



To Listen

“Have you ever been in the fields on a spring day, and heard nothing at all but your own voice and the voices of your companions, and then, perhaps, suddenly you have become silent, and you find a concert going on of which you had not heard a note? At first you hear the voices of the birds; then, by degrees, you perceive high voices, low voices, and middle voices, small notes and great notes, and you begin to wish you knew who sang each of the songs you can distinguish.”¹

Charlotte Mason — *Ourselves*

How often it is that we go through life missing the simple pleasures. Our focus is on ourselves; our thoughts, our plans and our concerns—failing to hear the joy around us. Here, Charlotte Mason reminds us to be fully present and to listen.

Miss Mason’s idyllic picture of being “in the fields on a spring day” is far from the reality of most 21st century lives. Although being in the fields on a spring day, or most days for that matter, would do us all good. Yet, I believe there is a deeper, more universal truth in her words.

Miss Mason writes about suddenly becoming silent in order to notice the concert going on around us. The concert to which she refers has a musical quality and in it she describes the voices of the birds— “high voices, low voices, and middle voices, small notes and great notes...” Too often we are so focused on our own internal voice that we fail to notice the variety and beauty of the sounds beyond ourselves. In nature, there are the sounds of the birds, the insects, and the leaves rustling in the trees—a refreshing melody indeed; and yet, how often do we miss the concert of the children in our midst?

Are the sounds of the children really noticed like Miss Mason is asking us to notice the voices of the birds? Do we quiet our own voice long enough in order to “suddenly become silent” and notice? What are the sounds of our children’s voices? Who has the high voices, the low voices, the middle voices? Who speaks the small notes and the great notes?

“Do you know the footfall of everybody in the house? ... Do you listen to people’s voices, and can you tell by the intonation whether the people are sad or glad, pleased or displeased?”²

Each one of us longs to know and to be known. As parents and educators our job is not just to hear our children, but to listen. Who are they? What are they really trying to say? What makes them distinct in this world? What sounds are uniquely theirs? What utterances will we miss when our home or classroom is empty?

“There is a great deal of joy, again, to be had out of listening—joy which many people miss...”³

We all too important adults have a knack for missing the obvious. We tend to neglect the simple joy of listening. Every day is an opportunity to “suddenly become silent” and notice. There is a concert going on around us. Will we listen?

¹⁻³ Mason, Charlotte, *Ourselves* (Vol. 4), pg. 29-30

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