



THE PRAYER CLOSET

*Transforming Lives Through Intercessory
Prayer And Fasting*

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ISSUE 7

LISTENING TO GOD

As a believer, you have the remarkable privilege of talking to God. You can enter into His presence through prayer and pour your heart out to Him. You never have to wonder if God will listen. You do not have to wait for an appointment. Anywhere, anytime, under any circumstance, you can talk with God. As a believer, you have the opportunity to approach God and spend time with Him, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

At the same time, you need to realize that prayer is not just a one-way conversation. Prayer is not only talking to God, but also listening to God. It involves both talking and listening to God. As much as God wants to hear from you, He also wants you to hear His voice. God does want to hear from you. Yet, He also desires for you to listen to Him.

Listening to God is both a privilege and a responsibility for the child of God. You have the awesome privilege to be led by God. You have the amazing opportunity to hear from God. Yet, you are responsible to be still and listen to Him. You must discipline yourself to hear Him.

Listening to God is an important aspect of the believer's prayer life. God desires to guide the believer in his or her intercession. As you listen to God, He can grant you insights that will lead to powerful and effective praying. By being sensitive to God's leading, the believer can be led into a deeper, more powerful intercession for others.

This issue of *The Prayer Closet* will focus on listening to God. The material in this newsletter is designed to help you develop a greater sensitivity to God's leading in your life and your praying. It is my hope and prayer that you will begin developing a "hearing ear" through your study of this material. God is a God who speaks and guides. If you will humble yourself before Him and seek Him with your whole heart, He will grant you a greater sensitivity to Him and His leading. He will create within you a "hearing ear."

ISSUE 7 - HIGHLIGHTS

LISTENING TO GOD

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The Biblical Basis Of Listening To God

Why does a believer need to listen to God? Does the Bible teach that a believer should listen to God? The Word of God reveals some basic reason why a believer should listen to God. *A believer should listen to God because He is a God who communicates.* The Bible reveals that God is a God

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who speaks to His people. The Bible is filled with accounts of God speaking to His people. God spoke to Adam and Eve. He spoke frequently to Abraham, calling him, leading him, and giving him promises. He communicated with Moses at the burning bush, on top of Mt. Sinai, and at times when Moses needed guidance in leading the children of Israel. God gave Joshua military advice that helped the children of Israel conquer Canaan. He spoke to David about leading Israel and about his sins and his struggles. The Old Testament shows that God communicated with His people.

This activity of God did not stop in the Old Testament; He continued to speak in the New Testament. He spoke to and led His Son Jesus Christ as He carried out His mission and ministry. Through the Holy Spirit, He guided the early church to select leaders, to provide for all the members of the church, and to carry the good news of Jesus wherever they went. He spoke to Paul on the road to Damascus. He then guided Him as he traveled throughout the Roman Empire and preached the gospel. He spoke to the apostle Peter in a vision, calling on him to extend Christian fellowship in a Gentile home. He spoke to the exiled apostle John on a lonely island, revealing His purposes concerning the reign and rule of His Son.

All these things point to the fact that God communicates with His people. He loves to speak and reveal Himself to His people. He delights in revealing His will and purpose to His people. A believer should listen to God because God desires to communicate with him or her.

The Bible also reveals that believers should listen to God because they have been saved for the purpose of fellowship. God saves sinners in order to bring them into a personal relationship with Himself. God desires to have an intimate relationship with the believer. David cries out in **Psalm 4:3**, "But know that the LORD has set apart for Himself him who is godly; the LORD will hear when I call to Him." The godly man is set apart for fellowship with God. In the New Testament, the apostle John writes, "That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (**1 John 1:3**). Through the gospel, these believers had entered into fellowship with God.

God saves sinners in order to bring them into an intimate and personal relationship to Himself. The word "fellowship" refers to the sharing of lives. We share our life with Him. We give ourselves to Him. He changes us, speaks to us, guides us, comforts us, and teaches us. Fellowship then is a mutual sharing between God and the believer. We communicate with Him and He communicates with us. We talk and listen to Him. This is His purpose in saving us.

God has delivered us from sin and damnation so that we might know Him, "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (**John 17:3**). The word "know" means more than just factual knowledge. It also refers to a personal experience with God. It means that we experience His power, His voice, and His guidance. A believer should listen to God because it is a fundamental part of his or her fellowship with God.

The Bible reveals that listening to God is a reality for the believer because of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit enters and lives inside of the believer, "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?" (**1 Corinthians 6:19**). Once a person turns his or her life over to the Lord Jesus Christ, it is no longer business as usual. Life can no longer consist only of that which can be seen or smelled or figured by human logic. The Holy Spirit enters the believer and his or her life moves from the natural into the supernatural.

A two-way conversation between the believer and God would certainly be a supernatural encounter. Listening to God is a supernatural event. Yet, what is so surprising about this? This is exactly what happens when the Holy Spirit takes us residence in a believer. He enables the believer to cry out to God, "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father'" (**Galatians 4:6**). To talk with God is a supernatural event. It requires the Holy Spirit. At the same time, the Holy Spirit enables the believer to listen to God. He empowers the believer to follow God's leading. He grants insights and impressions to the believer that is in accordance with the Father's will. This is a supernatural event. It requires the Holy Spirit. He

makes talking and listening to God a reality in the life of the believer.

A believer should listen to God because the Father desires to guide him or her. For the child of God, it is the sincere desire of his or her heart to follow God, to do His will. Yet, as much as the believer desires to follow God, God desires even more to guide the believer. Your Father longs to guide you in the decisions and circumstances of your life. Listen to what the Word of God says about your Father's guidance:

Psalm 48:14: "For this is our God, our God is forever and ever; He will be our guide even to death."

Psalm 25:9: "The humble He guides in justice, and the humble He teaches His way."

Psalm 73:24: "You will guide me with Your counsel and afterward receive me to glory."

Psalm 37:23: "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in His way."

Psalm 1:6: "For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish."

Psalm 32:8: "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye."

Proverbs 3:5-6: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your path."

Psalm 31:3: "For You are my rock and my fortress; therefore, for Your name's sake, lead me and guide me."

These verses of Scripture, along with numerous others, point to the fact that Your Father desires to guide you throughout your life. Because your Father desires to guide you, it is important to listen to Him. It is vital to develop discernment or a "hearing ear". You can receive His guidance by listening to Him.

A believer should listen to God because it is an integral part of his or her relationship to Jesus Christ. In **John 10:27**, Jesus Christ declares, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." Jesus describes His relationship to believers as that of a shepherd to sheep. Just as sheep listen to the voice of the shepherd, so believers listen to Jesus Christ. He clearly states that "the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own

sheep by name and leads them out" (**John 10:3**). He then adds, "the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice" (**John 10:4**). The language that Jesus uses here is full of intimacy. The believer has a personal relationship to Jesus, in which He calls, speaks to, and guides the believer.

It is true that Jesus calls a person to salvation. But, Jesus' call does not end at salvation. He continues to speak to the believer. In **John 10:27**, the verb "hear" is in present tense. This is describing a continual action. The sheep continue to hear the voice of the Shepherd. In other words, the believer continues to listen to Jesus. The believer experiences an intimate relationship with Jesus. This intimate relationship involves Jesus speaking to and guiding the believer throughout his or her life.

This is exactly the reason that the psalmist could write, "The LORD is **my** shepherd; I shall not want. He makes **me** to lie down in green pastures; He leads **me** beside the still waters" (**Psalm 23:1-2**, emphasis mine). Notice how the psalmist uses the words "I", "me", and "my". This speaks of an intimate relationship in which the Lord speaks to and guides David. The Lord spoke to and guided David personally and individually. This is why Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (**John 10:27**). Jesus speaks to and guides the believer individually and personally. The believer's relationship to Jesus calls for the believer to be still and listen to God.

The Bible reveals that God is a speaking God who desires to teach, comfort, and guide His people. He is a God who longs to make His voice known (**Psalm 29**). He yearns to speak to the believer. It is therefore responsibility of the believer to be still and listen to Him.

God does speak to us personally about our families, our businesses, our finances, our hurts, our frustrations, and our fears. God doesn't speak to just an elite few. We are all in the same category when it comes to His speaking and our listening. He treats all His children on an equal basis.

Dr. Charles Stanley

How Does God Speak To The Believer?

In order to listen to God, you need to know the ways in which God speaks. God speaks to the believer in a variety of ways. It must be made clear that one cannot limit the ways in which a sovereign God will work. The Word of God reveals that God will do what He pleases, "But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases" (**Psalm 115:3**). The Bible also says, "Whatever the LORD pleases He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deep places" (**Psalm 135:6**). God can speak to a person in any way that He chooses. He can guide a person by whatever means that He desires. We should not and cannot limit God in this matter.

The first and primary way that God speaks to the believer is through the Word of God. God has given us the written Word in order to teach us and guide us. As a believer hears, reads, memorizes, studies, and meditates on the Word of God, the Holy Spirit teaches and guides the believer.

The Bible is the revealed will of God. This means that God has declared plainly and openly what He desires. In the Bible, God reveals what He wants us to believe. He also shows us how He wants us to behave. The Holy Spirit grants the believer understanding in these things and then enables the believer to apply these things to his or her life.

God's work in your life will be done primarily through His Word. He saves you when you hear the Word of God and believe (**Romans 10:17**). He guides you in His will through His Word (**Psalm 119:105**). He enables you to overcome temptation through His Word (**Psalm 119:9, 11**). The Word of God is crucial to your growth and guidance as a Christian. In fact, the Holy Spirit through the Word of God brings about your spiritual maturity. The Bible is the Holy Spirit's tool in leading you to spiritual maturity. The apostle Paul teaches this by writing, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (**2 Timothy 3:16-17**).

God will speak to you primarily through His Word. Through His Word, He will convict you of your sin. He will teach you about Himself and His will. He will give you assurance and comfort. He will teach you how to pray and give you insights on how to pray. He will instruct you on how to live for Him. He will lead you to a verse or passage of Scripture concerning a decision or circumstance. The Word of God is the final guide for what you believe and how you behave. It is the sure and reliable source for guidance and insight to the believer.

Another way that God speaks to the believer is through the direct leadings of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit who lives inside of you can grant you insights for your decisions, your ministry, or your praying. This is often what a person means when he or she says that God spoke to them. It is the Holy Spirit impressing His will into the mind or spirit of the believer. God speaks to our spirit through His Holy Spirit who lives, dwells, and abides within us. It is not that God speaks audibly, but that the believer receives leading directly from the Holy Spirit. The communication is precise from the Holy Spirit to our mind or spirit.

The Holy Spirit does this in a variety of ways. There are times when He will impress a word or a phrase on the heart or mind of the believer. He sometimes brings a picture or pictures to mind. At other times, He will bring to our remembrance a verse or verses of Scripture concerning a person or a situation. The Holy Spirit does this in order to guide us or teach us.

A biblical example of this is found in **Acts 27:10**. The Word of God says, "Saying, 'Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also of lives.'" During a journey by ship, the apostle Paul told the captain of the vessel that he "perceived" there would be danger to the ship and its passengers if they continued the voyage. Paul did not say that he had a dream or a vision concerning this. He did not say that God had audibly spoken to Him. He perceived in his spirit that they were headed for disaster if they continued on this journey. His spirit received a witness from the Holy Spirit about this disaster (**Acts 27:13-44**).

On a personal level, this has happened to me as I have prayed. During times of prayer, the Holy Spirit will bring a picture of someone to my spirit.

The picture of this person is vivid and sticks in my mind and heart. This is the Holy Spirit leading me to pray for that person. The Holy Spirit directly communicates this leading to my spirit. On other occasions, as I am praying, the Holy Spirit will bring Scriptures and insights to my mind concerning a person or situation. This helps me to pray more specifically and intensely for the person and his or her situation. This is direct leading from the Holy Spirit to me in particular situations.

It needs to be emphasized that the direct leadings of the Holy Spirit are tied to the Word of God. There is a distinct connection between these two things. When you study and saturate your life with the Word of God, it makes you more sensitive to the direct leadings of the Holy Spirit. The more exposure that you have to the Word of God, the more sensitive you will be to the Holy Spirit's leadings. As I stated earlier, the primary way that God speaks to the believer is through the Word. It is through the Word of God that the believer learns to hear from God. As a believer learns this, he or she will be more sensitive to the direct leadings of the Holy Spirit. When the believer studies the Word of God, his or her spiritual senses mature. He or she learns to discern between good and evil and is able to recognize God's voice through these direct leadings.

A third way that God speaks to believers is through other people. God can speak to a believer through the advice or counsel of other believers. The Word of God reveals that a person can receive guidance and help from the counsel of others. Listen to what the Word of God says:

Proverbs 11:14: "Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety."

Proverbs 12:15: "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise."

Proverbs 15:22: "Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established."

Proverbs 19:20: "Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may be wise in latter days."

Proverbs 20:18: "Plans are established by counsel; by wise counsel wage war."

These verses point to the fact that God speaks to believers through others. God can use the advice and counsel of godly mature Christians to guide and instruct the believer.

A believer needs to carefully consider the words of others, especially godly, mature believers. God may be speaking to the believer through these words. We are to listen to others with a view of hearing God's voice through their words. He uses the words of others to guide and instruct us in His will.

A final way that God speaks to the believer is through circumstances. God communicates with the believer through positive and negative circumstances. God can teach and guide the believer through positive and negative circumstances.

An excellent example of this is Joseph, whose story is told in **Genesis 37-50**. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt. Potiphar's wife falsely accused him. He was unjustly imprisoned. Through the difficult circumstances over which Joseph had no control, he became an instrument of God to save thousands of people during a severe famine. Joseph viewed his experiences as direction from God. He said, "So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout the land of Egypt" (**Genesis 45:8**).

God also uses the circumstances of open and closed doors to speak to and guide the believer. This is illustrated in the life of the apostle Paul. On one occasion, he declares that God had opened a door for him to preach the gospel, "But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries" (**1 Corinthians 16:8-9**). The Lord guided Paul to stay at Ephesus through an open door of ministry.

Yet, on another occasion, God used a closed door to guide Paul. Paul desired an opportunity to minister in Asia. He did not do this because the door to this area was closed, "Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the regions of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them" (**Acts 16:6-7**). God closed the door

on Asia, but opened the door in Macedonia (Acts 16:8-10).

God will use the circumstances of a believer to speak to him or her. He will use these circumstances to guide the believer. The believer needs to see the circumstances of his or her life as an opportunity for God to speak to him or her.

God is actively working in your life. He is a speaking and guiding God. He speaks through the Word of God, the direct leadings of the Holy Spirit, people, and circumstances. David declared, "I will hear what God the LORD will speak" (Psalm 85:8). Will you be committed to listen to what God speaks to you through these things?

How Do I Know God Is Speaking To Me?

Whenever I teach on hearing the voice of God, there is always an inevitable question. It is "How can I know that God is speaking to me? Or, how can I be sure that it really is God that is speaking to me?" This is a fair question and one that needs to be examined.

First, we need to understand that there are two extremes about listening to God. The first extreme is that God is not speaking and guiding today. This is simply not true. Christianity is a personal relationship between the almighty God and an individual believer. You cannot build a relationship on one-way speeches. A relationship cannot be sustained if only one person speaks. There needs to be frequent, intimate, and sustained contact between persons, both of whom speak and both of whom listen. God is a living, sovereign, speaking, and guiding God. The God of the Old and New Testaments is the God that we serve today. He has not changed, "For I am the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of

Jacob" (Malachi 3:6). He still speaks and guides today!

The other extreme in this area is to believe that anything and everything is from God. Impressions and leadings, no matter how bizarre or unusual, are accepted as the work of the Holy Spirit. When a believer feels that God has spoken to him or her, that believer needs to test the leading. He or she needs to examine if it is God leading. This is necessary because of the flesh and the devil. Some leadings may be a result of the desires of the flesh. Paul writes, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find" (Romans 7:18). A believer still has to deal with the sinful tendencies of the flesh. There are times when a believer has a desire that is not from God but from the flesh. He or she may think that the desire or leading is from God, but its origin is actually from the flesh. It is possible for a believer to feel that his or her intense desires are the Holy Spirit's leading. For this reason, the believer needs to examine what he or she feels is guidance from God.

Another reason that the believer must examine his or her leadings is due to the enemy, Satan. Satan will attempt to deceive the believer. He will labor to propel his evil desires and leadings into the mind of believers, "Above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one" (Ephesians 6:16, emphasis mine). The Word of God declares about Satan, "And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). He will attempt to make his desires and leadings appear to be the will of God. Satan counterfeits everything that God does. He will even attempt to counterfeit God's leading and guidance for the believer. Satan is capable of both issuing his own leadings for destructive purposes and undermining God's leadings in your life. The presence and activity of the enemy requires that you test what you feel is God's voice.

There is a necessity for the believer to find a biblical balance between these two extremes. You need to be open to hearing God. You need to trust that God will speak to you and guide you. Yet, at the same time, you need to examine what you feel is God's guidance. You should test what you feel God

is speaking to you. This is not a lack of faith on your part. God will confirm His leadings in your life. God loves you and He is willing to grant you certainty in these matters.

How does a believer examine the leadings that he or she receives? The following are some suggestions on how you can test what you feel is God's guidance:

- ◆ *The Bible test.* God will never contradict His Word. He will never lead a believer in a way that contradicts what He has already revealed in His Word. The Word of God is the sure and reliable guide for the believer. Everything must be tested in light of God's Word. Test everything at the start and at the end by seeking the Scripture about it.
- ◆ *The fruit test.* God is working to transform you. He desires to make you holy and godly. His leadings will move you in that direction. You need to ask yourself, "Is this going to move me in the direction of a holy and godly life? Is this going to lead me into a deeper relationship with God?" This is also helpful when you feel impressed to pray for others. Is the leading you are receiving going to lead that person to holiness and godliness? If you pray for this, will it draw the person closer to Christ and move them toward greater holiness of life? God can speak to you through others. You can use this to test the counsel and advice from other people. When you need to test the counsel of another person, examine his or her life. Does the person have the fruit of a godly, mature life?
- ◆ *Confirmation by people or circumstances test.* The word "confirm" means to verify, strengthen, or establish. God can verify that He has spoken to you. God can give you the assurance that your desire or plan is from Him. He may give you a particular verse or verses from the Scripture. He may confirm it through a person who affirms what you are feeling or thinking is God's leading. He may work out the circumstances just as you feel that He has said. He may open doors and work out circumstances to show you that He is leading you. When you feel that you have heard from the Lord, look for

confirmation from Him through people or circumstances. You can ask Him to confirm His word to you.

- ◆ *The servanthood test.* God leads believers to servanthood. He does not lead believers to be self-serving or self-promoting. He leads a believer to serve others. The Holy Spirit will lead you to humble yourself, serve others, encourage others, and give things away. The enemy and the flesh will not move you to do this. Many of God's leadings will require you to choose between being comfortable and building character, between being a winner in men's eyes and a winner in God's eyes. Not all leadings will involve sacrifice and pain, but you can expect that quite often His leadings will involve you denying yourself and being a servant.

These are some major tests that you can use to examine your thoughts and desires. There are also some questions that you might want to ask when examining the leadings that you think are from the Holy Spirit:

- ◆ *Do I have the peace of God concerning this leading?* The Lord speaks in and with peace. The believer needs to pray for the peace of God. When a believer experiences the peace of God, he or she can face anything that the Lord speaks to him or her. The peace of God can enable a believer to discern God's leadings (**Colossians 3:15**).
- ◆ *Do I have a settled conviction concerning this leading?* The believer needs to pray and wait until the confusion turns into conviction. The Word of God says, "For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints" (**1 Corinthians 14:33**). God works through conviction and not confusion.
- ◆ *Does it build up or divide believers?* This is a good test when the leading concerns other believers. Is this going to build up the believers or tear them down? Can this truth be spoken in love to other believers?

◆ *Will I feel guilty if I don't do this?* Doing something because you will feel guilty if you do not do it is not good discernment. The Lord does convict us and we do feel guilty. But that conviction is a specific sense of guilt. It is a deep sense of guilt that the believer is disobeying God if he or she does not do this. There is a vague sense of guilt that comes from the enemy. Pray that God will enable you to know the difference between the guilt created by the Spirit and that created by the enemy.

◆ *What do godly, mature believers say about the leading?* When possible, it is wise to seek the counsel of mature, godly believers. Share with them what you feel God is speaking to you. Listen to their counsel. If they feel that it is God's leading, pursue it. If they feel uneasy about it, submit it to the Lord. Ask for clarification about the matter. There may be times when God is leading you in spite of the counsel of other believers. In these times, you need to be cautious. You must saturate it in prayer and pour over the Word of God. Pray for certainty in this matter

While you learn to discern God's voice, there are some warning signs that you need to look for. These signs should cause you to thoroughly and prayerfully examine what you are sensing as God's leading.

- (1) *If a leading requires you to shatter family relationships or significant friendships;*
- (2) *If a leading creates unrest in the spirit of mature godly believers when you share it with them;*
- (3) *If a leading requires you to go deeply in debt or place someone in a position of danger, compromise, or awkwardness;*
- (4) *If a leading requires you to make a major, life-changing decision in a short period of time.*

When you feel that God is speaking to you, test it. Ask God to confirm His Word to you. It is a terrible loss when Christians are so afraid of counterfeit leadings that they close their ears to the Holy Spirit's leadings too. God wants you to test the spirits (1 John 4:1-2). Yet, at the same time, He wants you to hear Him, step out in faith, and follow Him.

Hindrances To Hearing God

In learning to listen to God, there are some hindrances that you need to avoid. These hindrances will prevent you from hearing God. They will also keep you from experiencing an intimate relationship with God in which you speak to Him and He speaks to you. Now there are times when the Lord is silent; in these times, you must wait on Him. Yet, there are many other times when you are hindered from hearing Him. We can trace most of reasons that we do not hear God back to some hindrance in our personal lives. In these times, you can do something about the barrier between God and you.

(1) *Unbelief*-If you do not believe God will speak to you, you will not hear Him. Our relationship to God is based on faith. We are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). We walk and live by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7). We must pray in faith in order to receive from God (Matthew 21:22; James 1:5-8). Without faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). In God's sight, whatever is not of faith is sin (Romans 14:23). Everything in the kingdom operates on the basis of faith. The same is true for listening to God. You must trust that God will speak to you. You must believe that He wants to speak to you. Unbelief concerning this matter will hinder you from hearing God.

(2) *A lack of stillness before the Lord*-In order to hear God, you must slow down and be still. The believer who wants to hear from God must pay a price: he or she must discipline himself or herself to be still before the Lord. This is not easy, but it is essential to hearing the Lord. You will not learn to listen to God if you have a steady diet of activity in your life. Stillness

makes communication possible between God and the believer (**Psalm 37:7, 46:10**).

- (3) *Unconfessed sin*-Unconfessed sin blocks the flow of communication between God and the believer, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the LORD will not hear" (**Psalm 66:18**). The Lord also says, "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear" (**Isaiah 59:2**). You can be sure that if God is not listening to you, you will not be hearing from Him. When you harbor sin, it will keep you from hearing God's loving voice for you. Your communication with Him will be cut off.
- (4) *A lack of obedience*-When God guides you, you must be willing to do what God says. God desires obedience. When He leads you to do something, He expects you to do it. God does not speak simply to grant you insight, to give you more information. He does this so that you will act on what He speaks to you. He instructs you so that you will do what He shows you. This principle is found in **James 1:22**, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." If you are not willing to do anything about God's leadings, do not expect to hear from Him. God is not obligated to speak to you if you are not concerned about obeying Him. When you are not concerned about obeying Him, it will be a hindrance to you hearing from Him. A lack of concern for obedience will cut off your communication with God.
- (5) *A lack of discernment*-Learning to listen to God requires spiritual discernment. You must develop a "hearing ear". This is something that you cultivate as you spend time in the Word and practice the discipline of stillness before the Lord. As you expose yourself more and more to God's Word and are still before Him, the Holy Spirit will create greater discernment in you. The Holy Spirit will enable you to have greater sensitivity to God's voice. As you develop this sensitivity, you will be better able to hear God and distinguish His leading from any counterfeit leading.

- (6) *Selfishness*-A major hindrance to hearing God is a selfish spirit. From the moment we are born, we want what we want, when we want it, and how we want it. This selfishness can hinder you from hearing God because it causes you to exalt your desires over the will of God. When you have your own agenda, it will interfere with you hearing what God desires. In order to listen to God, you must die to self. You must be willing to give up your own agenda and humble yourself before the Lord. If you are not willing to die to your plans and goals, it will hinder your ability to hear and follow God's leading.
- (7) *Not being totally honest with God*-In order to listen to God, you need to be totally honest with Him. If there is something that you think God might want you to do and you do not want to do it, then tell Him. A lack of honesty with God places a barrier between God and you. By being honest with God, He can help you deal with your feelings about His leading. This will then remove the barrier of selfishness and will allow you to hear and follow God's will. When God began calling me to preach, I had other plans and dreams for my life. In fact, the last thing that I desired to do was preach. As the conviction about this grew more intense, I began to pray, "Lord, I do not want to preach. This is not what I planned for my life. I'm scared and I would rather do something else. But, if this is Your desire for me, I want You to change my desires. I yield myself to You and ask You to mold my will so that I will carry out Your desires. I pray that Your will would be done." As I prayed this, God changed my desires. He molded my will to conform to His. Now, I cannot imagine my life in any other way. My heart burns to preach and teach God's Word. By being totally honest with God, it enabled me to hear what God was speaking to me and then to submit myself to His will. When you cling to your own agenda and are not honest with God, you will not be able to hear and do what God desires. God wants you to be totally honest with Him.
- (8) *Grumbling*-One of the fastest ways to lose communication with God is grumbling. Grumbling is not talking with the Lord; it is

talking about Him. A whole generation of people missed the blessing of God because they grumbled against the Lord instead of listening to the Lord (**Numbers 11; Deuteronomy 1:27, 34-35**). Grumbling hinders you from hearing God, but praise prepares you to hear from God.

Developing A Hearing Ear

Listening to God requires that you develop a "hearing ear". You have to grow in your discernment of God's voice. This takes time and commitment on your part. Like other areas of your Christian life, you have to mature in this spiritual discipline. The following are some practical suggestions that you can implement to help you develop a "hearing" ear.

- ◆ **Express your desire to God.** Tell your heavenly Father that you want to grow in your ability to hear His voice. Share with Him your desire to have an intimate relationship with Him in which you speak to Him and He speaks to you.
- ◆ **Saturate your life with the Word of God.** The Word of God is absolutely crucial to you learning to hear the voice of God. The more you saturate your life with the Word of God, the greater your sensitivity to hear and discern God's voice. God will primarily speak to you through His Word. It is the foundation of an intimate relationship with God and the key to developing your sensitivity to God's leadership. You need to saturate your life with the Word by reading, studying, meditating on, memorizing, and obeying the Word of God. You must be in the Word in order to listen to and discern God's voice.
- ◆ **Become a "pray-er".** Prayer is similar to the Word of God in this matter because it makes you more sensitive to God's voice. As you spend time in God's presence, you learn to discern God's voice. The reason that many believers do not hear God's voice is because they do not take the time to pray. An inconsistent prayer life will not enable a believer to hear and discern God's voice. For

many years, I marveled at those who had an intimate relationship with God and knew and could discern the voice of God. These believers had profound insight and direction from the Holy Spirit. Through the years, I have come to see that there is no magical formula for this. It is not that some believers are more privileged than others. The simple fact is that these believers paid the price of consistent and fervent prayer. Spending time with God in prayer is crucial to hearing and discerning God's leadership.

- ◆ **Practice the presence of God.** Practicing the presence of God is talking with God throughout your day. It is turning your heart and mind to Him in all your activities and experiences. It is an ongoing conversation with the Lord. Talk with Him throughout the day about your experiences and your emotions. As you practice this, it will make you more sensitive to God's presence and voice.
- ◆ **Develop the discipline of stillness.** Plan to have time in your day or week when you will be still and silent before the Lord. You might want to consider making this a part of your quiet time. Have a time when you are still and silent before the Lord. Ask God to speak to you. As you begin receiving thoughts and impressions, record these. Pray over these thoughts and impressions. Ask God to clarify what He is speaking to you. Test these things with the Word of God and the Holy Spirit's leadership. Then obey in faith.
- ◆ **Ask God questions.** This is your invitation for God to speak to you. When you do this, you are opening yourself up to Him and what He has to say to you. Ask God specific questions about your life, your family, your work, and ministry and then begin searching the Scripture and listening for answers to those questions.
- ◆ **Be faithful in small things.** If you are not sure how to hear the Lord, start with something small. Ask Him how to encourage a co-worker during the day. Ask Him how to fix dinner. Ask Him what to do with your kids at night.

Begin with small things. When a leading emerges, thank Him. Then do it. One of the principles of God's kingdom is that if you are faithful in small things, God will enable you to be faithful in greater things (**Luke 19:11-27**). If you practice listening to God in the seemingly unimportant details of everyday life, you will find it easier to hear him in the greater concerns of life.

- ◆ **Be faithful to praise God.** Praise opens up the door between heaven and you. It brings the power of God (**Psalms 22:3**). Praise is the channel through which God's presence and power are experienced in a fresh and powerful way. As you praise Him, His presence and power become more real and sensible to you. This makes you more sensitive to listen to Him. It creates an atmosphere of listening. It brings a spirit of humility that prepares you to listen to God.
- ◆ **Be diligent to confess your sin.** This is absolutely necessary in order to keep the lines of communication open between God and you. Unconfessed sin hinders you from speaking to God and listening to Him (**Psalms 66:18; Isaiah 59:2**). Ask the Lord to search you and reveal anything to you that would hinder you from speaking to and hearing Him.
- ◆ **Be faithful to obey what God speaks to you.** In order to grow in your ability to hear God, you must be faithful to do what He leads you to do. There are times when God's leadings will be clear and logical; you will understand why God is leading you in this way. Yet, when you begin to listen to God's leadings, you often won't know why He is asking you to do something. He will lead you down paths through unknown territory, sometimes for no other reason than to teach you to trust Him. There have been times when God has led me to call people in order to encourage them. I would call and ask the person how he or she was doing. Often the person says that things are fine. I would use that time to encourage him or her. I have often wondered why God would lead me in this way, especially when nothing was apparently wrong

in the person's life. Through these things, God is teaching me to be obedient to Him regardless of my feelings or circumstances. He is working to teach me to trust Him in whatever He leads me. Be faithful to obey God's leading. He has a purpose for it even if you can't see it. Remember, your walk with God is based on faith and not sight, "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (**2 Corinthians 5:7**). It is better to make a mistake while trying to obey God rather than to do nothing.

When God Doesn't Speak

What does a believer do when God doesn't give any particular guidance? God is a living, sovereign Being. There are times when He speaks; there are times when He is silent. What do you do when God is silent?

- (1) *Check to see if there are any hindrances to hearing God.* There are times when we cannot hear God because of something in our lives. Examine your life to see if there are any obstacles to your listening. Plead with the Holy Spirit to reveal anything that is preventing your communication with God.
- (2) *Seek God with all your heart and strength.* God's silence is often an invitation to grow in your intimacy with Him. His silence should stir you to seek Him with all your might. When God is silent, it is often His purpose to draw you closer to Himself. God's silence makes the heart of the believer long for Him with a greater intensity.
- (3) *Walk in the light that you have.* When God is silent, do what God has already taught you. Stay in the Word and continue to pray. Be faithful to attend church. Fellowship with other believers. As Paul states in **Philippians 3:16**, "Nevertheless, to the degree we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind."
- (4) *Trust God.* Even when God is silent, He still loves you and is guiding you. Remember **Isaiah 50:10**, "Who walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the LORD and rely upon His God."

THE GOD WHO IS REAL

God is real. He is a living, all-powerful God. He is greater than you and your circumstances. He is a God who can help and heal. Listen to what He says about Himself:

"Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:22).

"Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. There is no searching of His understanding. He gives power to the weak (Isaiah 40:28-29).

Whatever you are facing today, this living, all-powerful God can help you. He can change you. He can give you the strength to cope. He will save you from your sin and give you hope and peace. If you will cry out to Him, He will hear and He will answer. If you will confess your need to Him and call on Him to act, He will work in a powerful way. If you seek Him, He will not turn you away!

"Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near" (Isaiah 55:6).



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