movement prayer

Learning to Hear God's Voice

Overview

We know from scripture and from the experience of believers throughout history that God speaks in various ways to people. If you want to grow to learn to hear God's voice, it's important to know two things: **1) God *does* talk to you**, and **2) *you can* hear His voice**.

Below is an exercise that may be helpful. It is by no means the *only* way to attune your ear to the things He is saying, but it may prove helpful in growing your ability to know when the Creator of the universe is personally speaking to you.

Getting Started

1. Quiet yourself and enter into His presence

Generally, God will not compete with other voices for our attention. So an important first step is to take time to pause and tune in to God's presence. You might also want to pray, "Jesus, silence every voice that is not from you," as you focus on being united with Christ and His Spirit.[1]

2. Bring your questions before God

As you quiet your heart in the presence of God, *believe* that he wants to speak to you. You can then begin by asking him a question.

If you have been reflecting on a passage of Scripture, you might want to ask, "What do you want me to know about this passage?"

Here are some other examples of questions you might want to ask:

- What do you want me to know about your love for me?
- What do you want me to know about my purpose?
- What is your perspective on this situation?
- What do you want me to pray about?

[1] This prayer is from Jamie Winship, *Living Fearlessly* p. 50. Many people have advocated this practice for silencing all other voices in order to hear God's voice.

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You can follow your first question up with, “How do you want me to respond” or “What do you want me to do?”

Here are a few examples of how you can expound on this question:

- How are you wanting me to obey what you are teaching me?
- Is there anything you want me to do regarding this situation?
- Is there any action you want me to take in this relationship?

If you struggle hearing answers to these questions, try asking simpler “yes” or “no” questions, and building from there. And before you take action on any of the responses you’re getting, be sure to read the end of this prayer tool regarding how to discern if it’s actually God’s voice that you’re hearing.

3) Pay attention to the thoughts, images, and feelings that surface

What are the first impressions, thoughts, images, or feelings that surface as you’re listening? At this point, you don’t want to analyze them or question them but simply perceive what He is speaking to your mind or in your heart. Snippets of scripture may suddenly pop into your mind as well. You may find it helpful to capture these impressions in a journal so you don't forget them, and you can come back to them or continue praying about them later.

Most people are not aware that God speaks to us through our feelings. I have a friend who is very effective at having spiritual conversations with lost people. He has learned that God will give him a sudden burst of compassion for a particular person to indicate he is supposed to engage with them.

Initially, you may not completely understand what God is trying to say to you. This is okay; when Jesus spoke, many people didn’t initially understand Him either. After you have time to reflect, pray, and perhaps share what you’ve heard with other believers, you will likely find clarity about what God might be saying.

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4. Capture and be ready to do what He says.

Write down whatever God is telling you so that you can remember it and reflect on His words.

> *To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them.* (Mark 4:25 NLT)

The implication is that we need to hold on to what Jesus is saying to us and view it as important, especially if we want to hear more.

Imagine that you worked for a large firm and the president wanted to have a private meeting with you. Hopefully you would bring something with you to capture what he is saying so you can remember and do what he is asking of you.

Many disciple-makers carry a notebook with them much of the time to specifically capture what God is saying to them throughout the day. The note app on a cell phone works well for this. Either tool ensures you always have the ability to remember His words so that you can obey all that He is telling you.

Let me be the first to encourage you to be patient if you don't hear God's voice immediately. We must recognize that God speaks to us in His time. Sometimes focused times of prayer and seasons of prayer are needed. Many Christians have also found that God often chooses to speak as you are going throughout your day, outside of your focused prayer time. The key is to be receptive. It's a learning process, practiced in relationship with God.

How To Discern if You're Actually Hearing from God

The Bible indicates that not all of the voices you hear in your mind are your own. In addition to your own thoughts, ideas can also originate from the spiritual world. There are only two spiritual sources: the Holy Spirit or evil forces (see Luke 22:3, Acts 5:3, I Cor. 2:10). Because of this, it is *critical* to test the spirits and discern what voice you are hearing (1 John 4:1). Keep in mind that learning to discern God's voice takes trial and error and we will always be vulnerable to mistakes. This is part of the process. Be encouraged that greater discernment will come with time.

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With that said, here are some questions to consider when discerning whether the spontaneous thoughts that popped in your head came from you, the Holy Spirit who has joined your heart, or from an evil spirit who is bent on destruction.

- Did the thought emerge while you were focused on Jesus, or was your mind idle or empty at the time? When our thoughts are fixed on Jesus, there is a greater likelihood that we will immediately discern and dismiss thoughts that are not from God.

- Does it line up with the teachings of Scripture and God's character?

- Was it instructive, comforting, and did it build you up—or was it destructive, negative, and pushy?

- Were you surrendered to Jesus and totally committed to His will when you received it? When we pray with idols in our hearts, our own desires will become prominent and can be hard to distinguish from God's voice. When we pray without submitting our own desires to Christ's lordship, we run the risk of filling our minds with our own thoughts to confirm or approve the thing we want. A great way to know you're hearing from God is to silence all other voices. You can remove your own bias by adopting a "Thy will be done attitude" before asking God your question.

- Does it bear witness with other mature believers? When you aren't sure if what you heard was from God, it is a good practice to share those thoughts with individuals who walk closely with God, and ask them to give you their honest discernment on what you heard.

Hearing (and obeying) God should be a natural occurrence for any disciple maker. It is what Scripture calls abiding in Christ (John 15:7) and praying without ceasing (I Thes. 5:17). It is ongoing communion with the Holy Spirit where we are listening to His voice and doing what He leads us to do. It can happen anytime and anywhere—in your quiet place, at work, in your neighborhood, in the middle of a whole night of prayer, or while you are writing a book inside a noisy coffee shop. While hearing God's voice can significantly enhance our effectiveness as disciples, the overarching benefit should stem from a desire for greater intimacy with our loving Father in Heaven.

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