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## 1

### And a Happy New Ear

Julia, my youngest, and Aidan, our middle child, had a fight. She was singing a rather raucous rendition of “We Wish You a Merry Christmas.” Aidan, unaware of the flurry that would soon befall him, intertwined his boy choir voice with hers and finished “and a happy New Year.”

Julia cocked her head, her blonde hair jutting to one side. “Aidan, you are singing that wrong.”

“No, I’m not, Julia.” “Yes, you are.”

“No, I’m not,” he seconded, this time in a higher pitch—like a clearly rendered high C.

“Yes, you are,” she replied plainly. “It’s supposed to be ‘and a Happy New *Ear*.’ You are wrong.”

At this point I turned from the spectacle and laughed. When I regained my momlike composure, as any good authority figure should, I told Julia, “Actually, Julia, Aidan *is* right. It is Happy New *Year*, not *Ear*.”

“No, it’s not, Mommy. You are wrong.”

Perhaps I am. We all need Merry Christmases. And many of us need Happy New Ears. I realized that truth when I read about a man and his family during a particular boom to a small Washington state village in the late 1800s. Gold-hungry folks crowded into that tiny community, creating great amounts of construction, mayhem, laughter, vitality, and even a printing press.

When the Canadian government required these “settlers” to get a license in Canada to hunt the elusive metal, everyone except the initial Washington settlers fled, leaving behind shells of homes, useless acres full of mud, and fallen trees.

When the last schooner pulled away, the family’s patriarch looked up to the sky because he heard something. It was the lilting song of the ducks. He had forgotten them. All the noise had blotted their song from him during the summertime boom. For a day he simply sat and listened to the ducks.

I need to listen to the ducks. I need to listen more to everything—the “Mommy pleases,” the nuances of sadness in my pre-teen daughter, the friendly voice of my son in his simple joy over creating a model, the cat’s purr, a friend’s tired voice, my husband’s perplexing over theological questions. These nuances need to be mined rather than ignored.

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But to listen well we have to make a choice. To have a new ear, we have to blot out other distractions that pepper us all day long. The seemingly important things—the things that assail from left and right, from above and beneath—are like tiny insidious monsters, pulling us in directions we never intended to go. They have loud voices, disguised in ringing telephones, ding-donging doorbells, blaring televisions, static-loving radios.

There are days I just want to throw my tired hands to the sky and shout, “Enough!” in some sort of poetic declaration to the noise gods that I will not listen. It’s not really their fault. I have to learn to turn things off, to not clutter my life with so much noise. I can’t hear the important things if the unimportant clamor minute by minute for my attention. “This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: ‘In repentance and rest is your salvation, and quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it’” (Isaiah 30:15).

If I disdain repentance, rest, quietness, and trust, I will not hear what God wants me to hear. I will be tossed here and there by noise, neglecting the cries of my children or stifling the cry of my heart to be quiet before Jesus.

Many times the noise I refuse to quiet is my own, coming from deep inside me. Its voice utters words like “should,” “you’d better,” or “so you can cross that off your list.” When I listen to these voices, I am more apt to snap at my children’s innocent needs or miss a friend’s nonverbal plea for a listening ear.

The only remedy for a loud life and an ear bent away from listening to the important is to cry out to God. “Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven” (Psalm 107:28-30).

Only the Lord who stills the seas can bend my ear toward him and others. For him to perform that auditory surgery, I need to cry out to him. With that in mind, I will sing *and a Happy New Ear* with glee.

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*Dear Jesus, give me new ears. Mine are full of noise right now, and I can't seem to have any auditory peace. Help me to welcome stillness. Lead me, as the psalmist declared, beside quiet waters. Keep me attuned to the cries of this world—the deeper needs that go unmet because everyone is busy listening to other noise. I want to be your ears today—to my children, my spouse, and your world.*

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