**Listening as Generosity**

How many of us think about generosity in the context of financial giving? Acts of service? Do we measure ourselves either by how much we *give* or how much we *do*?

What if we measured our generosity today not by how much we gave or how much we did, but by how much we *listened*?

This question was triggered by a TED Radio Hour episode a while back entitled [“The Act of Listening”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B2o3J7Xu5Ts) which stated that “listening is an act of generosity and a source of discovery.” The quote stuck with me, as it seemed to be a rather peculiar leap. Listening is generous? Isn’t listening just, well, listening?

The more I explored the idea, the more it got under my skin. One, because I realized that I don’t actually listen as much as I would like to think I do. Two, because it revealed that my frame of reference for generosity was far too narrow.

In many ways, I believe listening is the foundation of generosity. It’s what makes generosity truly valuable to the receiver. And it’s something I want to be better at.

On the most basic level, it takes listening to understand and respond to what is truly needed. Listening is what keeps us from donating items to organizations that, despite the giver’s best intentions, aren’t meeting an actual need and can’t be used.

It also takes listening to connect in a meaningful way, which I believe differentiates generosity from habitual giving, whether for tax purposes, tithing or because we just feel like we should. This form of giving – in which the giver and receiver share a meaningful connection – is where I believe generosity shines brightest. Connection gives both sides the opportunity to be generous. One shares an invitation into a larger story as the other shares time, resources, expertise to help those stories continue to unfold. Both are givers; both are receivers. But it starts with *listening*.

*Let us be quick to listen, slow to speak… and more meaningful in our generosity.*