

**Listen! Hearing That Still, Small Voice and Finding Your Own  
Part 6: Finding Your Inner Voice(s)**

by Rev. Dr. Eric Elnes

October 13, 2019

Scripture: Romans 12:1-2

**Note:** Due to the special format of the service on October 13, 2019, the sermon below is not a duplication of what happened in worship. The following sermon is an abridged version of one delivered by Rev Dr. Elnes on October 28, 2012.

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1–2)*

**I. Our Very Own Team of Rivals**

In his Letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul advised his readers, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.” This notion describes well the pressures all of us feel at times to conform to the expectations of others, and the havoc this wreaks on our sense of self.

Do you ever feel inundated by the cacophony of “the world,” wanting to turn off all the expectations so that you can listen more carefully to your inner voice? Many of us have employers, in-laws, family members, or peers whose voices overwhelm us. What if you could simply push a button and make all their expectations go away so you could simply be yourself?

I don't know about you, but when I stop listening to these voices and refuse to “be conformed by the world” to use Paul's language, life doesn't necessarily get a lot easier. What I find instead is that all those competing voices were never "out there" like I thought. They're *in here*—inside me. What most often keeps me from being me is, well, *me!*

Baylor University neuroscientist, David Eagleton, observes that our brains are wired to be what he calls a "team of rivals." Says Eagleton, “Intuitively, it feels like there's a ‘you.’ So when somebody meets [someone they know] they feel like: ‘Oh, yeah, that's one person.’ But in fact, it turns out what we have under the hood are lots of neural populations, lots of neural networks that are all battling it out to control your behavior.”

Eagleton continues, “it's exactly a parliament, in the sense that these different political parties might disagree with one another ... They're like a team of rivals in that they all feel they know the best way to steer the nation, and yet they have different ways of going about it, just like different political parties do.”

This internal “team of rivals” means that it’s getting harder to hear what our hearts are saying because of all that noise. There are all kinds of voices waiting for us, each with its own expectations and advice! No, if we are to follow the direction of our truest self, we can’t just listen to our hearts. We’ll need to go deeper, listening to the heart within our heart.

## II. Meet the Committee

That quotation from Paul doesn’t end with, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.” The last part is “*so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.*” Apparently, when we turn down the volume of the external voices in order to hear more clearly the internal ones, we may hear God’s voice in the mix.

Recently, I attended the ninetieth birthday party of a church member. We had a grand old time celebrating her long life with the help of about a hundred and twenty friends, a magician, and of course, lots of cake and ice cream. Having spent the last three months working hard to lose twenty pounds—and having another twenty to go before I’m through—I steeled myself against the temptation to indulge in either the cake or the ice cream. I did not “conform myself to the world” that kept asking me—even *expecting* me—to take a piece.

Yet, when I later stopped for a cup of coffee at Panera, I couldn’t help but notice a large chocolate chip cookie staring at me from behind the counter. I may have been successful at not being “conformed to the world” when offered cake at the elder’s party, but now with just myself and my “heart” to listen to, I found that there wasn’t just one Eric staring at the cookie. There were many. Here are just a few of the Erics I heard from:

Eric #1 (The Parent): “You know better. Just pay for your coffee and get out of here before you succumb to temptation!”

Eric #2 (The Free-Child): “COOKIE? COOOOKIE? ME COOKIE MONSTER! GIMME COOKIE!!”

Eric #3 (The Peer Group): “Hey, you’ve been doing such an admirable job with your weight lately. People are noticing. Don’t blow it now!”

Eric #4 (The Pragmatist): “That cookie’s 300 calories. A half hour on the treadmill would erase it from your waistline!”

Eric #5 (The Pessimist): “You know you’re going to eat that cookie. Why make it hard on yourself justifying your behavior. Just get it over with and buy the thing!”

Eric #6 (The Hero): “Are you really going to let something as paltry as a cookie tempt you off your diet? You’re *better* than that. Believe in yourself! Just grab your coffee and go!”

Eric #7 (The Adversary): “You are a worm – a despicable worm! Of course you’re going to eat the cookie. You’re too weak to control yourself. Besides, why would you want to repress your desire for something so tasty?”

Eric #8 (The Holy Spirit): “I wonder how Arianna [my daughter] is doing with her final exams down in Argentina? She sure sounded happy in her last email. It seems like she’s having all those experiences you hope for in a study-abroad program. Those memories will last a lifetime!”

Eric #9 (The True Self): “Cookie? What cookie? Oh, that. Nah, why would I want that? I already had four tacos, a slice of apple pie, and a Rice Krispies treat at the choir party last night!”

Although I acted on just one of these voices (#9, if you’re wondering), the point is that each of them were authentically *me*. Each voice is one that I’m used to hearing in my head ... constantly. They offer their opinion on any number of subjects, from purchasing cookies to purchasing homes; from considering food choices to choosing a president. Chances are, these voices are familiar to you, too. In fact, they correspond to some of the great archetypal voices identified by psychologists and mystics alike.

They could be called (in order of appearance): The Parent, The Free-Child, The Peer Group, The Pragmatist, The Pessimist, The Hero, The Adversary, The Holy Spirit or Comforter, and The True Self.

Did you notice the Holy Spirit in that list? The voice of the Spirit is there because it is really, genuinely a part of us—albeit a part that we have no real control over and whose desires and interests are often different than we expect.

### **III. The Path to God**

In the fourth century, St. Augustine observed that the path to knowing God and the path to knowing yourself is the same path. He knew this because he had done his own soul searching and regularly discovered the voice of the Divine within the many voices vying for his attention—which was as much of a surprise to him as anyone else.

At Panera, what I associate with the voice of Spirit came from completely out of the blue. While I was considering the cookie, I discovered that my thoughts had drifted to Arianna. Thinking of Arianna and how happy she was in Argentina broke the spell of my fixation on the cookie. The thoughts filled me with a feeling of joy and peace that was greater than the cookie could have supplied. With the spell broken, my True Self—that part of me that represents my will when it is completely free and not reacting to anything—decided that I didn’t need the cookie. In fact, it reminded me that I’d already gloried in a few (over-)indulgences the night before.

Of course, I can’t know for sure that it was the Holy Spirit talking to me when my thoughts went to Arianna. But what I do know is that the Holy Spirit speaks to us far more often in ways

that seem perfectly mundane, subtle, or organic to our thinking than in moments where we're thunderstruck. The Holy Spirit doesn't speak from the mountain-top nearly as often as She speaks from the parking lot, or the chair in the den, or at the Panera counter.

There's a reason why the voice of the Holy Spirit has been called The Comforter, even by Jesus. It's because, even when the Spirit is calling us into difficult or risky situations, she also gives us real knowledge that we'll be alright; that what we will gain by following will be far greater than the sacrifice we are asked to make; and that we're being guided on a path that brings us most fully alive in this world—a path that our Truest Self yearns for with heart and soul.

The beautiful truth is that once we admit that the evil we see and experience in this world is the result of our failure to follow God's voice rather than God's failure to speak, we start becoming the change we seek in the world. We can make an inward turn away from the voices of fear and self-loathing and toward the voice of the Spirit that whispers to the heart of our hearts. Without the fear and loathing drowning out the Spirit's voice, we hear more of the assurance it offers. We develop a yearning to follow that voice. And when we do, we become more fully alive in this world.

This week, why not try a little exercise to test what you've been learning? Find a question that's important to you and use the handout below to write responses from each of the nine archetypal voices represented there. The results may surprise you!

### **SOME VOICES WITHIN** **Based on a compilation by Rev. Bruce Van Blair**

**There are only nine here, but you no doubt have others:**

- 1) **THE PARENT (conscience)** Stern disciplinarian; you should be more compassionate and considerate of others. Jiminy Cricket - "Let your conscience be your guide." (Sorry, but I believe in God.)
- 2) **THE FREE-CHILD (creative, but not very responsible or realistic)**
- 3) **THE PEER GROUP (popularity)** Co-workers, friends, best friend, spouse, children, respected sibling.
- 4) **THE PRAGMATIST (security - survival - here and now)** Practical, worldly-success advisor.  
Logic - common sense - "As far as I can see . . ." (How far is that?)  
Boss - lawyer - financial planner - business associate

- 5) **THE PESSIMIST (shadow - life negator - destroyer)** Accuser - guilt producer  
You're no good - nothing works, or lasts - it isn't worth it
- 6) **THE HERO (idealist)** Who are your heroes?
- 7) **THE ACCUSER/SATAN (The Ventriloquist - The Liar - The Short-Cut Artist)**  
Satan can imitate the wording, but not the tone, of the Spirit's "voice" - that is, patience and affirmation and *comforts* would give away the false note in what Satan is doing.  
Satan cannot mimic the Holy Spirit very long - cannot be calm, quiet, with your deepest spiritual self-interest at heart, getting you in tune with God. If Satan pulls that off very well - he's working against himself.  
Best not to get too stuck or too fascinated thinking about Satan.  
Do not "fear" Satan - fear God! The fear Satan of is the beginning of all foolishness.  
Show a little disrespect.
- 8) **THE HOLY SPIRIT**  
God's appeal is deep and clean and "good" - hard maybe, but beautiful. It is calm - reassuring - no guilt or fear that is not "situation reasonable."  
"Who do you most want to please?"  
Who is your audience?
- 9) **THE TRUE SELF (identity of what you will become - "Higher Mind")** Soul - will  
You are born with more than you realize (wisdom - archetypes - identity - purpose). But you have to find it - call it forth.  
Education for techniques and information - Prayer/meditation for wisdom and truth.

Our object is to get the True Self (higher mind - will - soul) into the chairperson's seat - and keep it there. You cannot control the Holy Spirit, or decide when or what the Spirit will communicate. The Soul within will listen and respond - with much comment from the other voices at times. But if you put your True Self in charge, and get to know, appreciate and respect the other voices, and listen to them but not let them control or bully you, that is what you can do. The rest is up to the Spirit.

**Remember:** You cannot pray or "know God" above the level of your own self-awareness. To know thyself and to develop spiritually is the same path. You must spend some time alone, in reflection, on a regular basis, if you want to make friends with yourself. And if you do that, you will also encounter the One who made you - and Who knows who you really are, and what you are here for.