



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

The Biblical Basis of 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**).