

Prayer 03

Listening to God



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INTRODUCTION

At some point in our relationship with God we will desire a two way conversation. This is a Spirit produced desire. The desire for relationship and conversation originates with God, not us. Relationships in which one person does all the talking and the other person does all the listening are not very deep or satisfying. Our relationship with God is no different.

God loves to listen to what is on your heart and mind. But He also has much He wants to share with you. He desires conversation with you. Just as God would visit the garden of Eden to walk with Adam and Eve so He desires to be with you.

Adam and Eve were supposed to learn wisdom from God for how to be truly human and live as God's image bearers. God wanted relationship with them and to have conversation with them. And those conversations would also include God sharing His wisdom and giving them guidance and instruction - as any good Father does with His children.

Learning to hear God's voice can seem difficult or fearful. Yet it is something all disciples of Jesus can experience. Learning to hear God's voice comes by learning the different ways He speaks (many of which are unfamiliar to us) and learning to discern His voice from the other "voices" vying for your attention.

This week I want to introduce you (or remind you) of several helpful practices to develop a listening ear to God's voice. I recommend you **pick two** of the following to practice this week.

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| <i>Lectio Divina</i> | An ancient practice of reading Scripture slowly, listening for God's word to you. |
| <i>Journaling</i> | The practice of recording the highlights of your conversation with God so you have a record and reference. |
| <i>Examen</i> | The practice of reviewing your day with God to see how He was speaking to you through emotions, thoughts and circumstances. |
| <i>Listening Prayer</i> | The practice of quieting your thoughts so God can speak to you. |

LECTIO DIVINA

A good friend of mine once told me, “you have to slow down to catch up to the Holy Spirit.” I have found these words to be true. We often think or act as if God has to adjust to our busy schedule. But the opposite is true. We must slow down and find rest in God’s presence. It is a gift we must learn to receive.

Lectio Divina is latin for “divine reading.” It is an ancient practice of slowly reading Scripture as you prayerfully look for God’s word to you. It was first written about by Origen, an early church leader born in the 2nd century. It became a regular practice in the monastic orders from the 6th century onward and is still a popular practice within the contemplative tradition of Christianity.

The practice of Lectio Divina follows the following structure:

- Read** Read a passage of Scripture (usually a psalm, a teaching of Jesus, or a passage from the New Testament). Read it slowly and prayerfully. Look for when a word, phrase, idea or emotion stands out to you.
- Reflect** Pause and meditate on what stands out. What about it is drawing your attention. Why is it resonating with you? Why the emotion?
- Respond** Now invite God into your meditation. Talk to Him about your reaction, thoughts or feelings. Ask Him for additional insights.
- Rest** Take a few minutes to stop thinking and talking and just rest in God’s love and His word to you.

Write

Take a moment to reflect on your experience.

JOURNALING

I remember hearing a preacher say, “if it is not important to you it is not important to God.” Now, of course, this is not entirely true. There are many things that are important to God regardless of whether you consider them important. But it is true in the sense that God might not give you that which He values if you are not going to value it as well.

In Luke 16, Jesus tells a parable about a shrewd manager and ends with this lesson, “Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much.” God is generous and delights in giving abundantly. Yet, He is also wise and loving and may not give more if we are not willing to faithfully steward His gifts.

His words to us are one of the greatest of all His gifts. One of the ways to cultivate a real value for what God says is to keep a journal. Writing down what God says to us is also helpful since few of us have perfect or even good memories. It also is very encouraging when you write down what God says, act on it and then see something good come from it. Keeping a record is a great way to remind yourself and build your faith.

Journaling is a very personal and creative exercise. There is no one way to do this. Some people love to write and can write pages from their conversations from God. Personally, I like short and sweet - so my journal entries are a sentence or a short paragraph with highlights. Others like to draw. The point is to get in the habit of recording a highlight from your conversation with God in which God spoke to you.

LISTENING PRAYER

Listening prayer is the practice of learning how to quiet your inner thoughts to make room to hear God's voice. This is one of my personal favorite practices. It is also one of the most difficult because the human mind is fast and busy and works furiously to fill the void of silence. And the world we live in only magnifies this problem.

But for those who persevere and don't quit, the rewards are spectacular. The ability to quiet the mind and listen for God is a beautiful experience of love, peace and joy. Nobody achieves this quickly, yet it is available to everyone, even the most ADD personality, if you are patient and persistent.

Listening Prayer has these basic steps:

Breathe. Start with a few minutes of deep breathing. Focus on clearing your mind. Some like to simply pray "Jesus" or "Come Holy Spirit" as they breathe. I like to focus on my breathing as representative of taking in the life of Jesus by the Spirit.

Quiet. Sit in silence for a few minutes. This is generally the hardest step as our thoughts try to force their way into our attention. (Tip: bring a notepad with you and write down intrusive thoughts until they stop). Ask God for help in silencing your thoughts.

Ask God to speak to you.

Listen. Remember, the Spirit has direct access to your mind and your imagination. He may speak in a variety of ways, including a thought, a Scripture, a word, a phrase, an impression, a picture in your mind, a vision (like a little movie in your mind), a song, or a feeling/emotion.

Test. Because this is a highly subjective experience, it is particularly important to test what you hear against Scripture and to share it with those in your church community.

If you do not hear anything, don't worry or condemn yourself. It is ok. Just give thanks for God's presence and keep practicing until you do sense God speaking in some way.

EXAMEN

Examen is the practice of prayerfully reflecting on the events of the day in order to detect God's presence and discern his direction for you. It is designed to help you learn to detect God in every moment through the people, interactions and events you experience.

There are many variations on this practice, but the basic outline is:

- **Become aware of God's presence.** Take a minute to quiet your thoughts and focus on God's presence with you.
- **Review the day with gratitude.** Think about the people, connections and events of your day. Where was God in these? What good things can you give thanks for?
- **Pay attention to your emotions.** What kind of emotions did you experience this day? Why were you experiencing those emotions? What might God be saying through them to you?
- **Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.** Pick one thing from your day and pray about it with God.
- **Look toward tomorrow.** Think about your day tomorrow. How do you feel or think about it? Ask God to help prepare you for the day.

Reflect

Take a moment to reflect on your experience with this practice.

OBEY

Listening to God is important. Obeying God is even better. If you have practiced listening to God this week, you likely have a least one thing that you think or feel that God spoke to you that requires action or obedience on your part. Will you do it?

Reflect

What did God speak to you that requires action and obedience on your part? Is there any part of you that is hesitant or fearful? Why?

OTHER RESOURCES

Book

Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God by Dallas Willard

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