

SPIRITUAL GROWTH part 7: LISTENING TO HIS VOICE

The great inventor, Thomas Edison, was deaf in one ear and nearly deaf in the other ear, but he learned to communicate with his wife. When he was courting his wife, he taught her Morse code. In fact, Edison proposed to her by tapping out his proposal into her hand. She accepted in the same way. Throughout their marriage they frequently spoke to each other in code and, when they went out, Mrs. Edison would keep her husband abreast of the conversation by telegraphing the words to her husband. It would be a hard thing not to be able to talk to people and have them talk back to you. We grow up as little children learning to communicate. Our parents give us direction and teach us what we should do and not do in life by communicating to us. But of all the communication that goes on in this world, none is so important as communicating with God.

Have you ever wished that you had lived in Biblical Times so that you could experience God speaking to you? The good news is that God is still speaking to his people. Throughout any given day God is probably communicating with you in many ways. The problem is that we are many times not listening to what he is saying. If we're going to please God, we must listen to what he says and obey.

GOD SPEAKS WITH PEOPLE

From the beginning of the creation of man, and continuing throughout history, God has always wanted to communicate with His creation. In the old testament, when there was very little bible written, God used angels, prophets, the casting of lots, a burning bush, miracles, handwriting on the wall. He even used a donkey. His ultimate communication was through Jesus Christ. Wouldn't it have been great to have walked on the earth with Jesus and to have him direct your life? If you would have liked to have had that experience, I have good news for you. God is still speaking to his people. Jesus tells us in

John 10:27, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me."

Isaiah 30:21 says, "Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," Whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left."

Isaiah 50:4, "The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught."

Can you imagine God saying to you every morning, "good morning! Can I have a little time to talk with you? I have some great things I want to share with you before you get started in your day." God is in the business of speaking to His people.

HOW DOES GOD SPEAK?

1. God speaks personally

It is an amazing concept to think that with all the billions of people in this world that God would speak to anyone on a personal basis, but the truth is that he does. He always has. In fact, I am not aware of any place in scripture where God directly spoke to a group of people. He spoke personally to Abraham, to Noah, to Moses, to Daniel and to many others. God knows what is going on in your life individually, and he wants to meet with you on a personal basis.

2. God speaks uniquely

"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe." (Heb 1:1-2 NIV)

Observe the fact that God spoke in various ways. Many times he spoke through prophets. He once spoke supernaturally by writing on a wall. He spoke through dreams and visions. There were times that he spoke directly to some one's spirit. He even spoke one time through a donkey.

a) SOMETIMES GOD SPEAKS LOUDLY

Saul of Tarsus was a proud, hardened man. God spoke with him in a dramatic way that brought him to his knees and left him blind for a while.

When I came to know the lord, it was not a gentle voice that I heard. It was more like an atomic bomb. Got ripped everything that was important out of my life, and I had no way to look but up. There used to be a man in our church named Larry. Larry's neighbor, Melvin, first invited him to church. I remember Larry coming in with his family, but they were not very responsive. I went to visit Larry in his home. He was nice, but not interested. A few years went by, and Larry continued to live a worldly lifestyle. As he did, his life began to crumble around him. One night and found himself sitting alone in his empty house. His son had been placed in some sort of juvenile detention facility, and his wife was in the hospital undergoing some sort of psychological treatment. And in the midst of that personal catastrophe, he remembered our church. God placed a burden on his heart to come back to our church, but we had moved and he had no way of knowing where we were. He bowed his head and prayed asking god to show him where we were. At that moment, the phone rang. It was his previous neighbor Melvin. Melvin was then living in Florida, and god laid in a pawn his heart to call Larry. Larry asked him if he

knew how to get in touch with us. He did, and he gave Larry my phone number. Larry became a vital part of our church until he died. Was it a coincidence that Melvin picked up the phone and called his former neighbor? I don't think so. God spoke, and Larry listened.

b) SOMETIMES GOD SPEAKS SOFTLY

When he spoke to young Samuel in the temple, it was with a gentle voice. God is not limited in the way that he speaks to someone.

You may remember the story of Elijah running from jezebel and hiding in a cave. As Elijah sat in that cave, there was an earthquake. There was lightning, but God did not speak through those things. He spoke in a still small voice. The N.I.V. translates it as a "gentle whisper." One of the reasons that we sometimes do not discern God's voice is the fact that while we're waiting for an earthquake while God is gently whispering His will into our spirit. God knows what is going to get your attention, and he uses the best means possible.

3. God speaks specifically

God does not speak in generalities. When he told Noah how to build an ark, he didn't say, "just think about it and put a boat together the best way you can." God was very specific about how that ark was to be built. When he told Moses to build the tabernacle, he did not leave it up to Moses' imagination. Again, he was very specific in his directions. He was specific in telling Paul where to preach, and he will be specific in speaking to you about his will for your life.

HOW DO I HEAR GOD?

1. CULTIVATE A SURRENDERED HEART

There are three kinds of listeners: the passive listener who doesn't want to hear from God at all. There is the selective listener who listens to only what he wants to hear. Then there is the aggressive listener who says with Samuel in the temple, "Speak lord for your servant hears." God generally speaks to those who want to be spoken to. He does not force himself anyone.

Romans 12:1-2, “ ITherefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. 2Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Notice that presenting your body as a living sacrifice comes before knowing what God’s will is. God does not speak to people so that they can decide whether or not they want to do it. God speaks to people who decide to obey before they know what they will be asked to do. Your life is like a giant check. The check is blank and requires your signature. God asks you to sign your name at the bottom and then he’ll fill out the amount.

Someone said, “When I meditated on the word guidance, I kept seeing "dance" at the end of the word. I remember reading that doing God's will is a lot like dancing. When two people try to lead, nothing feels right. The movement doesn't flow with the music, and everything is quite uncomfortable and jerky. When one person relaxes and lets the other lead, both bodies begin to flow with the music. One gives gentle cues, perhaps with a nudge to the back or by pressing lightly in one direction or another. It's as if two become one body, moving beautifully. The dance takes surrender, willingness, and attentiveness from one person and gentle guidance and skill from the other. My eyes drew back to the word guidance. When I saw "G," I thought of God, followed by "u" and "i." God, "u" and "I" dance. God, you and I dance. This statement is what guidance means to me. As I lowered my head, I became willing to trust that I would get guidance about my life. Once again, I became willing to let God lead.”

2. SPEND TIME IN SOLITUDE

Silence is hard for a number of reasons. Sometimes, when we try to sit quietly, we begin to notice how dependent we are on noise—such as music or television to distract us from what is really going on inside. Sometimes we use noise to numb our loneliness or to keep us from feeling guilty about our sin. If you are going to hear from God, you are going to have to train yourself to spend time in solitude.

Several passages of Scripture emphasize the importance of solitude in our lives.

Psalm 46:10, “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”

Psalm 62:1, “For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation.”

Jeremiah said in Lam. 3:26-28, "It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young. Let him sit alone in silence, for the Lord has laid it on him."

Jesus regularly retreated into solitude to pray (Mk. 1:35 , Lk. 5:16) and listen to the Father.

Have you ever tried to read something in a noisy place? The television has a fast paced action movie going. The bad guys are running after the good guy and about to kill him, and the volume on your television's surround sound is deafening. Just a few feet away in the kitchen, your daughter is playing her favorite CD with the volume as high as it can be. Coming down the stairs are two other children arguing so loudly that they can be heard next door, and the dog is barking furiously at something outside. How can you concentrate on what you're trying to read? That is about the way it is when we try to listen to God. The message He is trying to give us is obscured by all the things going on around us.

3. GO PLACES WHERE GOD LIKES TO BE

If you want to study the habits of a polar bear, you won't be going to the desert find one because it won't be there. If you want to find a polar bear, you'll have to go to the snow and ice because that's where it wants to be. If you want to find God, it would be a good idea to go where God likes to be. God enjoys being in the assembly of his people.

Psalm 149:1 "Praise the LORD. Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the saints."

He delights in our meeting together like we have today in singing praises to his name and testifying of his goodness. God likes to go where people are teaching, hearing and learning his word. If you want to hear from him, worship him together in the assembly of his people. Spend time in small group bible studies. Go to Christian concerts. Those are places where you can find God and hear from him.

4. FILL YOUR HEART WITH SCRIPTURE

The primary way God speaks to us through the Bible. A.W. Tozer has written, "I think a new world will arise out of the religious mists when we approach our Bible with the idea that it is not only a book which was once spoken, but a book which is now speaking."

There are basically 3 ways that you read the scripture. The first is "informational"; that is, it is the gathering of facts. Informational reading provides information and knowledge, but it does not necessarily result in a changed life.

The second method of reading the Word of God is "instructional." In instructional reading, you don't just gain information, you learn how God wants you to live.

Psalm 19:7-8, "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes."

Psalm 119:105, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."

How would you like to have to find your way alone through a dark forest at night without any light? In the spiritual realm that is exactly what many people do. We have God's Word, but we don't use it, and without that light, we stumble and fall.

And the third method of reading the scripture is inspirational reading, also called devotional reading. In this kind of reading, you are not only learning how to live, you are also drawing near to God. David wrote...

"I am exceedingly afflicted; Revive me, O LORD, according to Your word."—Psalm 119:107

Psalm 119:114, "You are my hiding place and my shield; I wait for Your word."

Psalm 119:154, "Plead my cause and redeem me; revive me according to Your word."

Inspirational reading comes as you meditate on scripture. You don't just read it, you stop and meditate on it and apply it to your life. This is where you allow God to speak to you. As you sit in solitude with an open heart, God is able to speak to your deepest needs, and you grow in your relationship with him.

5. LISTEN TO WHAT GODLY PEOPLE TELL YOU

Strangely enough to me, right after I came to know Christ, people began telling me I needed to be a pastor. As far as I can remember, I had never considered a pastor in my life. God was using those people to speak to my heart. Not long ago, a young lady shared with me her testimony. Before being saved, she was dating a young man. The young man wanted to become engaged to her, but she refused. In response, he said he was going to kill himself. Of course, she did not believe him, but he did it. He committed suicide, and she was devastated. She was going to college, and one morning early she went into the cafeteria and sat by herself drinking some coffee. She was

overcome with grief and in a really bad way. Unexpectedly, a young man walk over to your table set with her. He did have a lot to say. He simply said, "God has told me to come and tell you that it's going to be okay," and then he left. She was so moved that she gave her heart to Christ. Sometimes, God uses people to speak to you about his will.

6. BE SENSITIVE TO THE PROMPTINGS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

A man was skiing in Colorado when he noticed on the slopes some people wearing red vests. Wondering who they were, he went closer and read these words on them: BLIND SKIER. He was astounded. He wondered to himself, "How do they do it?"

He found out that each blind skier is given a guide. That guide may ski beside, behind, or in front of the blind person--but always in a place where they could communicate with each other. The guide may say, "Go right, turn left, stop, skier coming up on your right." The blind skier is to have complete trust and immediate obedience to the instructions of the guide.

Life is much like skiing downhill totally blind. We can't see even five seconds into the future. We can't see the struggles and the heartaches that may await us. We can't even see other "skiers" who might run into us. But God has given us our own personal Guide.

Jesus said in

John 16:12-13, "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come."

The Holy Spirit who lives within us guides us into God's will for our lives. He prompts us to do or not do something. He convicts us of our needs. Sometimes we're given specific discernment about how to pray for a particular person or situation. Sometimes we just experience peace that God has heard and will act even though we don't know how or when. We may have a new idea on how to approach a problem or a sense of how we should spend our day.

APPLICATIONS

1. JUDGE ALL THINGS BY GOD'S WORD

God will never tell you to do something that contradicts His word.

Isaiah 8:20, "Look to God's instructions and teachings! People who contradict his word are completely in the dark."

Acts 17:11, "Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."

Any time someone gives you direction for your life, make sure that it doesn't contradict what the Bible says.

2. HAVE A PLAN TO GET ALONE WITH GOD

Identify a time and place where you can be alone on a regular basis. Start with something that you know you can be faithful to doing and make that the most important part of your day.

3. DO WHAT GOD SAYS

A. W. Tozer said many years ago, "Lord, teach me to listen. The times are noisy and my ears are weary with the thousand raucous sounds which continuously assault them. Give me the spirit of the boy Samuel when he said to Thee, "Speak, for thy servant heareth." Let me hear Thee speaking in my heart. Let me get used to the sound of Thy Voice, that its tones may be familiar when the sounds of earth die away and the only sound will be the music of Thy speaking Voice. Amen."