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The Tiptoe

Robbie Taggart

So often the prelude to the rhapsody is the ticking of a clock. Like a toddler waiting to be lifted into an earthly parent's arms, we yearn toward the everlasting arms of God. And sometimes we tire of looking up, hands outstretched, and content ourselves instead with the blocks and toys that surround us. But then the embrace comes and we are raised. And we remember what we were waiting for.

My theology stresses the reality of continued, continuing revelation: God speaks, not spake. It affirms that every person is worth communicating with, even if you're God. No—especially if you're God. But it is sometimes a real wrestle to know when he is speaking and what he wants. It takes attentiveness, and patience. Sometimes weeks pass without a whisper. "And he hath put a new song in my mouth," soliloquizes the Psalmist. Ah, the taste of that song. But two verses earlier, he wrote, "I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry" (Ps. 40:3, 1). The song only comes after the wait, after the cry. And it is always put or placed in my mouth. I cannot conjure it or command it. Every poet knows this. The mornings glisten once in a while. So much scent of sidewalk before the smell of honeysuckle. The music is a gift, and one can only stalk the Spirit and wait. How many hours does a prophet spend under a juniper tree or inside a cave before the gentle rustle of leaves and the still, small voice?

It's sort of like this: Was it last summer we were camping at the Henry Cowell Redwoods? When we pulled up to the forest, four-year-old Emerson said he knew we would see squirrels. But the squirrels in the camp proved very elusive, very timid. After a day of camping, I had seen

brief glimpses of a couple of squirrels and chipmunks off in the trees and bushes, but not a single furry animal made its way into our camp. I asked my young son if he had seen any squirrels. He told me no. So we went on a squirrel hunt. As we walked, I told him to listen very carefully, and if he heard a rustling, we would watch the bushes carefully. After a short distance, the bushes quaked a little. We stopped and strained our attention toward the spot. After watching for a while, we finally caught sight of a slight movement. But as we kept watching, we found only a small bird hopping around in the leaves. We went on. Emerson climbed a tree, and we went down a little trail. No squirrels. I prayed, "Heavenly Father, Emerson knew he would see a squirrel, and it's important to him. Can you help?" Just then I saw a squirrel at the foot of a camper in a nearby campsite. I tried to point it out to Emerson. He couldn't see it. We went closer, slowly. The squirrel ran into the bushes. "Did you see it?" I asked. "I think so. I saw the bushes move." But he wasn't content with that. We surrounded the little rodent and listened as he crashed through the bushes. Now, I have more experience stalking squirrels than my son does, and I've got a bit of a height advantage so I saw the squirrel a couple of times as it darted back and forth. But Emerson never caught a clear view. We walked on. "Well, thanks for trying," I said to God. I bet he laughed at that. "Trying?" Within a few feet, I saw another squirrel at the base of a tree. I tiptoed Emerson over and lifted him up. He saw it. He wanted to get closer, so he walked after it. It ran up the tree, chattering, and another squirrel joined it. Then it happened. Like a flood. Like an ocean wave. Like sunlight or like grace, God poured down what we had so cautiously been stalking. The squirrels ran around and up and down the tree, chasing each other. They ran two feet from our toes. One stopped on the tree, just above our heads and looked squarely at us. I almost thought he winked. He may have been an angel disguised as a squirrel, but my prayer had been answered. Emerson's faith had been answered. The wait had been rewarded. We saw. Our attentiveness had paid off. Sometimes it does.

A day or so later, we were out for a family walk through thick green woods. It was evening and the light was gray and mossy. It slid in sideways to illuminate the trail. We were walking through these curvy, moss-covered trees at twilight, and we saw an owl. First owl I've ever seen. It was hunched in the branches of a tree, and we stopped to tie a shoelace or something. And then it spread its enormous wings and lumbered through the air off to another perch. Grace unbidden.

Days go by, and months, and the reverie remains restrained. The mute muses shy by disguised as fellow pedestrians on the sidewalk we stroll. Life is just life. Mondays are mundane, and nothing extraordinary presents itself. And then the symphony awakens, stretching like a dance; the song is planted and shoots forth and ripens all at once. And we partake of the fruit of the tree of life.

This essay by Robbie Taggart received an honorable mention in the BYU Studies 2014 personal essay contest.