know what they're gonna think of next
Genetic engineers of the most high tech
A couple new ways to fall into debt
I'm a nervous wreck, but I'll bet that that T.V. set

Tells us what we've wanted to hear
But none of these sound bites are coming in clear
From the third world to the corporate ear
We are the symphony of modern humanity, yeah

If we're adding to the noise
Turn off this song
If we're adding to the noise
Turn off your stereo, radio...

- *How does this song compare to the prayer of Walter Bruggemann?*
- *In what ways is listening to God difficult?*
- *What strategies might we use to overcome distractions in our lives?*



GODSPEED ([Link - www.livegodspeed.org](http://www.livegodspeed.org)),

“No one in America gets listened to very much” – Eugene Peterson

Godspeed is a short film featuring Matt Canlis, an American pastor who learned about the power of slowing down, listening to each other, and to God. This is a free, easy to stream, 36-minute film and is great for groups to watch and discuss.

Godspeed discussion questions ([link - shorturl.at/bwyPY](http://shorturl.at/bwyPY))



LISTENING TO OTHERS

FIVE WAYS TO LISTEN BETTER – TED Talk by Julian Treasure – 7:50

[Link -youtu.be/cSohjYQI2A](https://youtu.be/cSohjYQI2A)

- *In what ways does our reduced ability to listen to others parallel our capacity to listen to God?*
- *How might we improve our capacity to listen to others?*



THE ART OF LISTENING – SERMON EXCERPT BY REV. BART VELTHUIZEN

[Link - www.crcna.org/resources/church-resources/reading-sermons/art-listening](http://www.crcna.org/resources/church-resources/reading-sermons/art-listening)

Text: James 1:19-27

How do we really listen?

- 1. Listen with your eyes and your posture.**
- 2. Be patient.**
- 3. Give feedback.**
- 4. Watch for non-verbal communication.**
- 5. Do not redirect the attention to yourself.**

How does one listen? We might think it is the easiest thing to do. But it is not easy. Really listening is difficult; it takes intentionality; it takes self-discipline and self-restraint. Here are some suggestions on how to really listen:

1. Listen with your eyes and your posture. Responding with an "Oh yeah?" with your eyes focused on a television screen while a spouse or a child is expressing something that is meaningful is NOT listening. Responding with a "ahh hah" with your eyes riveted on your laptop while a parent or friend is saying something important is not listening. With your posture tune out all other things and tune in the one talking. Connect your eyes with the person speaking. Listen with your eyes and your posture.

2. Be patient. Do not be quick to respond. Our focus verse, James 1:19, says, "Be quick to listen, slow to speak." Curb any desire to interrupt. Wait until the person is finished speaking. I know, it is hard not to interrupt when we are so sure we are right and the other is wrong. We may be tempted to finish the speaker's thoughts. Yet continual interrupting will hurt your relationships.

Be patient. This also means do not be quick to give advice. If the person is expressing some frustration and problems, before you offer advice, first show to the person you want to simply understand her or his situation and feelings. With patience you show you are trying to empathize.

3. Give feedback. Sometimes this is called "active listening". Ask the person questions about what he or she just said. Possible questions are:

- "Am I correct in sensing some resentment about...?"
- "What did you mean by..."
- "I understand you to be saying (...such & such). Is that correct?"

Giving feedback like this communicates to the other person that you really want to understand, that you really care about what that person is saying. Giving feedback also helps to avoid misunderstanding which can lead to conflict.

4. Watch for non-verbal communication. Some estimate that 75% of all communication is non-verbal. Watch for clues as to what the speaker is communicating:

- Is the speaker's posture rigid or relaxed?
- Does the speaker maintain eye contact?
- Does voice tone match what is being said?

5. Do not redirect the attention to yourself. Refrain from topping the speaker's story with something like, "Oh, that reminds me of something that happened to me..." or "Oh, that's nothing; let me tell you about...." Keep your priority on understanding what the speaker wants to communicate.

- *What aspects of good listening are the most difficult for you?*
- *How can we set ourselves up for listening success? What environments are best? In what ways might we manage distractions?*
- *How might listening contribute to our relational, spiritual, and intellectual growth?*



Prayer: Lord Jesus, we thank you for taking our old, egotistic, sinful nature to the cross. Holy Spirit, help us to become better listeners. Help us to overcome our tendency to think more highly of ourselves than we ought and to desire to understand others. May we show our love through listening well. Strengthen our important relationships. Amen.

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Lost Art of Listening: How Learning to Listen Can Improve Relationships, by Michael P. Nichols [Link](#)
- Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future Paperback, by Margaret J. Wheatley [Link](#)
- Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life: Life-Changing Tools for Healthy Relationships, by Marshall B. Rosenberg [Link](#)
- You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation, by Deborah Tannen [Link](#)
- If I Understood You, Would I Have This Look on My Face?: My Adventures in the Art and Science of Relating and Communicating, by Alan Alda [Link](#)

CROSSWORDS IN ACTION

PUTTING THE WORD INTO PRACTICE

SCRIPTURE

↑ Psalm 46:10 | He says, “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”

↔ James 1:19 | My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry

ADVENTURE

Visit the Hudsonville Nature Center (2700 New Holland St. Hudsonville) or another natural area and walk down a trail. As you walk, listen carefully to what you hear. Find a spot to pause and remain silent for a few minutes. On the opposite page draw the things that you hear.

PRAYER – KAREN RIEMERSMA

Lord, please help me to listen to those around me. Help me to be there when someone needs a shoulder to cry on or someone to rejoice with. Help me to remember to be quiet and use my ears and my heart. Please help me each day to be still and calm and hear what you are telling me. Thank you for listening to me and for being always faithful.

RESPONSE

Can you think of someone in your life who may need a listening ear? Visit, call, or video chat with someone today and listen carefully to what they are going through and what they may be feeling. Ask “listening questions” like, “What is that like for you” or “Can you tell me more about...”

After your visit or call, pray for that person and the concerns that are on their heart.

We hear God speak in many ways...

- Through scripture
- Through God’s creation
- Through other people
- Through the Spirit

What do you hear? Listen for each type of thing and draw what you hear:

Something in nature:

Another person:

Yourself:

To say that Jesus is the Word of God
is to say in part that he is God's vocabulary for the world.

So he serves, he suffers, he loves enemies
he prays for persecutors, he challenges,
and he puts compassion into action:
that's God's language for the world -
a language that is quite foreign from our own.

Without the help of the Spirit,
it is a language hard to hear
and harder still to listen to....

I must confess that when I read scripture
I often forget
that he reserves his strongest critique
for those of us who are "religious",
we who, for whatever reason,
have forgotten our mother tongue.

When you listen for God's vocabulary
you won't hear it in safe places
(God has never been interested in safety)
but you will find it on the edges
where the risk, vulnerability and danger is.
These are the places that are ripe for God's language
and that's when God's vocabulary begins to take on our flesh.
I have come to see that if we wish to listen
and learn God's language of Jesus,
a good way to start is to try and put him into practice.